

The
Sisters'
Mind Connection



by
Allison Hazel Liévano Gómez

Illustrated by Oscar Pinto



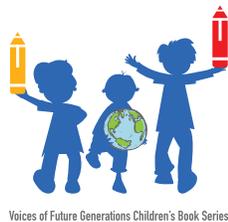
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foreword



Who better to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities than children who share with them the joys and challenges of everyday life? This is the spirit of *The Sisters' Mind Connection*. Inspired by her experiences with her sister Daniela, who has autism and Down Syndrome, Allison Liévano makes a powerful appeal about the importance of education as a human right to ensure the dignity and inclusion of every child.

I had the honour to meet Allison when she received the Voices of Future Generations Award. She is an outstanding 9 year old girl, with a passion for robotics and mathematics, which she combines with a love for lyrical singing and piano. I was deeply impressed by her determination to ensure that every girl and boy is included and given a chance.

This book echoes UNESCO's commitment to empower all children, including those with disabilities, through education and through harnessing the power of new technologies. Every voice matters today: No one can be left behind as we seek to build more inclusive, knowledge-based societies and to meet the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Every child is unique and special. Every girl and every boy aspires to create, to express themselves and to understand the world and themselves. If we give them the attention, tools and support they need, the next generation will make it a better place. To understand the vibrant power of a creative young mind, I invite you to dive into the following pages...

Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO

prefaces



It has been wonderful getting to know Allison. Her tenderness, her curious and inquisitive eyes that capture everything that's around her, her enthusiasm, her eagerness to learn, her hopes, dreams and her imagination, lift up the hearts of anyone around her.

Allison's capacity to communicate, to interact, to relate and to fantasize with her sister goes far beyond the potential we have as professionals and experts to truly capture the reality faced by Allison's sister and many young boys and girls like her. As it comes naturally to her, she does it with heart and everlasting love.

Imagine if we all were able to feel the same love as Allison does for her sister. The world would be totally different. Expressions such as “impossible,” “there is no remedy,” and “it cannot be done,” would simply not exist.

Allison has not only studied the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, but also embodies its principles and leads by example. We all should be grateful to Allison as she teaches us through her story how to love one another beyond language or cultural barriers.

*Marcela Orvañanos de Rovzar
President of UNICEF Mexico's consultative board*



The United Nations makes a difference to the lives of millions of people around the world on a daily basis. It is urgent for many important programmes and discussions to focus on the needs of children.

Before, we used to say that this was part of investing in our common future. Today, especially since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we recognize that boys and girls are not only the future, but also the present. Thanks to growing networks and new information technologies, young people all over the world are demonstrating that they are agents of change.

The world needs child leadership. *The Sisters' Mind Connection* is a shining example of how, through a child's eyes, we can understand global challenges in a local – even familial – light. Allison Liévano has shown leadership in her community, in Mexico and on the world stage. As the UN turns 70, this story is an example to the Member States of the organization working for a world that is more prosperous, secure, and fully respectful of all human rights.

As Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, few experiences can be as fulfilling as seeing young people enrich the work of the organization. In Allison's book, children and adults alike will find a model for addressing exclusion, ignorance and discrimination, all of which are obstacles in the fulfillment of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Mexico congratulates the *Voices of Future Generations* project and will continue working to transform those voices into tangible results for peace, development and human rights.

*Ambassador Jorge Montaña
Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations*

chapter 1

Reading a dog's mind is easy: they mostly think about food and cats and fetching balls and rolling on the grass. Reading a human's mind is more difficult. They think about work and are tense, especially adults.



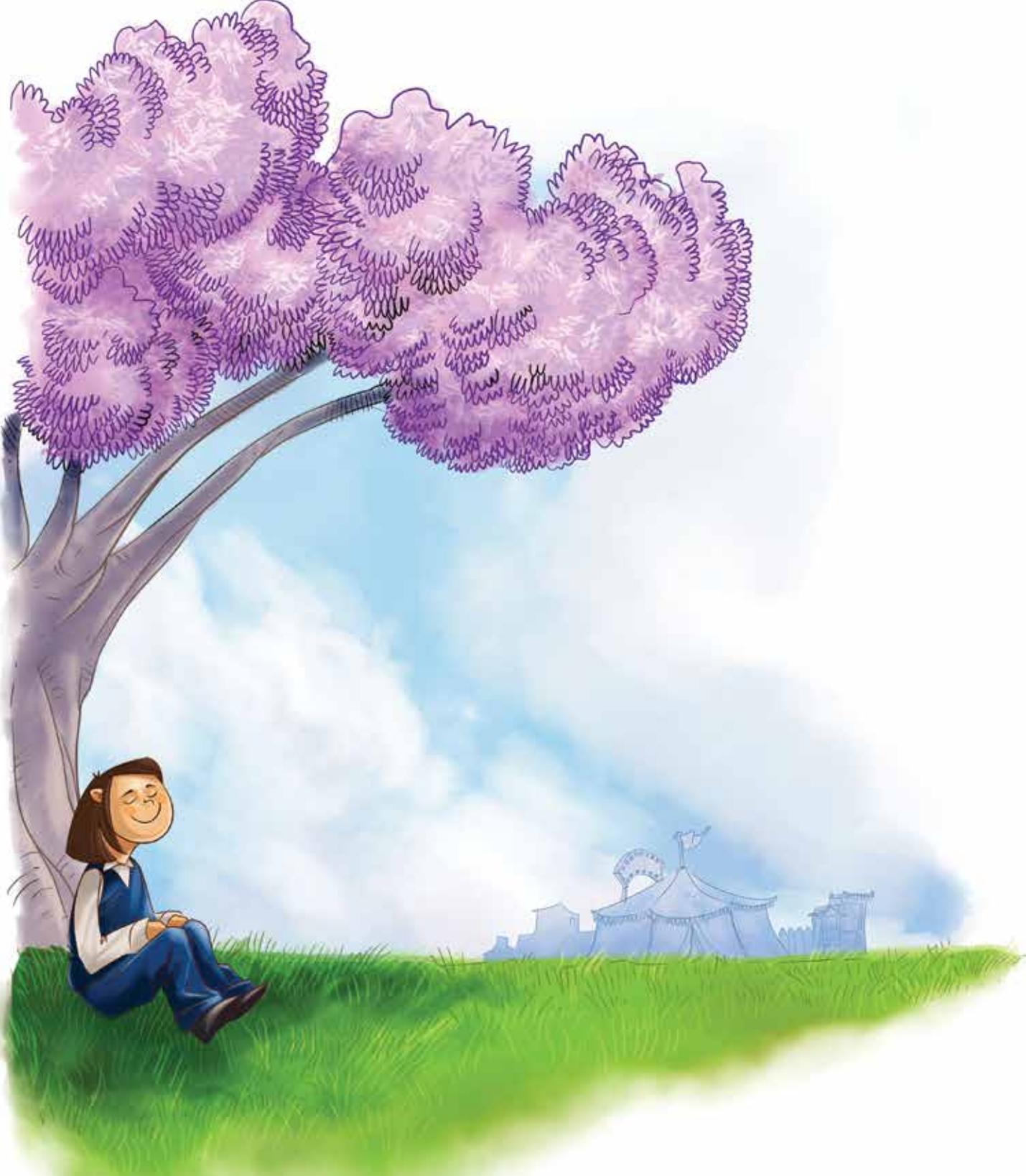
Michelle is very special, gentle and kind. But she cannot express how she feels by talking because she has a double diagnosis: autism and Down Syndrome. Michelle's parents cannot find an appropriate school for her. Michelle is Clara's big sister. They live in Mexico City.



Clara is the “middle of the sandwich”. She is a splendid girl (that’s what her mom says!). She gives all her effort to her work at school and she is also very joyful. She wishes that her sister Michelle could talk. She loves her very much.

Clara also has a marvellous little brother called Jorge. He loves programming, coding and building things. He is an inventor. He calls his inventions “Jorge-Apps”! He designs computer apps that come alive, like virtual robots, and they really work. He has created an app to feed and clean up after Cafecito, the family’s fancy and adorable Chihuahua; an app to pick up his toys; a monster detector app to look for monsters under his bed and even a nanorobot app to plant hair on bald heads. Clara’s dad really liked this one!... There are so many Jorge-Apps!

The children are very happy together. They laugh, sing and dance, and especially like jumping up and down on the trampoline. They visit the park, where Michelle has a special flowering jacaranda tree that she loves in all seasons and never tires of visiting. They sometimes have fights, but they can always work things out very quickly. They are like magnets: they want to be together.



The children visited an amazing fair with big rides and had a fabulous time. Michelle and Clara tried the fastest and splashiest ride, but Jorge was too small for that, so he quickly invented a special floating shoes app, to make himself look taller. He really enjoyed that ride in particular.

chapter 2

The children also imagine their own games. One game they always play together is called “superpowers”. Jorge and Clara imagine that Michelle has special powers that only they know about. Michelle can fly or see through walls, and she can hear conversations from very far. She uses these super powers to help Jorge and Clara to escape from trouble.

Sometimes it really does seem like Michelle has super powers! Like the time when she found the note Do on the piano, like magic, after the piano teacher sang the note to her... or the time when she suddenly sang perfectly in front of hundreds of people!

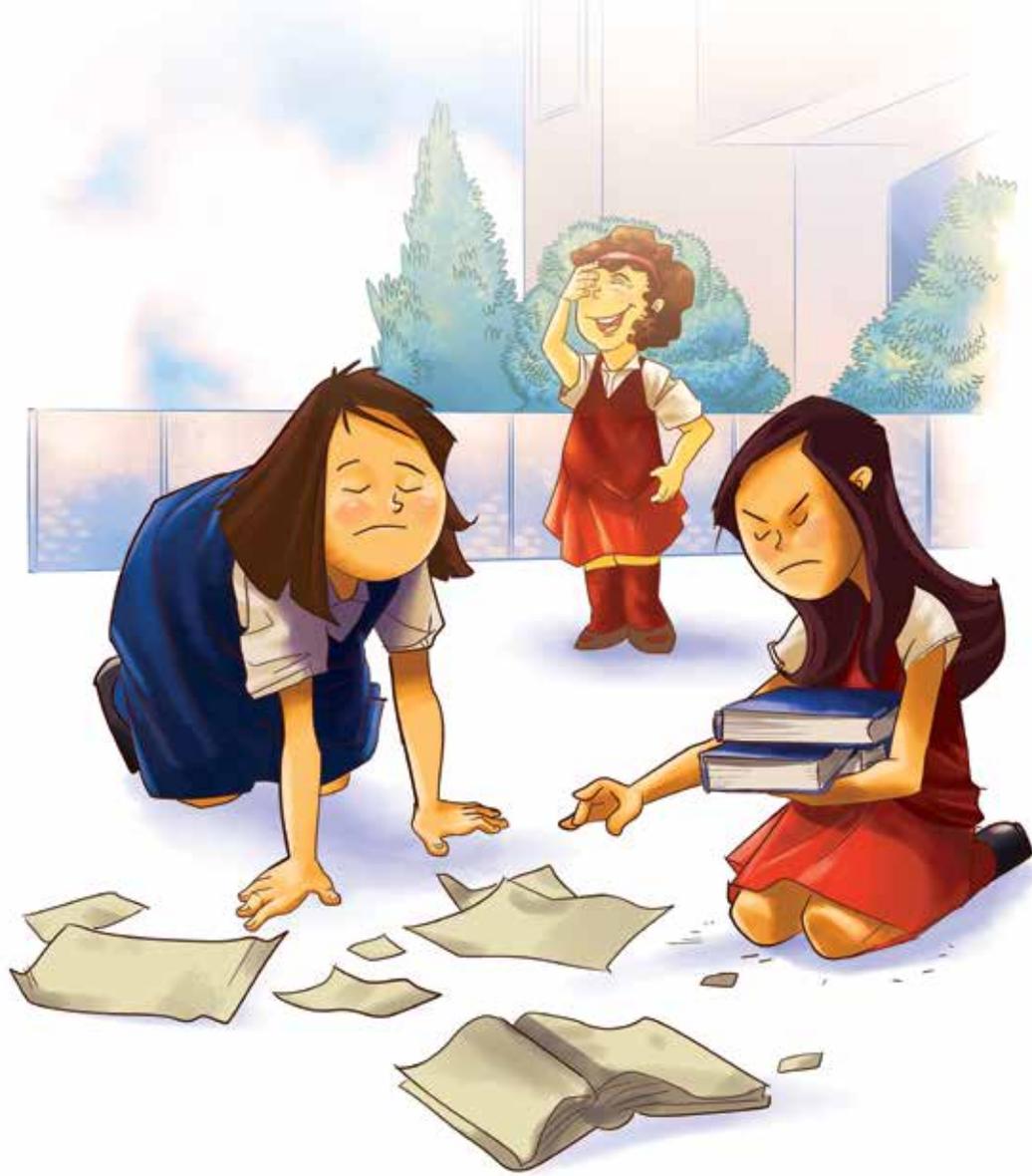




One day, the children's parents finally found a special school for Michelle. Clara was very excited because Michelle would be very happy there. But it did bother her. She did not understand why her sister Michelle could not be in the same school as Clara and Jorge. The three children should be together, in Clara's mind. It would be fantastic, she felt. She dreamt of it. There was something else that Clara found hard.



Every time they played with their neighbours, she noticed that they didn't want to play with Michelle. They didn't understand her. And worse, sometimes they even laughed at her. Clara wanted more people to understand Michelle, not only Jorge and her.



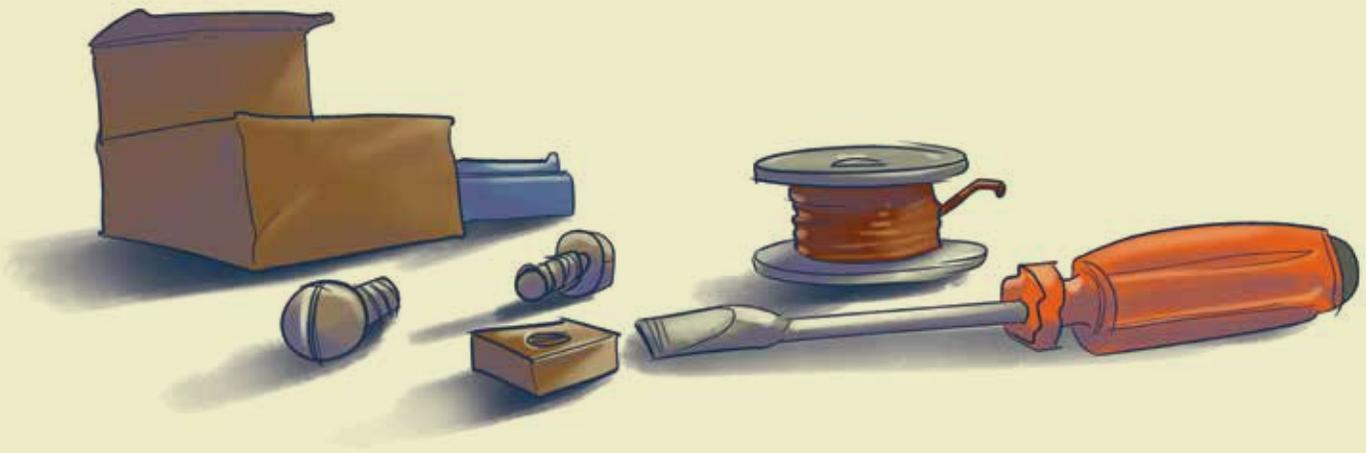
When Michelle came back after her first day of the special school, she seemed to be happy and relaxed. She was even proud as she carried her own folders and workbooks up the garden path. But suddenly... she tripped and fell down and dropped all her new schoolwork. Their neighbour Agatha laughed in a cruel way, adding, to the other children in the neighbourhood: “She’s so dumb!”

Clara was very upset. She thought to herself: “Why does she act like that with my sister? Why can’t people understand Michelle?”

In school, she had learned about the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child*. Clara knew that children with different abilities have the same rights as other children. It just seemed unfair that this was not happening for her sister. Clara could not sleep well that night. She tossed and turned in her bed, worrying and trying to find a solution. She thought and thought about it, and finally fell asleep.

chapter 3

The next morning, she saw Jorge experimenting with one of his crazy coding projects. He was working on a strange looking headset. She asked him: “What is that? And what are you doing?” Jorge answered: “It is a mind-connection app. It translates the electro-magnetic waves of the brain.” She laughed: “What a crazy idea!”





Her brother persuaded her to place it on her head. Suddenly, a strange robot-voice said: “I want pizza”. That was exactly the same thing that Clara had been thinking. She was thrilled. “It worked! And if the app worked with me...”, she thought, “it would work with Michelle!”

This was the solution! With a mind-connection app, all people would be able to hear what Michelle thinks and feels. They would be able to understand her.” Clara hugged Jorge and ran out of the room, leaving him looking a bit anxious.



When Michelle came back from school that day, Clara ran down the stairs to give the headset to her. She put the app on Michelle's head and suddenly a sweet voice said: "Hi, Clara!" She was very excited and started asking Michelle all the things she had always wanted to ask her. The sisters talked about their vacations together, about their birthday parties, and most of all, they talked about their feelings.

She learned so many special things about Michelle. She learned that her favourite colour was purple and her favourite food was pasta. She learned that when Michelle flaps her arms, it is because she is excited, and when she screeches her teeth, it means that she is tired and, when she hums, she is trying to say that she is hungry. It was all so interesting!



Suddenly, Clara had an idea. She could share the app with Michelle in front of the other kids! She could even organise a party to make new friends for Michelle. They would be able to hear her, and would immediately see that she was a very gentle and kind person.

It would be great! Clara decided to invite all the neighbourhood children and all their friends from school. They could finally understand Michelle! It was an excellent idea! That night Michelle and Clara dreamed happy dreams.

chapter 4



The next day, Clara woke up at 7am to prepare everything. She was terribly excited. Today was the party! It was Saturday, which was Michelle's favourite day, because on Saturdays the sisters always went to the park together. But Clara told herself that they could always go to the park some other day. Michelle would be happy at the party.

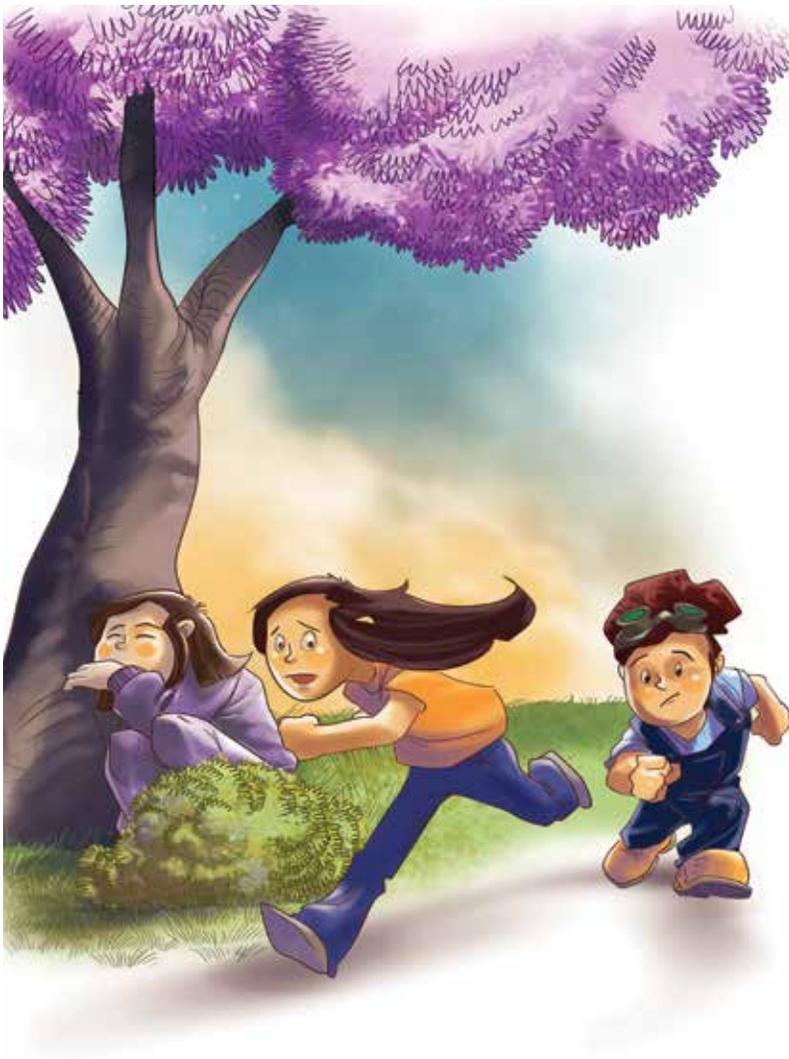
Clara decorated the house, prepared the music and the food. The decorations were purple, Michelle's favourite colour.

All their friends started coming in. Even Agatha, the neighbourhood bully, came. Just then, loud music started to play.



Michelle was the last one to arrive. She was wearing the mind-connection app headset. Clara was delighted to see her arrive. But in that moment, a strange voice from the headset said: “I need to escape from here. There’s too much noise and so many people. I want to go to the park like we always do. There is too much noise! Please get me out!” Michelle started to shout “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah” in a high, panicked voice.





Everybody was staring at her and some children were even laughing at her. Finally, Michelle opened the door and ran away so fast that her headset fell off. Clara and Jorge ran after her, but Michelle ran too fast and they could not find her. Luckily, the children's parents also searched. They found Michelle hiding in her special tree and took her carefully around the back entrance, to her room.

Clara looked down and saw the headset, lying broken on the garden path. She looked back and all the sisters' friends were still dancing happily inside the house. Then she ran to tell Jorge so that he could fix the headset. When she got to Jorge's laboratory, in their garage, he explained that the headset could not be repaired. A delicate wire which made it work had burned out. It was awful!



Clara went to her bedroom and stared at her fish bowl. She threw herself dramatically on the bed and started to cry. The mind-connection app was the solution, but it had failed. She felt like it was all her fault. She felt she had failed Michelle. Suddenly, someone opened the door. It was Michelle.

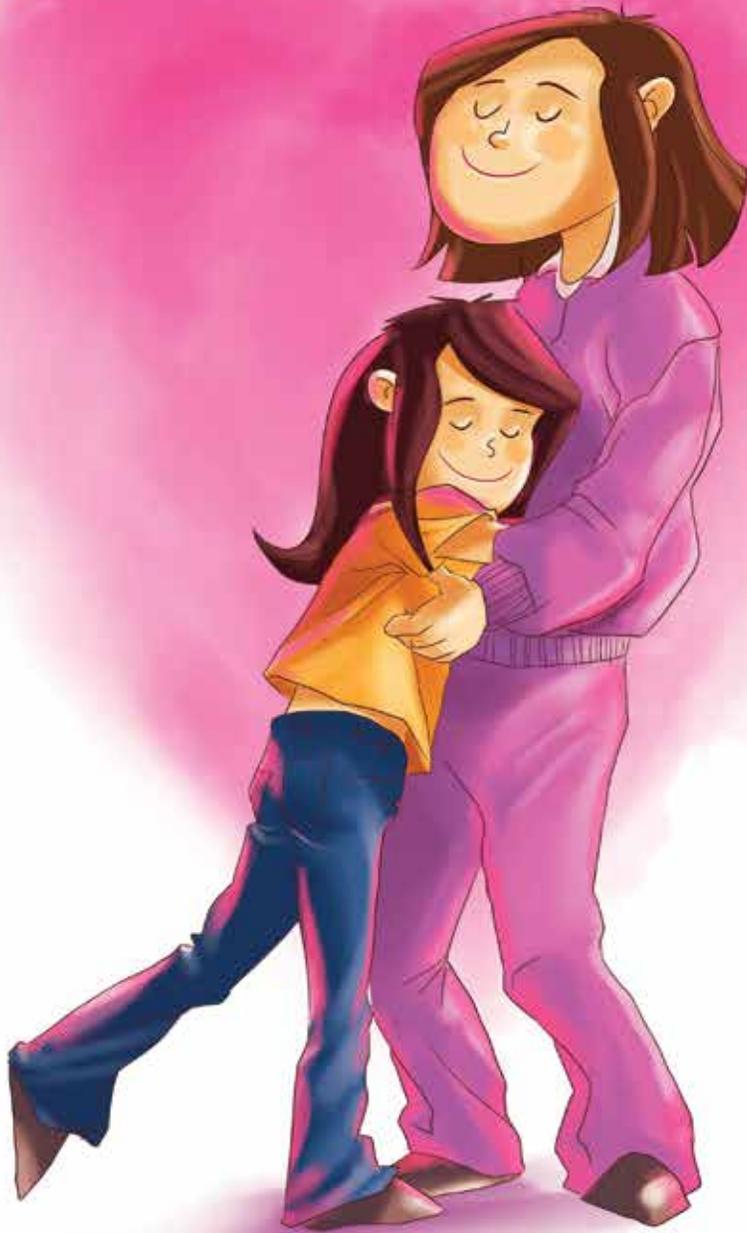


Clara hugged her sister and for a long time the two of them were hugging and crying. When Clara stopped crying, she thought for a moment. Michelle had come to console her. Michelle understood her. She felt it was all her fault, but realised, it was Michelle who came to give her the best loving hugs. Michelle was there when Clara needed to be comforted.



Michelle then started to flap her arms and Clara told her: “Yes, I know you are happy. I am happy too!” Clara realized that she already knew Michelle and that Michelle knew her too. They didn’t need a mind-connection app to understand each other, because they already knew each other!

It would not be easy, but they were sisters and they could stand up for each other and make things okay together. They would need to explain to the principal, to their parents, and to all the other adults. But that could be done.



They would use the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* to help them convince people. Anything could be done, when people were open and ready to understand each other.

chapter 5

Today, the alarm clock started to ring and everyone at the house woke up. The children were very excited because it was the first day of school again.





It was an even more special day because Michelle was starting at Clara's school. The school had agreed to integrate children with different abilities and Michelle was one of the first ones to join.



The sisters' dreams were beginning to come true. Michelle and Clara can go to the same school. Michelle still can't communicate as well as the other kids, but she can learn. The other children can learn too that each person has their own worth, and their own special gifts to bring. And together, the children could build a better future.

The End



about the author

Allison Hazel Liévano Gómez is a 9 year old from Mexico. Allison attends the Edron Academy in Mexico City where she is a top student. She particularly excels in literacy, maths and art. In her free time, she enjoys literature, singing and robotics. She is fluent in Spanish and English and has dual Mexican and American citizenship.

Allison is an avid reader and though she is a newly published author, she imagines and writes stories all the time. While her favourite author is Malala Yousafzai, she reads diverse authors and genres.

Allison's story, *The Sisters' Mind Connection*, is an imaginative tale that deals with inclusion of children with disabilities and is inspired in Allison's experience of growing up with her older sister Daniela, who has Down's Syndrome and Autism.

Drawing from her life experience, Allison is passionate about advocating for children with disabilities. Allison has supported others from a very early age: When she was 5 years old, her school recognized her support and advocacy for classmates with disabilities.

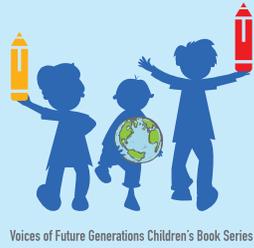
Allison thanks *Voices of Future Generations* for the award, which is giving her an exciting outlet and platform to further this passion. She also thanks key individuals who have personally encouraged her: Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, Emb. Jorge Montaña, permanent representative of Mexico at the United Nations, Marcela Orvañanos de Rovzar, President of the Consultative Board of UNICEF Mexico and Nuria Sanz, Representative of UNESCO in Mexico. Allison now intends to reach out and work with UNICEF, UNESCO and various NGOs on the challenges facing children in Mexico and Latin America. She hopes to use the knowledge she gains for future stories.

She thanks her parents and family, especially her 15 year old sister Daniela and her inventive 3 year old brother Gustavo (who inspired the character Jorge, the app creator). She also thanks her amazing teachers and, particularly Mr. Eamonn Mullally, Headmaster and Miss Avronne Edwards, her Year 3 English teacher, for recognizing her love of literacy and encouraging her to submit a story for this competition. She especially thanks Oscar Pinto for his vivid illustrations, which made her story come to life.



about the illustrator

Oscar Pinto studied Graphic Design in Mexico City but has always had a passion for illustration, which has taken him from museum illustration to illustrating comic books. His works includes covers for Valiant comics and co-creations of the comic book “Crimson” published by the DC Comics imprint “Cliffhanger”. In 2000, he co-wrote a Superman Annual set in Mexico. He thus became, along with F.G. Hagenbeck, one of the two Mexicans to first give words to DC Comic’s most iconic character. Currently, Oscar lives in Mexico City with his wife Almendra, daughter Anya and son Alek.



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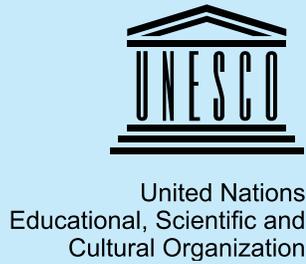
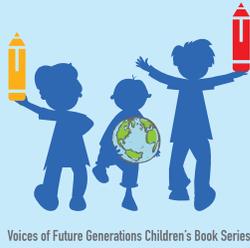
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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

All children are holders of important human rights. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, over a hundred countries agreed a UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the most important human rights treaty in history, they promised to protect and promote all children's equal rights, which are connected and equally important.

In the 54 Articles of the Convention, countries make solemn promises to defend children's needs and dreams. They recognize the role of children in realizing their rights, being heard and involved in decisions. Especially, Article 24 and Article 27 defend children's rights to safe drinking water, good food, a clean and safe environment, health, quality of life. And Article 29 recognizes children's rights to education that develops personality, talents and potential, respecting human rights and the natural environment.

— *Dr. Alexandra Wandel*
World Future Council



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The UN Sustainable Development Goals

At the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, governments and people came together to find pathways for a safer, more fair, and greener world for all. Everyone agreed to take new action to end poverty, stop environmental problems, and build bridges to a more just future. In 283 paragraphs of *The Future We Want* Declaration, countries committed to defend human rights, steward resources, fight climate change and pollution, protect animals, plants and biodiversity, and look after oceans, mountains, wetlands and other special places.

In the United Nations, countries are committing to 17 new Sustainable Development Goals for the whole world, with targets for real actions on the ground. Clubs, governments, firms, schools and children have started over a thousand partnerships, and mobilized billions, to deliver. The future we want exists in the hearts and minds of our generation, and in the hands of us all.

— Vuyelwa Kuuya
Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL)



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Thanks and Inspiring Resources

'Voices of Future Generations' International Commission

Warmest thanks to the International Commission, launched in 2014 by His Excellency Judge CG Weeramantry, UNESCO Peace Education Research Award Laureate, which supports, guides and profiles this new series of Children's Books Series, including Ms Alexandra Wandel (WFC), Dr Marie-Claire Cordonier Segger (CISDL), Dr Kristiann Allen (New Zealand), Ms Irina Bokova (UNESCO), Mr Karl Hansen (Trust for Sustainable Living), Ms Emma Hopkin (UK), Dr Ying-Shih Hsieh (EQPF), Dr Maria Leichner-Reynal (Uruguay), Ms Melinda Manuel (PNG), Ms Julia Marton-Lefevre (IUCN), Dr James Moody (Australia), Ms Anna Oposa (The Philippines), Professor Kirsten Sandberg (UN CRC Chair), Ms Patricia Chaves (UN DSD), Dr Marcel Szabo (Hungary), Dr Christina Voigt (Norway), Ms Gabrielle Sacconaghi-Bacon (Moore Foundation), Ms Marcela Orvañanos de Rovzar (UNICEF Mexico) and others.

The World Future Council consists of 50 eminent global changemakers from across the globe. Together, they work to pass on a healthy planet and just societies to our children and grandchildren. (www.worldfuturecouncil.org)

United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) which celebrates its 70th Anniversary throughout 2015, strives to build networks among nations that enable humanity's moral and intellectual solidarity by mobilizing for education, building intercultural understanding, pursuing scientific cooperation, and protecting freedom of expression. (en.unesco.org)

The **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its three Optional Protocols, by its State parties. (www.ohchr.org)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. (www.unep.org)

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) envisions a just world that values and conserves nature, working to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. (www.iucn.org)

Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL) supports understanding, development and implementation of law for sustainable development by leading legal research through scholarship and dialogue, and facilitating legal education through teaching and capacity-building. (www.cisd.org)

Trust for Sustainable Living and its Living Rainforest Centre exist to further the understanding of sustainable living in the United Kingdom and abroad through high-quality education. (www.livingrainforest.org)

Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF) established in 1984 is the premier ENGO in Taiwan. Implementing environmental education, tree plantation, and international participation through coordinating transdisciplinary resources to push forward environmental and sustainable development in our time.



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About the ‘Voices of Future Generations’ Series

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Voices of Future Generations Children’s Book Series, led by the United Nations and a consortium of educational charities including the World Future Council (WFC), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), the Environmental Quality Protection Foundation (EQPF), the Fundacion Ecos and the Trust for Sustainable Living (TSL) among others, also the Future Generations Commissioners of several countries, and international leaders from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and other international organizations, has launched the new Voices of Future Generations Series of Children’s Books.

Every year we feature stories from our selected group of child authors, inspired by the outcomes of the Earth Summit, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and the world’s Sustainable Development Goals, and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself. Our junior authors, ages 8-12, are concerned about future justice, poverty, the global environment, education and children’s rights. Accompanied by illustrations, each book profiles creative, interesting and adventurous ideas for creating a just and greener future, in the context of children’s interests and lives.

We aim to publish the books internationally in ten languages, raising the voices of future generations and spread their messages for a fair and sustainable tomorrow among their peers and adults, worldwide. We welcome you to join us in support of this inspiring partnership, at www.voicesoffuturegenerations.org.









It is an honour for me to endorse *The Sisters' Mind Connection*, authored by Allison Hazel, who, in a simple way, speaks of the rights of children. This story also raises the themes of communication, equal opportunities and, most importantly, inclusion and socialization.

Each chapter of this book shows us how everyone wishes to enjoy human rights, but also shows us that, despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals, discrimination can result where there is a lack of awareness. Allison points out the importance of understanding and accepting differences and that, many times, those who cannot communicate or express themselves in the same way as others still want to participate and have a voice.

While it is sad to know that differences of race, status, religion and nationality continue to cause conflict and violence in this world, it is reassuring to think they also enrich our societies and make us unique human beings. Indeed, accepting differences makes us more human and sensitive.

I appreciate very much the opportunity to share Allison's wonderful book and I invite you to enjoy it.

Sandra Jiménez Loza

*Member of UNICEF Mexico's consultative board,
Advocate of persons with disabilities*

The Edron Academy is very proud to commend Allison's story that is inspired by the unique needs of her sister and the inventive mind of her brother. As a Head Teacher, I am very proud to share in Allison's success and I hope that everybody who reads this story, and the others in the series, will be inspired by the warmth and the kindness of its author.

Eamonn Mullally

Head Teacher at the Edron Academy, Mexico City

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