

# Sharing Hope Through Hoops



**M**uji Vader likes to *do* things. Whether she's coaching kids in Uganda or Jamaica, or scoring points for her school's basketball team in Massachusetts, Muji believes in taking action—and she does it with passion.

After living in an orphanage in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she and her brother, Joey, were adopted by the Vader family in 2016. Muji was eight years old and Joey was seven. They embraced the Bahá'í Faith and began doing service projects with friends. In 2022, Muji joined a local basketball team and loved it. The next year, she and Joey started a service organization called “The Assist”—a basketball term for passing the ball to help a teammate score.\* They travel in the U.S. and internationally to set up basketball hoops, donate sports equipment, and teach basketball skills to other kids.

Now a senior at Minuteman Vocational High School, Muji studies culinary arts and excels in basketball, winning many awards. After graduation, she'll spend a year in Switzerland polishing her basketball skills at Ball Academy before going to college.

**Q: What was it like when you first came to the U.S.?**

A: It was exciting, but it was kind of a blur because I was a little overwhelmed . . . When we got to the airport [in Boston], all of my [new] family members were there . . . It was a lot, but now that I'm thinking back, it was really, really, really great.

**Q: When and where did you start playing basketball?**

A: My best friend in fifth grade, she was big into basketball . . . Her dad was a coach, and he said, “You'd be good at basketball.” I [thought], “Let me just try this out.” I've liked it ever since . . . Around age 13, I started [playing on] a rec team.



While coaching at a camp in Jamaica, Muji demonstrated the proper form for a free throw.

**Q: What do you love most about basketball?**

A: There's a lot to love about basketball . . . I did track before, and track is an individual sport. It might be easier in that you . . . can rely on yourself. But I really love the team aspect of basketball, of working together for one combined goal.

**Q: What advice would you give a kid who wants to join a team, but they're unsure of themselves?**

A: Have confidence, go for it, try your best, even if you're not good at the specific point [when] you want to try out. Coaches are always looking for people who are vocal, who cheer on other people, people who are uplifting the team. Just try your best, be aggressive, and really be vocal.



In 2024, Muji and her family visited Uganda, where Muji and Joey worked with the national team to host a basketball clinic for 150 kids.

**Q: What are some qualities of a good teammate?**

A: Patience, leadership, being able to communicate well . . . You have to be ready to [play] with people who are . . . just starting or [have] been playing the sport for so long. You have to be patient and mentor them if they need it. You have to be able to read the type of people that you're playing against. Patience for me is a huge, huge thing that I look for in teammates and I try to [give] to my teammates.

**Q: You and your brother do service projects together. How did that start?**

A: We were spending a lot of time dedicated to basketball . . . We didn't really have time to focus on our faith . . . I was talking to my mom and my brother, and we were like, "How can we take basketball, which [we] spend so much time doing, and incorporate some Bahá'í virtues into that?" So that's how The Assist started.

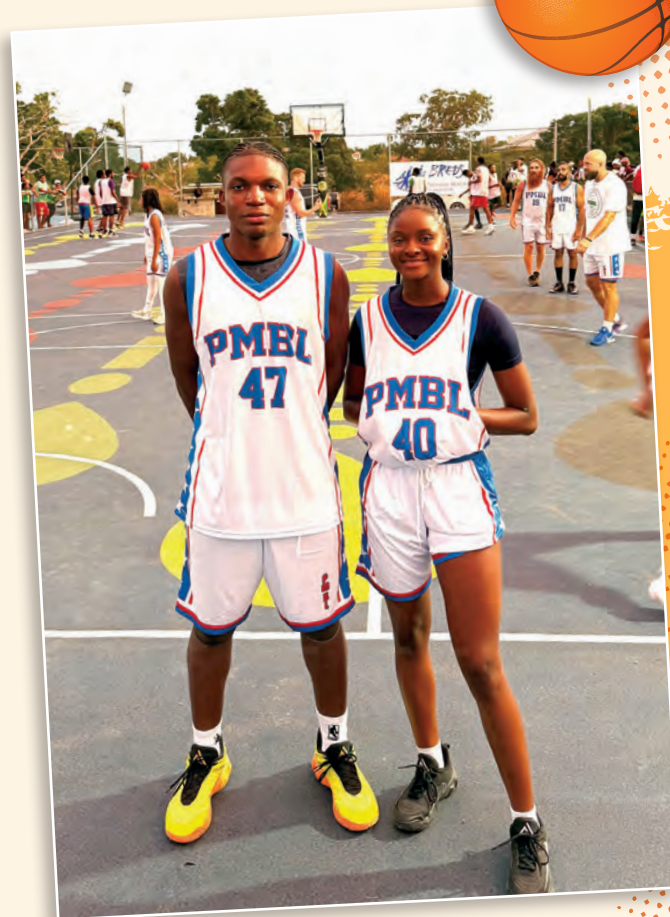
**Q: What spiritual qualities do you think you've gained or strengthened through your service?**

A: Gratitude is definitely the big one, because I started off in an orphanage . . . If I hadn't been adopted or introduced to the Bahá'í Faith, I wouldn't be where I am right now. So, I'm very thankful to God and the people around me and my faith, because I live by my faith. That's what defines me.

## How to Start Your Own Service Project

Service "doesn't have to be massive," says Muji. "Little service also counts. In the eyes of God, service is service." Try some of her tips:

- ☆ Start small, like helping your family with chores at home
- ☆ Help neighbors bring in groceries, rake leaves, or shovel snow
- ☆ Find out what other service is needed
- ☆ Use your interests and talents
- ☆ Ask a parent or other trusted adult to help
- ☆ Invite others to join you
- ☆ Work together to make a plan
- ☆ Let your team's passion shine!



In August 2025, Muji and her brother, Joey, went to Jamaica to coach hundreds of kids at a week-long basketball camp.