UNICEF Shifts Its Focus To Include All Children

By Kate Henniges

As 2015 approaches, the United Nations continues to work arduously to complete the original 8 Millennium Goals while simultaneously preparing goals to guide continued development in the future. The post 2015 goals will encapsulate both developed and developing countries as well as all types of people, including the aging population, those with physical disabilities, and people with mental health issues.

Within that context, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has added children with physical and social disabilities to its list of primary focus areas. UNICEF plans to serve these children by working diligently with their caregivers since the children are often too disabled to leave their homes to interact within their communities. The caregivers will be asked to bring the children out of their homes so they can be assessed by UNICEF workers. The workers will be able to help the caregivers better meet the needs of the child.

Children with disabilities often have many abilities that can be utilized in the community, but are tagged as worthless early on. UNICEF Director Anthony Lake said, “When you see the disability before the child, it is not only wrong for the child, but it deprives society of all that the child has to offer.” (1) He strongly believes that communities need to work with these children to develop their strengths and improve their well-being. “Their loss is society’s loss; their gain is society’s gain.” UNICEF will encourage communities to acknowledge and support their disabled members.

I am personally overjoyed that UNICEF will be shifting its focus to support children with disabilities. As a Communicative Sciences and Disorders major, I was unsure how my major could really fit into the United Nations and all the work this international organization does. I was ecstatic to walk into the UNICEF New York headquarters and see the huge banners with a group of children. A young boy with a pair of crutches is lined up with the rest of the children getting ready to enter the school. He is happy and able to socialize with his peers all because he was given crutches to walk with. His entire life is now changed dramatically both socially and academically all because he was given something as simple as a crutch. This child may now grow up to have a successful job and a successful life.

A lot of emphasis is placed on children with disabilities in the United States with specific schools and teachers available to help them achieve their goals. The United States can serve as a model for other countries and show others the importance of focusing on these children and utilizing their gifts and talents. My hope for the future is that children with disabilities all over the world will be valued and cared for by their societies in the years to come.