



CHILD SPONSORSHIP RESEARCH

CRITICAL INSIGHT INTO

**SPONSOR**

TRANSFORMATION

How do donors engage with child sponsorship?

## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

Child sponsorship stands out within the international development sector because it offers donors an opportunity to engage regularly and actively with the development process in the communities where international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) operate. This may be via letter-writing, personalised progress updates, gift-sending, visits or other kinds of engagements that reflect their concern for the poor, such as advocating for change, prayer, and changing their consumer behaviours. Not all sponsors take up these opportunities or attach meaning to them in the same ways, and international development organisations' allowance of such opportunities varies widely; nevertheless, they remain vital elements of sponsorship's appeal.

Global investment through child sponsorship is substantial. World Vision donors from 31 countries contribute about US\$1.2 billion to 1.3 billion annually through child sponsorship alone. Despite this level of investment, relatively little has been done to empirically explore the experiences of child sponsors. The Child Sponsorship Research seeks to fill this gap by improving our understanding of the

mechanisms that explain how sponsors engage in and experience sponsorship programmes and how they can be transformed by the experience. This was explored in terms of three key themes:

1. the sponsor experience
2. the sponsor–child connection
3. the transformative effects of child sponsorship on donors.

The research into sponsor transformation utilised quantitative and qualitative methods, exploring sponsor experiences through an online survey and in-depth interviews with sponsors. The online survey targeted sponsors from four English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, US and UK) that together represent more than half of all World Vision's sponsors. Just under 4,000 surveys were completed. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 55 sponsors from these countries, as well as Germany. The data provides rich insights into the expectations and experiences of these sponsors, as an initial step in exploring sponsor experiences. However, it is important to note that expectations and experiences of Asian, European or Latin American sponsors may be somewhat different.



*Bounceback communications are a valuable aid to sponsor–child connection. Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision*

# Theme I

## The Sponsor Experience

Research findings suggest that people at all stages of life decide to become a sponsor – research participants included young adults, adults, parents with children and retirees.

### Sponsors are confident that sponsorship makes a difference

Results from the quantitative survey show that 95 per cent of sponsors either ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ agree that sponsorship through World Vision is an effective way to make a difference in children’s lives. Australians are the least confident, with 60 per cent choosing the ‘strongly agree’ option, whereas the US, Canada and UK figures range from 72 to 77 per cent.

### Sponsors find sponsorship rewarding

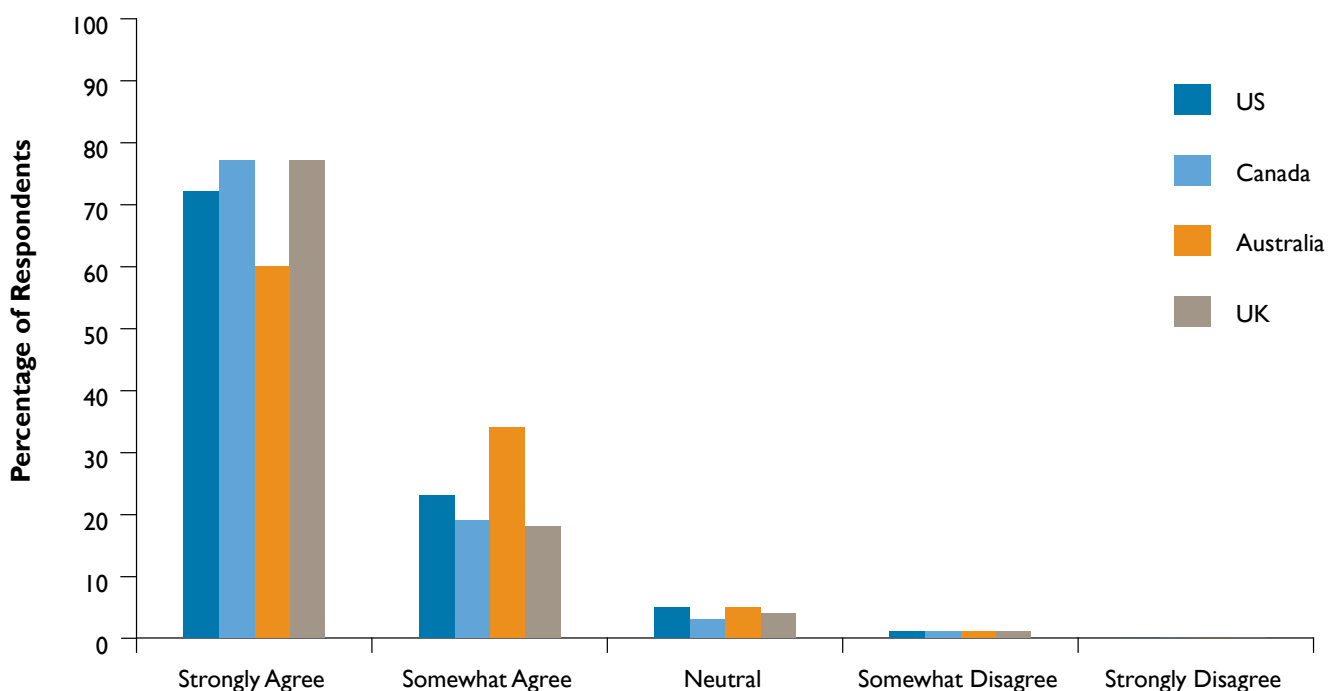
Ninety-one per cent of surveyed sponsors agree that sponsoring a child with World Vision is a rewarding experience, with the majority of these respondents indicating that they ‘strongly agree’.

### Reasons for choosing to sponsor

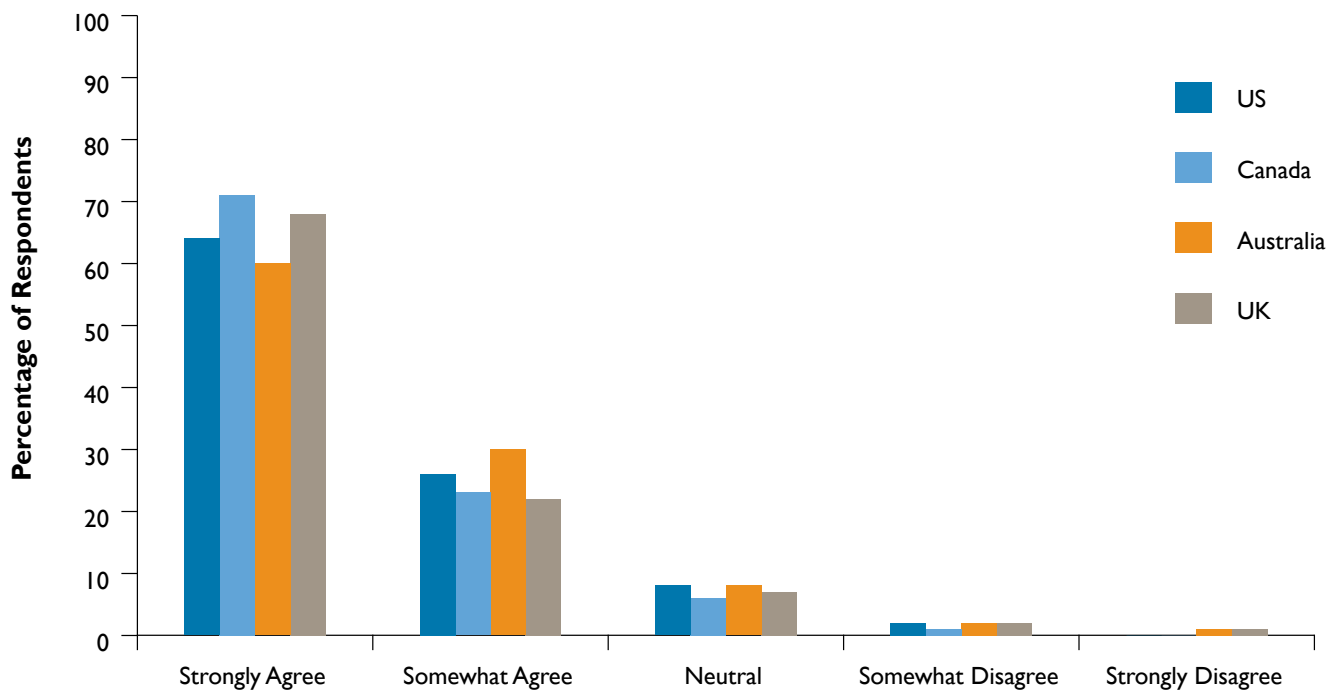
Some sponsors saw a child’s photo and were immediately convinced that sponsorship was the right thing to do; others spent months considering sponsorship before committing. The reasons most frequently cited for choosing to sponsor are:

- an awareness among sponsors of the needs in the developing world
- a desire to help a child
- a chance to ‘give back’
- an opportunity to educate the sponsor’s family
- an opportunity for learning about a child and where they live
- a way to honour God.

**Figure I. I am confident that sponsoring a child with World Vision is an effective way to make a difference in children’s lives**



**Figure 2. Sponsoring a child with World Vision is a rewarding experience**



*‘It gives me a good feeling in my heart that I can do something that God would want me to do. Because [the Bible] says, when you are feeding others you are feeding Jesus.’ – Canadian sponsor*

Research participants rarely cited the desire to develop a relationship with a child as a deciding reason for initiating sponsorship, despite many reporting that the relationship was very important to them later on.

While some reported that they commenced sponsorship when they were in a stable financial situation, other research participants highlighted that they struggled with finances and made sacrifices to sponsor.

### Triggers for initiating sponsorship

The triggers that motivate a person to sign up for sponsorship fall into three categories.

- **Personal milestone.** Some participants said their trigger to sponsor was reaching a milestone such as achieving financial independence, starting a new job or having a child of their own.



*Sponsorship is an opportunity to teach children about the lives of others. Photo: Greg Schneider/Genesis Photos*

*‘I think the initial prompt, so to speak, was when I had my first baby in my arms. And that’s such a feeling you have, that you would do anything for your baby and how you would feel if you couldn’t feed her or clothe her; how you would feel. And I don’t know if I saw an advert or something, but I remember thinking about that bond from one mother to another and if you could help a mother by feeding or clothing her child, then that was a good way to give.’ – UK sponsor*

- **A particular event.** The trigger to sponsor might have come from a book, a speaker, a documentary or an overseas trip.
- **World Vision's efforts.** Some research participants recalled speaking with World Vision staff at a conference stall or exposure to a World Vision campaign. What stood out for these research participants were children's photographs.

## Reasons for choosing World Vision

Sponsors chose to sponsor through World Vision because they had heard of the organisation or knew of its Christian identity rather than any specific understanding of how sponsorship through World Vision might be different from other organisations.

## Sponsors' understanding of the community-based approach

The survey shows that the overwhelming majority (96 to 99 per cent) of sponsors surveyed within each country responded 'yes' to the statement 'I realise that World Vision strives to work with whole communities in order to benefit all vulnerable children, not just my sponsored child.' This suggests that World Vision has successfully developed sponsors' understanding of the underlying mechanisms for improving child well-being.

### Critical insight: Communicating the community-based approach

Although the overwhelming majority of sponsors surveyed understood that World Vision works with whole communities to benefit the sponsored child, together with other vulnerable children in that community, sponsors did not mention this as a consideration when making the decision to sponsor. This suggests that World Vision is doing a good job of educating existing sponsors on what it means to practise good development through a community-based approach, but it may not be well communicated to prospective sponsors.

## Sponsor expectations

The research found sponsors have a range of expectations of child sponsorship. Some of the most frequently mentioned expectations are:

- Sponsorship should provide for a child's basic needs.
- Sponsorship should provide emotional support for a child.

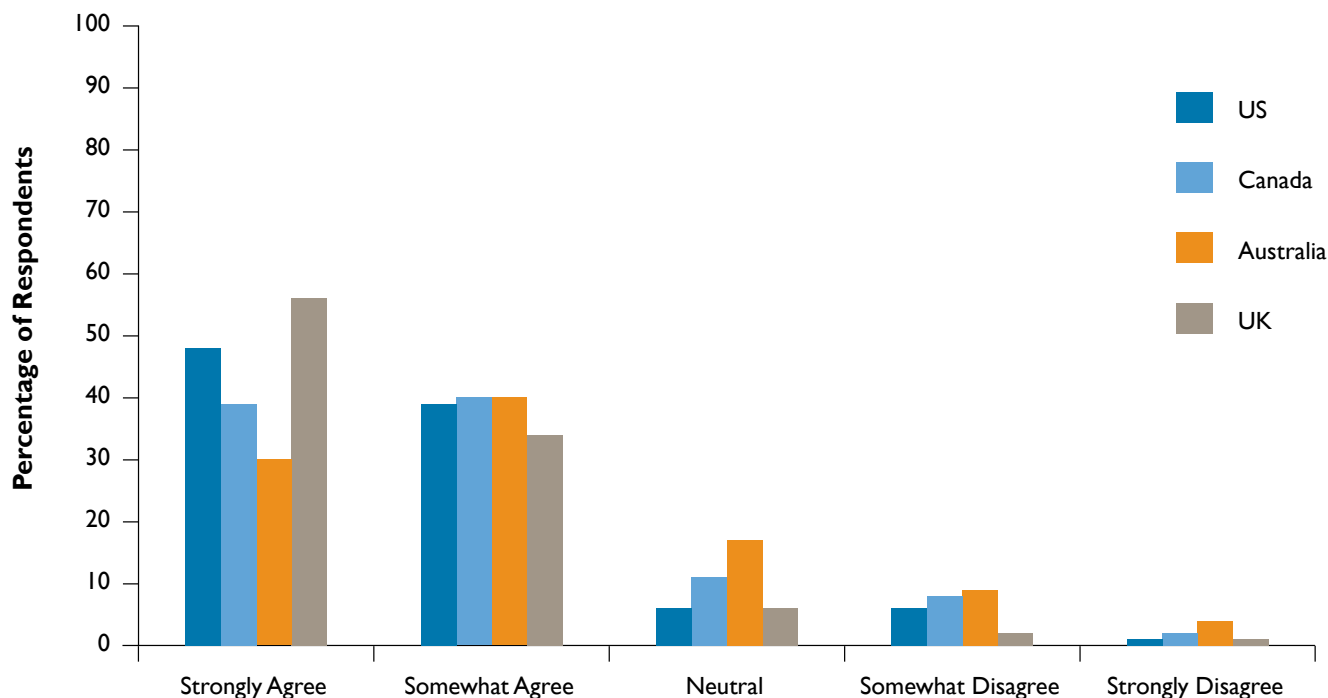
*'[I want her to have] something to look forward to – show her that she does have a future.'* – Canadian sponsor

- Sponsorship should benefit the whole community, not just the child.

*'My father was talking to a colleague who was rather critical of the whole [child sponsorship] concept, like "You'll help one individual, but wouldn't it make more sense to change the structures altogether?" And then I said, "According to what I've been reading, that is actually the case [with World Vision], that you help on a large scale.'* – German sponsor

- Sponsors should be able to communicate with their sponsored child.
- World Vision should update sponsors about progress in the lives of their sponsored child and community.
- World Vision should spend sponsorship money appropriately.
- Sponsors should be able to visit their sponsored children.
- It is the sponsor's own responsibility to ensure a child feels cared for and loved, often through consistent letter writing and sometimes through prayer and sharing of life lessons.
- The sponsor should maintain sponsorship as a long-term commitment to the sponsored child.
- The sponsor is responsible for communicating sensitively.

**Figure 3. World Vision keeps me updated on the progress that is taking place in my sponsored child’s community**



**Critical insight: Sponsors have high expectations of themselves**

The research found that sponsors often have high expectations of themselves as they take on the responsibility of being a child’s sponsor. Sponsors feel not only a financial commitment to the child but also an emotional responsibility to make sure the child feels cared for and respected.

**Keeping sponsors informed**

Findings suggest that World Vision can improve on updating sponsors on the impact their sponsorship is having, with 45 per cent of respondents indicating that they ‘strongly agree’ that World Vision keeps them updated and a further 38 per cent indicating that they ‘somewhat agree’. The highest level of agreement was among UK respondents. Australian respondents had the lowest rate of agreement.



Participants believe sponsorship should provide emotional support for a child. Photo: Paul Bettings/World Vision



## Critical insight: Room for improvement in keeping sponsors informed

A key expectation that sponsors have is that World Vision will keep them updated on progress in their child's community; however, the level of agreement that World Vision actually keeps them updated is relatively low compared to other survey items. There is room for improvement in the way that World Vision communicates progress.

## Reasons for continuing sponsorship

The data suggests several motivations behind participants' continuation of their sponsorship.

- **A belief that sponsorship is beneficial to the sponsored child.** The majority of sponsors surveyed believe that sponsorship enriches the lives of their sponsored children.



Participants desire to make a difference in a child's life.  
Photo: Sopheak Kong/World Vision

*'I'd lose my house before I would stop paying that monthly payment. I just assume that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to help this little girl out. I feel like she's depending on us.'* – US sponsor

- **A desire to make a difference in a child's life.** This includes sponsors making sure their sponsored child knows someone cares about them.

*'I hoped that [my sponsored child] would get kind of a sense of confidence in who she is and know that she's loved and that she's special.'* – US sponsor

- **A desire for their sponsored child to experience God's love.** Some sponsors, especially from the US, desire to be involved in a child's spiritual growth in some way.
- **A desire to live out their values or their faith.** A large number of participants said they continued to sponsor because they felt it was a way for them to live out their values or their faith.

*'[Sponsorship is] a practical, pragmatic expression of my faith on a world-wide stage.'* – UK sponsor

- **A social responsibility.** Participants felt an obligation to sponsor in response to their social conscience.
- **A belief that sponsorship is fulfilling.** Participants continued sponsoring because they were fulfilled by the experience.

*'I think the other thing, if we are really digging into why [we sponsor], [is] you do it to feel good about yourself.'* – Canadian sponsor

## Feelings of guilt

Not all experiences that participants had with child sponsorship were positive. One of the most frequently articulated negative experiences was around participants feeling guilty in some way in association with their sponsorship. For most, this was related to the frequency of their communication with their sponsored child – that they did not write often enough or put as much time or effort into it as they felt they should have. At a basic level, feelings of guilt tend to derive from participants having a feeling of not doing enough for the child, or having a desire to do more.

## Sadness at sponsorship ending

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Some sponsors report feeling sad or concerned when their sponsorship came to an end, especially when this was unexpected. This sometimes occurred for participants who may not have consciously acknowledged that they had a connection with their sponsored child but may have been more emotionally invested than they realised.

*'[When a sponsorship comes to an end], suddenly you're on to [sponsoring] another child ... I feel [World Vision] should let you know once that child gets to a certain age that you're going [to be transitioned]*

– Australian sponsor



*Most participants believe sponsorship enriches the lives of sponsored children. Photo: Sopheak Kong/World Vision*

# Theme 2

## The Sponsor–Child Connection

Outlined in this section are the perceptions of what connection means to sponsors. The research participants were selected for the qualitative component because they were considered to be among the sponsors who were more engaged with their sponsorship.

### Feeling connected

What it means to ‘have a connection with a sponsored child’ varied among participants in the study. But regardless of how a participant defined ‘connection,’ the study found that two-thirds of survey respondents did feel connected, stating that they either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ to the statement ‘I feel connected with my sponsored child.’ Respondents in the UK felt most connected, while Australians felt the least strongly connected.

### Types of connection

Research participants described a number of different types of connection with their sponsored child, each with varying drivers towards that connection and varying degrees of emotion and strength.

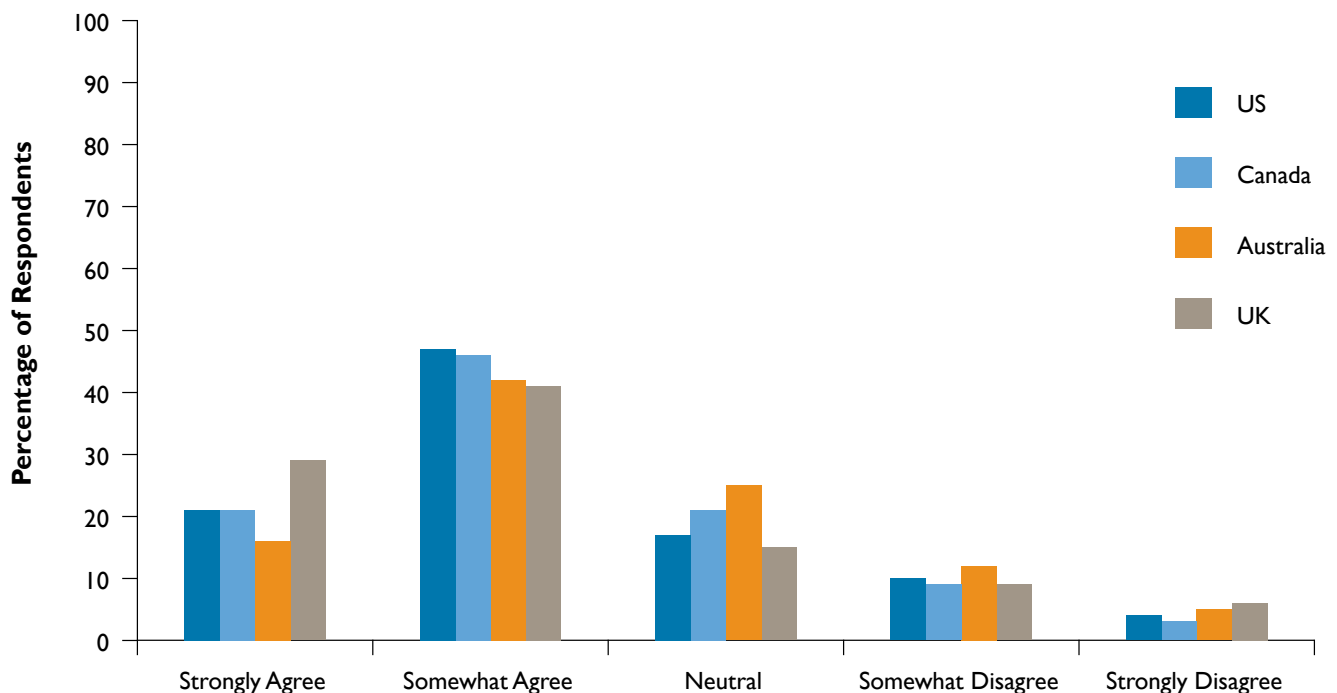
- **A connection based on personal relationship.** This was often expressed in familial terms and characterised by reciprocal sharing on a very personal level and feelings of love or care for a child.

*‘At one point, [my sponsored child] was signing his letters to me, “From your son.” I wrote to him about my classes and becoming a teacher, and he now wants to become a teacher. [Our relationship] was pretty close. We definitely both influenced each other in some ways.’ – US sponsor*

- **A superficial connection.** The second is based on a more superficial relationship between a sponsor and child that does not need to be as deep but which does involve interaction between the two.

*‘Oh yes, there is [a connection]. There definitely is. It isn’t a hand-to-mouth existence where we’re in each other’s pocket. The communication is maybe once or maybe twice a year, and for what it is, that’s all it needs to be.’ – UK sponsor*

Figure 4. I feel connected with my sponsored child





Most participants feel connected with their sponsored child. Photo: David Kamerman/Genesis Photos

- **A connection based on information about a child.** Participants feel a connection with their sponsored child based simply on information they have gathered about a child, either through photos or updates sent through World Vision.

*[My connection with my sponsored children is] quite good. I get information and that from them, and they send me every – I think it might be twice a year – their school reports and what they're doing at school and all that. I think they get a kick out of sending it to me as well as I get out of getting it from them and reading it. I feel quite ... thrilled to know that at least ... the money I'm spending sponsoring [means] they are getting ahead in life. And they're learning.' – Australian sponsor*

The research revealed another kind of connection beside the sponsor–child connection. Some participants said they felt more connected with a cause or an idea than with a sponsored child on a personal level. The child was seen more as an ambassador or representative for a cause, for example, girls' empowerment.

## The importance of communication to connection

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There was a statistically significant relationship between feeling that one is kept up to date on progress taking place in a sponsored child's

community and feeling connected to the sponsored child. The more that sponsors felt they were kept up to date, the more connected they felt to their sponsored child. Results from the qualitative interviews indicate that being kept updated is a key expectation of participants' sponsorship experience. It is noteworthy that the level of agreement among survey participants that they are kept up to date is relatively low compared with some other survey questions. It suggests room for improvement in the way that World Vision communicates progress and impact.

## Connectedness and satisfaction with sponsorship

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The survey found the level of connectedness with one's sponsored child to be associated with both satisfaction with sponsorship and feeling that sponsorship is a rewarding experience. Among respondents who 'strongly agree' that they feel connected with their sponsored child, 95 per cent also 'strongly agree' that sponsoring a child is a rewarding experience for them. These findings indicate that among most of those who feel strongly connected to their sponsored children, a feeling that the sponsorship experience is rewarding is highly likely to also be present. On the other hand, those who find sponsorship rewarding do not necessarily have a strong connection with their sponsored child. While feeling connected with one's sponsored child is an important factor in a sponsor's feeling of personal reward from the sponsorship experience, it is not the only factor.

## Initiating a connection

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Participants' connection with their sponsored child often starts with the selection of the child. They tend to choose a child with particular traits or attributes. Hence choosing a child often helps build connection because there is some common ground or shared interest from the outset. These initial connection drivers occurred in the following ways.

- **Finding something in common.** Some participants selected a child to sponsor because either they or their family had something in common with that child. For example, a

participant may have chosen a child with the same birthday as someone in their family, the same age or gender as one of their own children, or who shared the same cultural ties or ethnic background.

*'[My sponsored child] is 10. I did that on purpose. I got her the same age as the youngest girl that I'm raising so I could have a visual of her size and what she would be up to in life.'* – Australian sponsor

- **Finding particular attributes in a child.** Some participants reported that they looked for particular attributes in a child. For example, some participants chose a child from a Spanish-speaking country so they could practise writing in Spanish.

### Critical insight: Sponsors often look for something in common with their child

Sponsors might look for:

- a similar ethnic background or cultural heritage
- a shared language
- similar age as their own child
- a shared birthday
- a particular gender.

*'I have three sons and a daughter, and that's why I sponsored three boys and a girl.'* – US sponsor

## Building a connection

Research participants identified several drivers that helped build a connection with their sponsored child.

- **Correspondence.** Research participants frequently referred to letter writing, or regular communication with their sponsored child, as the most important method by which they established a connection. Regular correspondence feeds a number of pathways to connection. These include building feelings of mutual care, bringing a child into a participant's regular thoughts or prayers, and finding common ground.



Regular correspondence is a key way of establishing connection. Photo: Jeff Raymond/Genesis Photos

*'Over the years, [my sponsored child] has written personal notes as well. You can see the handwriting is getting better, you know, like one of my own children ... You see progression.'* – Canadian sponsor

- **Visual cues.** Visual cues, such as photos of the sponsored child, pictures they draw, or introduction videos can also be powerful drivers of connection. They provide a tangible way for sponsors to see the changes taking place in the lives of children. Participants often spoke about how they displayed the photos of their sponsored child. This suggests that a photo fosters a feeling of connection in a way that a written report cannot.

*'I think also seeing pictures of the sponsored kids really helps make a good relationship because you can see them growing ... I remember for a long time [my sponsored child] wasn't smiling in the pictures, and then I remember the first picture I saw her smiling in, and it was a really amazing feeling.'* – US sponsor

- **World Vision prompts.** The various updates World Vision sends can be used, particularly by long-term sponsors, to track information about a sponsored child (changing interests, school performance, etc.), which creates a feeling of connection by allowing the sponsor to watch a child grow and develop.

- **Length of relationship.** The length of a relationship between a sponsor and child can be a powerful driver of connection. Being able to journey with a child, through various updates or photos, seemed to be enough for some participants to feel more connected with their sponsored child.
- **Gift giving.** The evidence suggests gift giving helps form connection. Some participants spoke of putting a lot of time and effort into selecting the right gift: small enough to mail, yet appropriate for the child’s age and culture.
- **Bounceback communications.** Participants welcomed ‘Bounceback’ communications (where reminder notices or blank cards for birthdays or Christmas are provided for a sponsor to fill out and send off) as a valuable aid that allowed them to maintain a connection with their sponsored child. The prompts also allow sponsors to keep track of the milestones in a child’s life, giving them an opportunity to reflect on how the child has grown up.
- **Sponsor visits.** Although fairly uncommon, a small number of participants had made the trip to visit their sponsored child. The visit was a powerful connection driver as it broke down the geographical barriers and allowed a connection to develop naturally.

**Critical insight: Possibility of visiting a sponsored child is important**

Visiting a child was a powerful experience for sponsors lucky enough to have the opportunity. Importantly, for many other sponsors, just the possibility of a sponsor visit plays a significant role in their experience of sponsorship, even if they never go. Many sponsors mentioned either their regrets about not being able to visit for various reasons or the possibility of visiting one day. Sponsors were aware that facilitating such a visit is something World Vision offers.

*‘I wanted to go see [my sponsored children], but I can’t. It would be nice if I could. A friend of mine just [started sponsoring] a couple boys from India and I am sure he is going to go over to visit them. The possibilities are really great’ – Canadian sponsor*

*‘I like it that you at World Vision eventually made it easier for sponsors by sending these reminder postcards. “Your sponsored child is having a birthday soon” or “If you would still like to mail something for Christmas, you can choose this or that, and you should mail it by such and such date.” That was very encouraging to me, a reminder for Christmas, and all within limits. “Great, the postcard, I can do this!”’ – German sponsor*

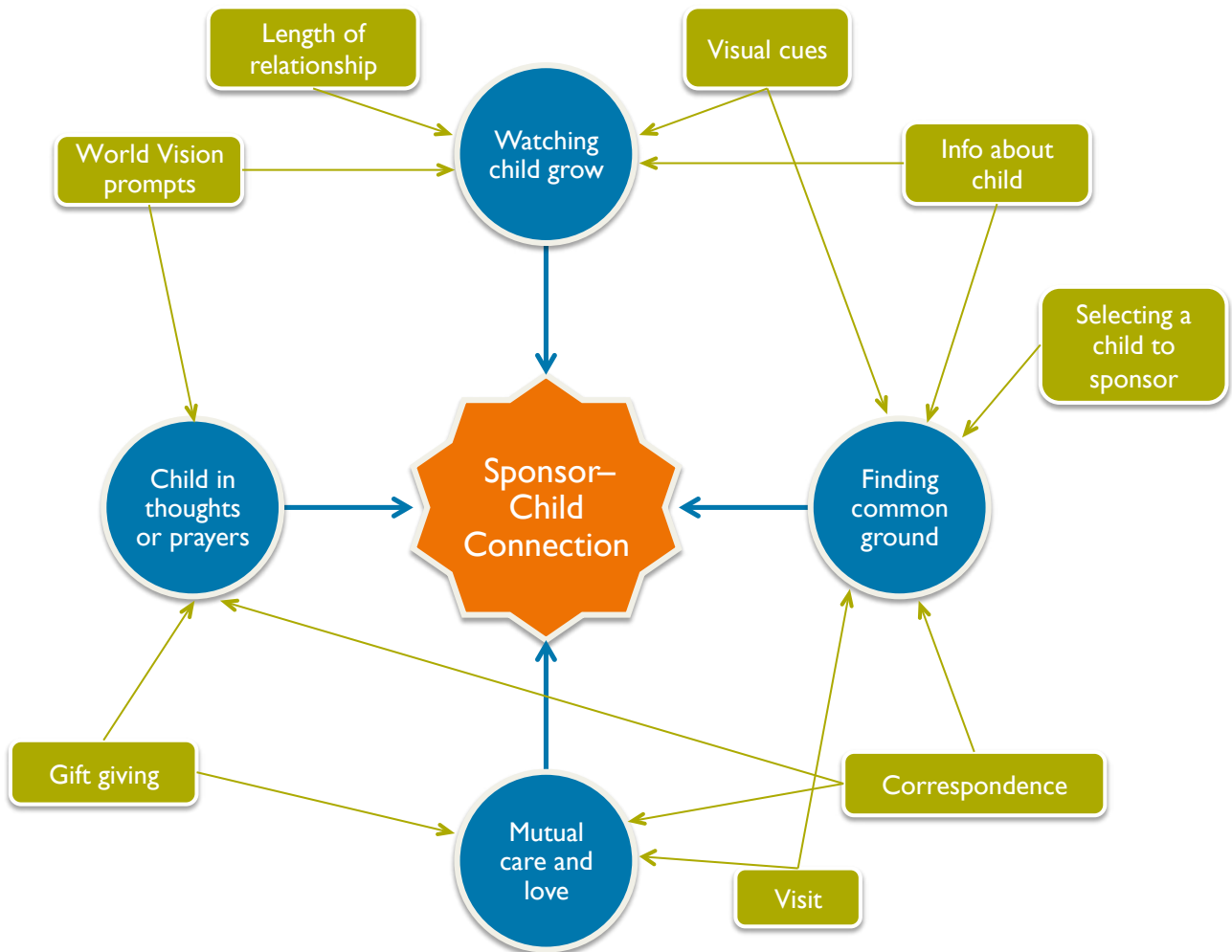


Sponsor visits can be a powerful driver of connection. Photo: Annila Harris/World Vision

**Figure 5. Pathways to sponsor–child connection**

■ Drivers of connection

■ Mechanism through which connection is established



**Critical insight: Depth of relationship does not determine experience of connection**

The way sponsors described their feelings of connection with their child did not always match the way they characterised their relationship. Some participants described their feeling of connection with their sponsored child as ‘deep’ but spoke about having no regular communication with the child or had little knowledge of what life was like for the child day to day. Conversely, some expressed feeling deep love for a child – they may communicate regularly, think about or pray for their sponsored child daily – but would still describe their relationship as ‘tenuous’.

*‘I think we have a connection ... It’s good when we talk. It’s always good, and I’m like, “Oh, [name of child],” and I love him and I think about him on a regular basis – like I said, I have his picture on my refrigerator – but ... I don’t reach out to him and say, “You won’t believe what happened today”, or something like that. It’s kind of an acquaintance.’ – US sponsor*

## Barriers to connection

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It is also necessary to acknowledge the factors that act as barriers to the sponsor–child connection.

- **Fear of being hurt.** Some participants resist too close a connection because they fear they will end up being hurt when their sponsored child inevitably moves on.

*‘We just find it overwhelming ... I can give money, but I can’t allow myself to be emotionally [invested].’*

– Australian sponsor

- **No interest in a relationship.** Some participants stated they didn’t want a connection, perhaps because they didn’t want the responsibility of maintaining a relationship or saw sponsorship as simply a monthly donation.

*‘I wasn’t expecting any sort of personal relationship at all. No. Apart from the Christmas cards and the birthday cards and that sort of thing, no I wasn’t. And personally I don’t think they would benefit from any sort of contact from me. They’ve got their lives; their lives are difficult. That’s why they’re sponsored. And they just want to get on with their lives. They don’t want some European peering over their shoulder every five minutes.’*

– UK sponsor

- **Child’s age.** Some participants said it was harder to establish a connection with a child who could not write to them, or who was of an age the participant had no point of reference for.

There were a small number of participants who believed establishing a connection should be the choice of the child. Some participants also spoke of geographical distance, the cultural divide and language as barriers to connection.



# Theme 3

## Sponsor Transformation

The data suggests that sponsorship impacts participants in a variety of ways. These include enjoyment and personal happiness; inspiring participants to act as advocates for sponsorship; and as an enabler, or aid, of spiritual growth.

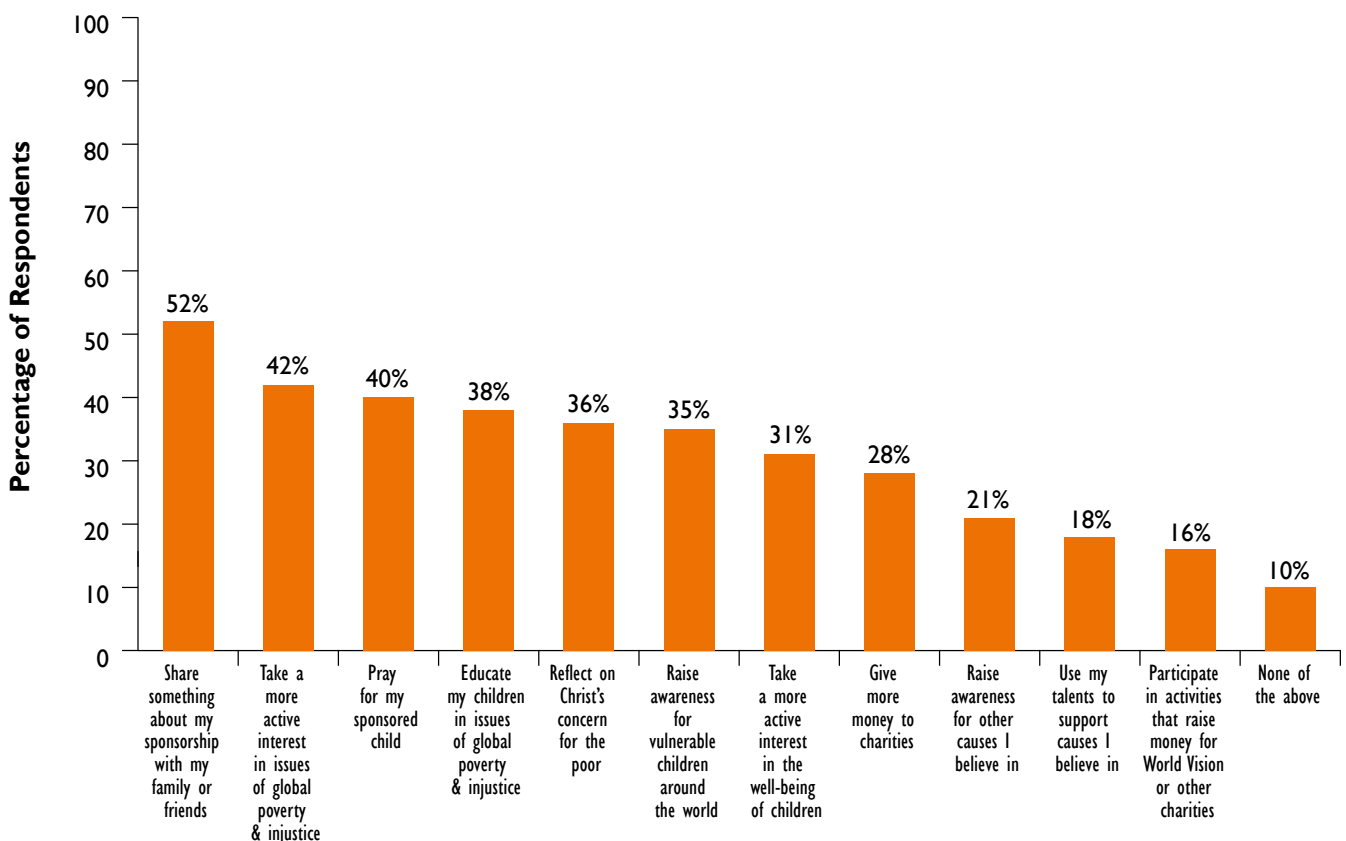
### Sponsorship inspires action

Findings suggest that sponsorship inspires sponsors to take action in several ways. Fifty-two per cent of survey respondents across all four countries reported that sponsoring a child inspired them to share something about their sponsorship experience with family or friends.

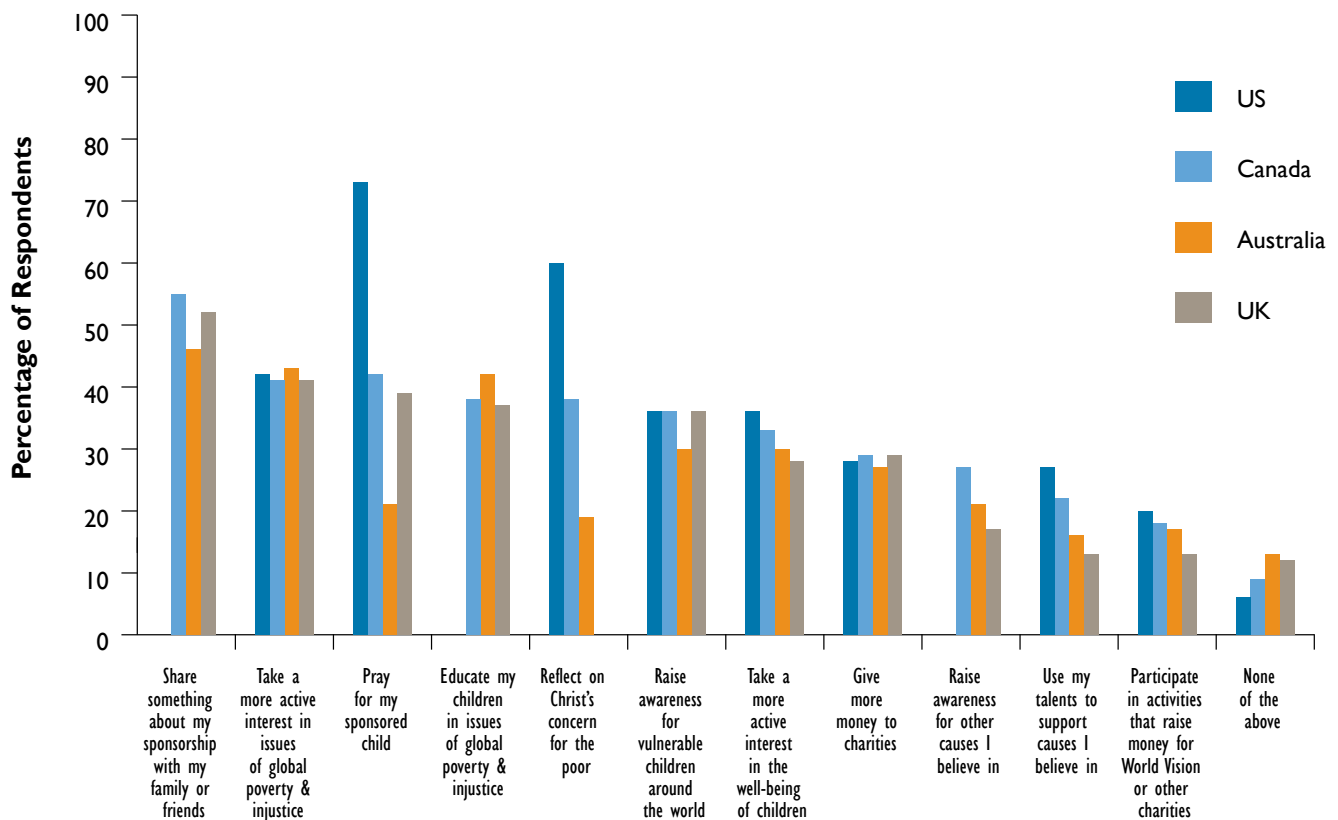
Other key ways in which respondents were inspired to act include taking more interest in global poverty and injustice, praying for their sponsored child, educating their own children on poverty and injustice, and reflecting on Christ's concern for the poor.

On average, each Canadian respondent selected 4.1 ways in which sponsorship inspired them to take action, compared to 3.6 ways for each Australian respondent, 3.5 ways for each UK respondent, and 3.4 ways for each US respondent. There were also significant differences across countries on the type of action sponsorship inspired sponsors to take. The greatest disparity across countries was the two items related to praying for a sponsored child and reflecting on Christ's concern for the poor. Seventy-three per cent of US respondents reported that they have prayed for their sponsored children. This compared to 21 per cent of Australians. The high rates observed among Americans may be reflective of the large Christian sponsor base of World Vision US.

Figure 6. Sponsoring a child with World Vision has inspired me to:



**Figure 7. Sponsoring a child with World Vision has inspired me to:**



## Enjoyment and personal growth

Sponsorship encouraged enjoyment and personal growth in several ways.

- **A sense of gratitude.** Many participants reported that their sponsorship allowed them to reflect on their own lives and be grateful for their family's circumstances.
- **A feeling of compassion.** Some reported that their sense of compassion grew and they found themselves feeling a greater responsibility to help others. Often this was through feeling moved by the personal stories they heard from their sponsored child.

*'I had never had [a sponsored child] grow [up] and be on their own ... I thought it was amazing. It ... inspired me to keep [sponsoring] because I thought there is an end to this, there is a moving on, this person is going to be self-sufficient. It's not like a handout for the rest of their lives. She was going to be a nurse and she was going to move on and get a job. She has been educated; she has been helped, and now she was going to go back and give to her community.'* – Australian sponsor

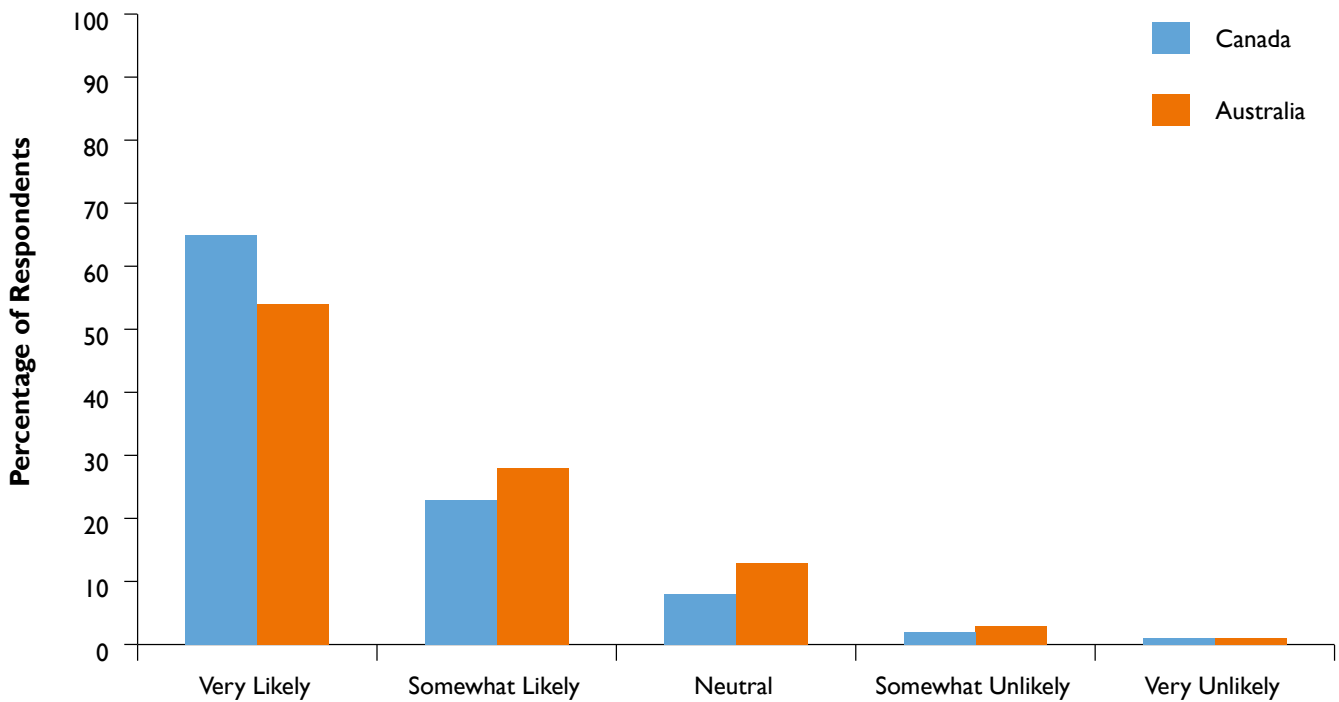
- **A learning opportunity.** Some research participants reported sponsorship gave them a reason to learn about a particular country or culture they might otherwise never have known.
- **Getting to know a child.** Some participants reported they enjoyed getting to know a child or, in some cases, the child's community.
- **Intergenerational journey.** Some participants revealed that they enjoy the intergenerational journey with World Vision sponsorship. Participants either talked of a parent or older relative sponsoring through World Vision before them, or a child of their own deciding to sponsor.

*'The gratifying flow-on effect has been two of our daughters are now sponsors.'* – Australian sponsor

## Promoting sponsorship

Participants report they are willing to recommend sponsoring a child to others. Eighty-two per cent of Australian respondents and 90 per cent of Canadian respondents reported that they would be 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to recommend sponsoring a child to others.

**Figure 8. How likely would you be to recommend sponsoring a child to others?**



### Impact of sponsorship on spiritual growth

When asked whether participants have experienced spiritual growth as a result of their sponsorship, responses were mixed. Some participants felt there had been no growth, but others felt there had been, often stating that sponsorship taught them how to sacrifice and be generous.

*'Just seeing how these [sponsored] kids live and seeing how much joy that they can have from something so small, it's just kind of made me rethink, I guess, how I live and what I think is important and how I want to raise my kids.'* – US sponsor

Other participants asserted that they had not grown spiritually because of their sponsorship, but, instead, their sponsorship was a result of their spiritual growth.

# Conclusion

The Child Sponsorship Research has sought to investigate the basic premise of what it means to be a sponsor and what sponsorship transformation looks like. It explored what ‘engaged sponsors’ understand about the programme, what makes the experience meaningful to them, why a connection with their sponsored child may be important and how their experience as a sponsor has affected them personally.

Understanding how the sponsor–child relationship develops and grows could inform not just the sponsor engagement efforts of INGOs, but also improve the impact of the sponsor–child relationship on child well-being. These findings may also help agencies inspire sponsors as agents of change in the development process.

This research has highlighted that sponsors’ experiences with child sponsorship are nuanced and diverse. Care will need to be taken to ensure that a one-size-fits-all approach to sponsorship programmes is avoided. People build and desire connection in different ways and this needs to be acknowledged, valued and nurtured. The research

has shown the importance of various communication methods that connect a sponsor and the sponsored child, and the numerous ways sponsors interpret and attach meaning to these. Communicating the impact sponsorship is having on the life of a child and their community has also been shown to be a powerful way in which sponsor loyalty is fostered, particularly among sponsors to whom a close, personal sponsor–child connection is less important. The findings suggest that this is an area where there is substantial scope for improvement. Moving forward, improving World Vision’s capacity to facilitate and enhance its communication of impact will be an important means of engaging sponsors.

If World Vision can partner with sponsors through a child sponsorship programme that is responsive and accommodating to their specific needs and preferences, there is great potential to bring about a transformation whereby sponsors’ lives are enriched as they participate in the process of improving the lives of children. When sponsors’ lives are transformed, they become advocates and partners for change. Thus, the knock-on effects extend beyond the sponsor to benefit sponsored children, their communities and vulnerable children around the world.



*Provision of clean water is one way sponsorship makes a difference. Photo: Paul Bettings/World Vision*

## More about the Child Sponsorship Research

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The sponsor transformation research report was produced as part of World Vision's global Child Sponsorship Research, which was established in 2013 to address the evidence gap in its sponsorship programming. The research is part of World Vision's global Sponsorship Transformation Programme. The Child Sponsorship Research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What contribution do area development programmes make to the well-being of children, including the registered/sponsored children? Do the most vulnerable children participate or benefit?
2. How does World Vision's community-based approach support communities to improve the well-being of their children?
3. How does World Vision's Christian identity inform the way it works?
4. How effective are child sponsorship activities (i.e. sponsorship communications and child monitoring) in creating life-enriching experiences for children, communities and supporters?
5. How do area development programmes enable communities to sustain improvements in child well-being?

To explore these questions, World Vision conducted eight programme evaluations in countries across the globe. In addition, it sought to address the evidence gap on sponsor transformation by exploring sponsors' experiences, specifically the various ways sponsors engage and how sponsorship generates enriching experiences.

The research into sponsor transformation utilised quantitative and qualitative methods, exploring sponsor experiences through an online survey and in-depth interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data was analysed alongside one another in order to triangulate findings and present a more comprehensive construction of sponsor transformation. The survey consisted of 10 questions and was conducted in four of the five countries supporting the Child Sponsorship Research. These countries were Australia, Canada, the UK and the US. Support offices collected just under 4,000 survey responses across the four countries.

The in-depth sponsor interviews were conducted with sponsors in five countries – Australia, Canada, Germany, the UK, and the US. These interviews were conducted with sponsors considered to have a reasonable level of engagement and with sponsors currently sponsoring a child in one of the eight research sites subject to programme evaluation. It is important to note that the qualitative interview component of the research does not seek to understand the full range of sponsor experiences but is focused on the experience of 'engaged' sponsors only.

This report is a summary of the findings of the full research report on sponsor transformation, completed in March 2015. Readers seeking more details should contact James Addis, Communications Officer, Child Sponsorship:  
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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

