**2nd Place: One Small Act (20)**

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The pandemic has touched everyone in different ways. Some have lost, no-one has won and a few have not been fully recognized and acknowledged for their work. Women, in particular, have played a crucial part by being at this front line, with their work in many circumstances being overlooked.

I would like to talk about one such angel of change: Basira Popul. Basira's story (one of many amazing people) is of an individual who has dedicated her efforts to alleviate the suffering of others during this horrific pandemic.

A single mum, Basira resides in a mountainous village in Afghanistan with her husband and her four children. Like many women across Afghanistan, Basira is illiterate and never got the chance to study or earn a living, trapping her in her never-ending cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, Basira is not alone and millions of women find themselves in similar situations.

What makes Basira so unique? A polio worker, she has travelled through her country vaccinating children and teaching remote communities about the dangers of the crippling virus that is COVID-19. The eradication of polio was on the horizon in her country, however the unpredictability of COVID19 striking has meant she has quickly adapted to helping others with this. Basira did not give up instead she understood the responsibility that she duly needed to fulfil and has done so with great humility. In a country where there are extremely limited resources, she knew she had to step up.

So instead of vaccinating against polio she began distributing bars of soap. Whilst this sounds like a small gesture, for many of us who take this for granted, for Basira it was a way for her and her colleagues to protect those around them. In doing this, she has highlighted the importance of maintaining high hygiene standards to help in our fight against this virus. Basira and her colleagues have already given out more than 1 million bars of soap and are still going strong, determined not to stop.

Basira has made a great difference in my life. Her small act of kindness is inspiring and allows me to believe that I too can make difference with just one small act.

In Basira helping in such a remote area in her country, I have begun thinking about what I, my friends and others are doing for our local communities - especially giving back to those who have given so much of themselves and not asked for anything in return. How can I bring about a positive change to my community? Basira's determination is infectious.

And it has encouraged me to take on challenges that come my way. Her small act has saved countless lives and perhaps stopped people from catching this life-threatening virus. Whilst we are all playing our parts in supporting others (washing hands, wearing masks, keeping our distance) sometimes more is needed than these individual actions. Actions that benefit those who are not as lucky as we are, as Basira has shown.

The church and the holy bible are a constant reminder that we should try to always bring about a positive change, and the quote "see, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" provides a consistent and constant reminder of what we can do to bring about a change.

The church and the bible are always telling us we should try to be the best version of ourselves and always do the best that we can do for our community. If Basira, in such a remote part of the world can bring about such a great change with small act, then can we as children of God, who are in privileged positions must try to understand the impact our small act could change. If we focus on the small acts, then for someone else these could have a lasting change - bigger than the small act we take.

Anyone can make a difference. Last year I was diagnosed with a CTLA 4 deficiency which is a rare genetic disorder which impairs the function of my immune system, but I didn't choose to give up. I am immensely grateful for all those doctors and my haematologist who worked to ensure I was able to stay well. Whilst they might consider their acts small, the impact for me was big. I remain thankful this was discovered at a young age and not at a later point in my life where it would have affected me greatly and possibly have been serious. I am alive and well due to the acts of others, someone, like Basira thought about more than just themselves.

It's about time we all did the same - just one small act, that's all it takes