Dear Pathfinders,

Going where the need is greatest. Sometimes that means stepping in to save a life.

A few months ago, late on a Friday night, I got a call from the hospital. We need your help, they said. There's a very difficult labor.

I am a physician, but for six months I’ve worked in Pathfinder’s Kilifi office, advising maternal and child health programs. With a shortage of doctors available, the hospital staff called on me, and I knew I had to step in. That’s what Pathfinders do.

At the hospital I met the patient, a woman named Doris. She was already past her due date and she was in pain, but not in labor. She had given birth twice before, but both were stillbirths. She asked, “Will I lose this baby, too?”

My colleagues and I knew we had to do everything we could to help Doris. With her history in mind, I ordered a C-section right away.

Before, Doris had given birth at home, alone, without anyone to help. But in a hospital, with medical support, the outcome was very different.

Today, Doris is the proud mother of a daughter named Esther.

I am a Pathfinder because I believe every woman should have the help she needs to have a safe and healthy delivery—for herself and for her baby.

Every day, your support helps women like Doris get the care they deserve. You are helping health providers reach people who otherwise would not have access to the services they need. You are saving lives here in Kenya and around the world.

Today, I hope you will read more about Doris’s story on our website. I want you to understand the barriers many women face and the difference you are making. I want you to see what “going where the need is greatest” looks like, for one woman and her baby.

Thank you for saving lives with me.

In partnership,

Dr. Janet Omyonga,
Senior Technical Advisor for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health and Family Planning
Pathfinder Kenya
Early pregnancy forces many girls in Burkina Faso to drop out of school. Because of you, Adeline is not one of them.

Sixteen-year-old Adeline* still remembers her sister’s hushed instructions: **We will go to the clinic at five o’clock, after school. Wear long sleeves.**

After seeing other girls her age drop out of school because they’d gotten pregnant, Adeline was worried. She wondered, *Am I going to finish school? How am I going to avoid pregnancy?*

That’s when her older sister told her the clinic could help. “She asked me if I wanted to get contraception.”

Adeline said yes, and they traveled together down the dirt road to the clinic. They kept the visit a secret from everyone except their mother. Adeline was nervous, but she felt confident about her choice.

“I don’t want to be pregnant yet,” she says. Adeline is shy and soft-spoken, but her voice doesn’t waver. “I am not ready.”

As a Pathfinder, you know that every woman should be able to make the choices she wants. For girls like Adeline who want to wait until they’ve finished school to get pregnant, contraception can change everything. But in her village—and in many other communities like hers—girls are often afraid or unable to access the methods they want.

“Some people think using family planning is a bad thing, that it means you are a bad girl,” Adeline explains. “But I think it is a good thing.” Worldwide, 23 million adolescents want to avoid pregnancy but aren’t using an effective form of contraception. **You’re changing that number, starting with girls like Adeline.**

At the clinic, Adeline chose an implant, and the midwife inserted the matchstick-sized rod into her arm. Her long sleeves hid the tiny mark—and her choice remained a secret.

Today, she has made another choice: to tell you her story. “I am no longer afraid of how my life is going to be,” Adeline says. “Now my mind is focused on my studies. I want to become a nurse, because I’d love to help other young girls get access to family planning.”

She smiles. “This is what I will tell them. **Family planning can help you make your dream. You don’t have to be afraid.**

*Name has been changed.
Living Positively:

When Grace found out she had HIV, she wanted to end her life. You helped her find her strength—and today she's giving hope to other women.
Grace couldn’t wait to hear the doctor’s news.

It was a hot, humid day in Mtwapa, and the journey to the clinic had been tiring. Grace barely noticed the heat. She was thrilled to be expecting her first child, and excited to hear the results of her antenatal checkup.

The doctor’s news changed everything.

“They told me I was HIV positive,” says Grace. “I thought my life was over, and my baby’s life.”

You might remember another Pathways story about Grace and her husband, Benson. How neither one knew they were HIV positive until Grace’s checkup. How they worked hard to help their child be born HIV negative. But for Grace, medical worries were only one part of the overwhelming emotion she felt when she learned her status.

“I was so discouraged,” Grace remembers. “I wanted to kill myself.”

In Grace’s community, people living with HIV face serious stigma. “People are afraid to go to the clinic to get their drugs, because they think their friends will see them,” explains Dr. Janet Omyonga, a Pathfinder in Kenya. “They don’t come in until they get very sick, and by then, it’s too late.”

**HIV Is Not a Death Sentence**

People living with HIV who start and adhere to their treatment can live long, healthy lives. Pregnant women who follow a doctor’s advice reduce their chances of mother-to-child transmission to only 5 percent, instead of the 45 percent they can face without care. But millions of people still don’t know about their options.

That’s where you come in.

Pathfinder’s programs are making voluntary testing, counseling, and treatment accessible to some of the world’s most vulnerable populations.

“In Kenya, HIV testing is becoming more prevalent,” Janet explains. “We even have a door-to-door testing service now. We’re making sure providers have the information they need, so they can help people understand how important preventative care is—that if they take their medicine, they won’t get sick. We’re also working to reduce stigma.”

Another thing women like Grace need? To know they’re not alone.

Grace’s doctor partnered her with a mentor mother, another woman living positively. She had a simple but powerful message for Grace: *I have gone through what you are going through. Your life is important. You can live.*

Grace beams as she remembers hearing those words. “It changed my life,” she says.

With her mentor mother’s encouragement, she joined a support group. “The first time, I was so shy,” she recalls. “I was afraid to say anything. Then the other women started talking. I couldn’t believe it. They weren’t afraid to share their status. They had babies that were negative. They weren’t sick. They were happy.”
A woman living with HIV can face a nearly 50% chance of passing HIV to her child. With proper treatment, that risk drops to less than 5%.

We empower mothers to protect their children. Programs like ours have helped dramatically reduce new HIV infections in children.

816,900+ pregnant women received HIV counseling and testing through Pathfinder programs.

66,900+ mothers and babies received medication to keep babies free from HIV.

Yvonne is now six years old. She loves reading and fancy dresses, and she wants to be a doctor.

Sharing Hope

Grace kept coming back to her support group. “I feel good when I am with them because we are going through the same thing,” she says. “We are talking the same language. When I’m down, they make me strong. We teach each other. We encourage each other.”

Under her doctor’s care, Grace gave birth to a healthy daughter. When she received baby Yvonne’s 18-month test results—the final test to determine her status—Grace hurried to tell her new friends. “My daughter is negative.”

The support Grace received changed her life: support from her doctors, her group, her mentor mother, and from people like you. “One day I decided, ‘I will stand up and be strong,’” she says. “Now I feel like I can make it, whatever comes my way.”

At the group meeting today, Grace doesn’t sit quietly. “I love to tell my story so I can help someone else,” she says. “So many people are facing stigma. I want them to come out positively and stop the fear. I tell them, ‘come out, come out, it is so important to start taking the drug! You have children to look after. You have your life to live.’ “

Grace smiles as her daughter practices her numbers in a notebook. Yvonne is now six years old. She loves reading and fancy dresses, and she wants to be a doctor.

“God willing, I will make sure she gets all the education she wants, and a good life,” says Grace. “One day soon I will tell her my story. She will know that I am courageous because I made it. I made it.”

Grace has just accepted a job as a mentor mother. She wants you to know how much your support has changed her life—and that she has found a new path in helping others. “I tell them that HIV doesn’t kill,” she says resolutely. “I tell them the importance of life. Just because you have HIV, your life does not stop.”

Grace takes her daughter’s hand. “It’s not the end of the journey.”

You can help make sure HIV is not a death sentence. When you give to Pathfinder, women like Grace can access lifesaving medical care and psychosocial support to lead happy, healthy lives while living positively.

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You’re Changing the Future for Young People Everywhere

The largest generation in history is coming of age. Young people face some of the greatest barriers to making choices about whether and when to have children and living the lives they want. As a Pathfinder, you know how important it is to break down those barriers. Here’s how you’re changing the conversation—and the lives of young people worldwide.

1995 Pathfinder is awarded USAID’s first global adolescent reproductive health program. Today, we continue to bring quality services to millions of young women and men worldwide, so they can take control of their futures.

2014 Where girls’ health and rights are threatened, we inspire policymakers to take action. In Egypt, that means supporting the government to create and launch a national strategy for preventing child marriage.

2017 What’s one of the biggest barriers for youth who want contraception? A health provider who refuses to serve them. Pathfinder leads a new program to reduce provider bias in Pakistan, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso.

Few places in the world afford girls choices about their bodies and futures. Pathfinder is changing that. I am proud to give to an organization that touches tomorrow’s generations in countless ways.

—CHERYL TOMCHIN, PATHFINDER SUPPORTER SINCE 2007