

GWLN Women Leaders for the World 2008

This document contains the stories of the Women Leaders for the World 2008 participants. They will come to us from Armenia, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Kenya, Nigeria (alternate), Senegal, Turkey, Uganda, and the United States,

Here are the amazing women with countries and projects (NOTE: You can go directly to their profile by clicking on the name. Return to this page by clicking in the lower left on the word "**RETURN**":

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**Hosnara (Baby)
Ahmed — Bangladesh**

**Improving the Socioeconomic Status of
Women in Rural Bangladesh**



Hosnara Ahmed is founding member of Social Advancement Through Unity (SATU), a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the socioeconomic status of poor women and children in the rural areas of Bangladesh. SATU aims to achieve its mission through institution building, empowerment, education, economic activities, sanitation, and environmental improvement through mobilization of local resources. Since its inception in 1991, SATU has organized more than 45,000 women members into some 2500 homogeneous groups to educate them about their rights, public health and environmental issues, and socioeconomic opportunities.

Hosnara's vision is to develop and strengthen her network of group leaders to extend and enhance SATU's reach. "As a development worker," she explains, "I have received training in Bangladesh and abroad, including Pakistan, Thailand, and the United States, and I have gathered knowledge that is being shared among our leaders and members through organized training at the grassroots level." Through her "train the trainers" program, Hosnara mobilizes group leaders to educate women about their rights against, for example, domestic violence, early marriage, and trafficking; to organize arbitration against abuses and illegal divorces; to improve women's health by reducing superstitions and educating women about reproductive health; to teach women how to take part in decision making in their families and communities; and to empower rural women by helping change their attitudes and behaviors.

Hosnara received a Bachelor's Degree in Law and Legislatives and a Master's Degree in History.

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**Sunisha Ahuja —
India**

**Breaking the Cycle of Poverty through
Reading and Literacy**



Early literacy programs help disadvantaged children gain access to education programs and socioeconomic opportunities. Room to Read, a nonprofit organization founded in 2000, partners with communities throughout the world to establish schools, libraries, and other educational infrastructure. The purpose is to intervene early in the lives of children in the belief that education is a lifelong gift that empowers people to ultimately improve socioeconomic conditions

for their families, communities, countries, and future generations.

Sunisha Ahuja is Country Director of Room to Read in India and has recently joined the Asia regional team as Program Director, where she will develop programs in six Asian countries. With her experience in education and child development, Sunisha knows that “Children provided with an enriched learning environment can overcome many challenges.” She continues: “At Room to Read, we strive to break the cycle of poverty one child at a time.”

Sunisha’s vision is to set up local resource centers or “Reading Cells” as part of the Room to Read program in select countries. As she explains, “These centers will be the knowledge resource to each country office in designing programs to address country-specific, locally relevant issues of quality of education, especially girls’ education.”

Sunisha holds a postgraduate degree in Child Development.

Thank you – Ahuja has been funded!

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**Svetlana Aslanyan –
Armenia**

**Promoting the Civil Rights of Armenian
Women**



In Armenia the transition from Soviet rule to Armenian independence has negatively impacted the socioeconomic status of women. Those who held leadership positions under the Soviet quota system have been dismissed. At the same time, the democratic movement in Armenia has presented all women with opportunities to participate more fully in all sectors of society.

During Soviet times, as a scholar and dissident, Svetlana Aslanyan focused mainly on her education and professional life. But, as she explains, “*Perestroika* changed my attitude toward life. I became one of the active participants in the democratic movement. After the declaration of independence, I realized that as an educated person I must contribute to society.” She was also profoundly affected by the Fourth Women’s Congress in Beijing and the women she met there. She returned home determined to devote her life to “the struggle for women’s rights in Armenia.”

During *Perestroika*, Svetlana founded the Center for the Development of Civil Society (CDCS) where she serves as President. Its mission is to promote ideas about democracy, civil society, women’s rights, and diversity. A basic long-term goal is to protect women’s rights, increase the role of women in public life, and foster civil society through the civic education of women. Svetlana’s vision is to create a Political Academy for Women within the CDCS. She sees the Academy as “a nationwide educational resource and training center designed to help women, especially in rural communities, to successfully integrate into the new political environment and participate in the decision-making process at local and national levels.” Through the Academy, CDCS will promote women’s leadership and encourage their participation in the political process.

Svetlana is also the founding member of the Armenian Rural Women’s NGO Network and founding member and Foreign Relations Coordinator of the Trans Caucasus Women’s Dialog. She holds a Ph.D. in linguistics. Her publications include two monographs, six dictionaries, two readers, a textbook, and a series of scientific articles.

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Charity Binka — Ghana

Empowering Women through Global Media and Information Communication Technology (ICT)



Women in Ghana have limited opportunities for advancement and leadership. Through education and increased communication, they can gain the skills and awareness to become more knowledgeable, effective, and empowered in their society.

Charity Binka's vision is to establish a training and resource center of interactive and collaborative technologies (ICT), where women and girls can learn computer skills to communicate nationally and globally, enhance learning and research, and discover employment opportunities or market opportunities for their existing businesses. As Charity explains, "Having ICT skills is a necessity for women to be effective. I am passionate about an

ICT project that targets women and girls as key to unlocking their potential and empowering them as leaders."

As a practicing journalist for nearly 30 years, Charity has devoted herself to promoting women's issues and putting them on the national agenda, first as a journalist for the *Nigerian Tribune* and the *Sunday Tribune*, later as Chief Editor and head of the Women's Desk of the Radio News Division of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and as Coordinator of the Ghana Team of Virtual Newsroom Project linking 80 African countries to produce a monthly web-based newspaper entitled *Africawoman*, and most recently as Co-founder and Executive Director of WOMEC (Women, Media and Change), an organization committed to giving women public voice and visibility through the effective use of ICT and mass media.

Charity holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration, a Master's Degree in Gender and Development, and a Graduate Diploma in Communications Studies.

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**Katherine
Daniels
USA**

Effecting Global Change through Women's Media



When Kate Daniels began working for a prominent online news publication in 2005, she discovered the same under-representation of women's voices that she had experienced in the print world. "Not only were women's bylines hard to come by," she says, "but equally sparse were women experts contributing to the conversations that mattered most to me."

On International Women's Day in March 2007, Kate launched The Women's International Perspective (WIP), a comprehensive news website of 50 women contributors from more than 20 countries that reports world news, opinions, and commentary. Within six months of launch, the site had more than 45,000 page views from readers in 117 countries. WIP's mission, as Kate explains, is "to provide quality news from the unique perspectives of women, accessible worldwide and free to our readers. Through the promotion and publication of women's perspectives, WIP fosters dialogue and brings divergent cultures, opinions, and ideas together."

Kate's personal and professional experiences laid the groundwork for WIP. In addition to her undergraduate and graduate work in the US, she studied in Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Nicaragua, and she taught students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. "In my lifetime," Kate says, "I have learned that the diversity of thought and opinion that exists all over the world must be heard in order to find peaceful solutions to the issues we face. I found that personal stories can have a great impact on our understanding of cultures and countries." This perspective is reflected in WIP's approach to journalism, which Kate describes as "more personal than mainstream media by drawing on individual experience in its analysis and reporting." Through WLW, Kate's vision is to expand her global network and community: "I am cultivating a community of men and women whose conversations and dialogue can effect the change our leaders have failed to achieve."

Kate holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Communication and a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics.

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**Sosena Demissie –
Ethiopia**

Building Youth Hostels as a Portal to Education and Training to Improve Women’s Health and Livelihood



In rural Ethiopia, girls must leave home and move to nearby towns to attend high school. Most of the girls rent rooms with friends. Their gender and status often make them vulnerable to different types of violence, forcing them to return home and end their education. In the worst cases, because of economic problems and lack of counseling, they experience prostitution and unwanted pregnancies.

To provide a safe and supportive environment where girls can pursue their education and training, Sosena

Demissie envisions low-cost hostels that can be run by local women’s associations in these rural towns. The hostels can also provide counseling services for health and reproductive issues, including HIV/AIDS, as well as income-generating activities to help pay the girls’ expenses while they are there and to help prepare them for employment when their education is complete. Sosena has no doubt that providing such services in a safe, supportive environment “will change the girls forever by enabling them to continue their education and empowering them to attain better lives.”

Sosena speaks from experience. She has served as a board member of the YWCA of Ethiopia, which strives “to improve the status of women and girls through skills and leadership training, promoting income-generating activities, and advocating for the fundamental freedom and rights of women.” In addition, she spearheaded establishment of the Goh Library and Information Center, where women and girls can read and study. Sosena also consults with rural communities about appropriate programs for their children.

Sosena received a Master’s Degree in Development Studies and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Economics.

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**Ann Endress
US**

Developing Children as Global Leaders



Ann Endress is the new California Office Manager and Development Coordinator for Free The Children's first United States office opening in San Francisco this summer. She is committed to establishing and growing the organization to impact thousands of youth in North America and around the world.

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight..."

"In a world where babies die from hunger and preventable disease and girls in poor countries miss out on schooling or succumb to trafficking schemes, the above childhood chant, evoking wishes and dreams for an abundant future, is not sung enough."

"Through the establishment of a Free The Children United States office, I envision many North American youth participating in leadership training workshops, international service trips, and Youth In Action school clubs. These agents of change organize awareness and fundraising campaigns about global issues. They inspire action and giving, resulting in holistic development projects impacting their peers overseas. Their passion, enthusiasm and commitment to social justice shine while powerful decision-makers – both women and men - find innovative, equitable solutions to world problems."

"All this while empowering a new generation of idealistic and energetic leaders and dreamers – who sing loudly and often!"

Ann Endress has a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) in International Management from the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Ann has focused on work related to the safeguarding of children's rights. Recently she returned from serving in Togo, West Africa as a Girls' Education & Empowerment Agent where she interned with CARE International Togo, supporting the monitoring and evaluation activities of their prevention of child trafficking program, and World Education, a USAID contractor, charged with the implementation of the West Africa Region Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program.

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**Carrie Ellett
USA**

Empowering Young Women as Agents of Change



Young women play a critical role in shaping their communities. In large urban areas as well as small villages around the world, young women can be decision makers and create social change.

Carrie Ellett is National Program Director of Girls for A Change (GFC) whose mission is to empower young women to create social change in their own communities. In partnership with adult women mentors, teenage girls identify a social issue about which they are passionate and then design, lead, and implement a social change project that tackles that issue. “The vision of GFC,” Carrie says, “is for young women, in partnership with adult women, to realize their voice, ability, and

problem-solving capacity as they create social change in their communities and their own lives. We serve all girls, and most of our Girl Action Teams are in low-income communities.”

Before joining GFC, Carrie was a sports writer, a team leader with AmeriCorps, and a program manager for the Girl Scouts. While working at the Girl Scouts, Carrie had a revelation. “I realized that I had been struggling with the issue of gender equality for a long time. I had challenges every day working as a sports writer that included my opinion being discounted ‘because you are a girl.’ In that period of reflection, I thought about other times in my life, as far back as when I was five years old, when people assumed that I had a certain role as a female, ranging from working at a construction site, to having chores that were much different from my brother’s.” GFC gives her the opportunity to help create a world where “young women can shine in every aspect of their lives and not be discounted simply because of their gender.”

Carrie’s vision is to develop pilot plans for GFC’s expansion into several communities nationally and internationally, to determine whether the GFC model can incorporate the culture and social assets of those communities. Because culture has such a strong impact on girls and women, GFC must ensure that its model can be adapted successfully worldwide.

Carrie holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism with emphasis in Political Science. She has had significant training in coaching, leadership, conflict resolution, disaster relief, and diversity.

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**Gloriana
Guillen
USA**

**Empowering poor women entrepreneurs as
agents of change**



The organization Pro Mujer provides Latin America's poorest women with the means to build livelihoods for themselves and futures for their families and communities through microfinance, business training, and healthcare support.

Gloriana Guillen, a native Costa Rican and the Communications and Marketing Manager of Pro Mujer, has seen firsthand the many women of Pro Mujer who have experienced

“a journey of self-discovery and empowerment, becoming leaders in their communities and providers of an important source of income (often the sole one) for their families.” These women “work hard to better themselves and provide their children with opportunities they never had.”

Through marketing, public relations, and fund-raising activities, Gloriana helps to explain and demonstrate Pro Mujer's profound impact on the lives of poor women and families in Latin America. Her vision is a breakthrough project for Pro Mujer and the micro-finance industry--a video series called “My Mother is a Changemaker.” The series will feature stories where daughters describe how their entrepreneurial mothers have inspired them to become owners of their destiny. As Gloriana explains, “These amazing stories of poor, entrepreneurial women have never been presented from the perspective of their own families. These women are role models and a source of inspiration and hope for their daughters and other women.”

Gloriana is a Fulbright Scholar and a Fellow of the Americas Project. She holds a Master's Degree in Management of Nonprofits and a Master's Degree in Film and Electronic Media.

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Marie Agathe Jean-Baptiste Haiti

Empowering Women by Improving Health Care



After her medical studies in Cuba, Dr. Agathe Jean-Baptiste returned to the Haitian village where she was born and established a Primary Health Care Program within the Peasant Movement of Papay (MPP). The oldest and largest peasant organization in Haiti, MPP addresses various personal and public health issues in peasant communities.

As a clinician, Agathe treats patients in the community and also ensures referral from the community to the

district hospital. As a health educator and advocate, she coordinates a training program for health promoters and traditional birth attendants who teach women about reproductive health and family planning and who provide primary care in their peasant communities.

Agathe's vision is to give Haitian peasants a voice in the healthcare movement. As she explains, "I want to advocate for health policy at the regional and national levels that favors the rural communities in Haiti." She is especially interested in promoting women's health because of the central role of women in their families and communities: "I believe that informed and healthy women have the power to change their lives and their communities."

Agathe is a medical doctor and is finishing a Master's Degree in Global Public Health at the University of Washington in Seattle. She is advisor for the Global Fund for Women helping shape strategies in Haiti and in the Caribbean overall.

Thank You - Agathe has been funded!

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**Jacqueline
Mwaba — Kenya**

**Empowering Women through Literacy,
Micro- Finance, and Micro-Enterprise**



Poor women in communities around the world have traditionally been excluded from opportunities for personal and professional development. Working with international and local organizations, Jacqueline Mwaba led the implementation of the WORTH Program in Zambia, built on literacy and financial literacy, micro-finance, and micro-enterprise. More than 5,000 poor rural and urban women in Zambia have been enabled to earn incomes for their families and improve the quality and sustainability of community life.

Jackie's vision is to implement the WORTH Program in many other developing countries. As she explains, "Poor women are able to earn or raise their incomes while learning how to read and write. When women are empowered economically, they gain the respect of their families and their communities. They also gain the courage to protect themselves from social factors that put them at risk of disease, such as HIV/AIDS." Expanding outward, Jackie adds, "Empowered women build empowered communities, effective governments, and responsible private institutions that give all people an opportunity for a better life."

Jackie is currently Programs, Operations, and New Business Development Advisor of the WORTH Global Support Unit in Nairobi, Kenya. WORTH is a program of Pact, a US-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to help build strong communities globally that provide people with an opportunity to earn a dignified living, raise healthy families, and participate in democratic life. Pact achieves this by strengthening the capacity of grassroots organizations, coalitions, and networks, and by forging linkages among government, business, and citizen sectors to achieve social, economic, and environmental justice.

Jackie earned a Master's Degree in Education.

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**Rosemary Nakijoba —
Uganda**

Empowering Women and Combating AIDS through Transformational Training



As Program Deputy Director for Kitovu Mobile Aids Home Care Counseling and Orphans Program for eight years, Rosemary Nakijoba observed firsthand the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on women and children and the positive impact of counseling and treatment services. Witnessing the extreme conditions of the Internally Displaced People's Camp in her village, set up for people fleeing from rebel violence, Rosemary founded the Tii Ki Komi Women's Project in 2002 to focus on women with HIV/AIDS. The project, "a baby I am nurturing . . . trains and empowers women to do income-generating activities to reduce poverty and disease, advocates for their rights, counsels those suffering from HIV/AIDS and refers them to treatment centers, and supports the education of orphans and vulnerable children."

Rosemary's vision is to create a social transformation training center that will empower women to design training programs and advocacy strategies to alleviate poverty and reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on their communities. The center will also create a network of women who can expand its mission into neighboring counties. Above all, as Rosemary explains, the center will transform the women: "Many women are marginalized and exploited, and their mindset is that they are meant to be poor and dependent. This mindset creates poverty, the ultimate expression of human rights abuse. To undo it, we must construct a different mindset and become agents of change."

Rosemary is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Developmental Studies and is certified in counseling, transformation training, advocacy, project planning and management, strategic planning and fundraising, and HIV/AIDS Communication Technology (ICT). She has participated in and presented papers at many HIV/AIDS conferences throughout Africa and has exhibited her organization's work at the HIV/AIDS Conference in Toronto.

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Awa Ndiaye — Senegal

Using Micro-Finance to Reduce Poverty and Conserve Nature



As Micro-Finance Project Officer for the World Wildlife Fund WAMER, Awa Ndiaye is working with stakeholders in her community to reduce poverty while conserving the environment. For example, through micro-financing, Awa has helped 600 fisherman turn to other income-generating activities such as gardening, animal breeding, and trade, at the same time enabling depleted fish populations to recover.

Awa's vision is to build a future where people can earn livelihoods while living in harmony with nature. She also wants to increase the capacity of women to participate in community life and decision making. Awa has established two credit unions with more than 1200 members. In west Senegal, 98 percent of the women hold responsible positions in the cooperative union. In Cayar, 40 percent of the women are decision makers in the union. "My challenge," she says, "is to have stakeholders in my community link up conservation strategies and activities with effective poverty reduction and build the capacity of women in financial management."

Awa holds a degree in Agricultural Engineering, a Master's Degree in Econometric Statistics, and certificates in Economic Tools for Conservation and in Climate Change.

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**Sizani Ngubane —
South Africa**

**Securing the Legal Rights for Women
to Own and Control Property**



Poor women in South Africa are discriminated against on the basis of gender and economic status. One of the most difficult forms of discrimination for women, children, and communities is the eviction of widows and single mothers from their homes by their male relatives.

Sizani Ngubane's vision is to secure women's property rights through enforcement of existing laws and creation of new and stronger legislation and policies. "I want to actively engage local women to tell their experiences and speak to their needs, and how they believe these needs and concerns could be met by the government. I want to address situations where the law can be applied to secure restitution and, where it

cannot, to advocate for new legislation that will secure their land and property rights."

For the past 40 years, Sizani has been working with grassroots women's organizations. She is Founder and Director of the Rural Women's Movement (RWM), which now works with 500 community-based organizations with a membership of about 50,000 women in South Africa. Through RWM she will conduct case studies of evicted women and determine how restitution can be achieved through existing laws or the passage of new legislation to correct weaknesses in existing laws. In the process, Sizani will educate women and communities about the property rights of South African women.

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**Olanike Olugboji –
Nigeria**

**Empowering Women through
Environmental Management**

Olanike Olugboji believes there is a strong connection between empowering women and sustaining the environment. She is Founder and Executive Director of the Environmental Management and Protection Network (EMPRONET) whose mission is to promote constructive environmental practices aimed towards environmental sustainability. During her travels in Nigeria as an environmental consultant, educator, and advocate, Olanike recognized “the potential for women to improve their social, economic, and political status through developing and managing natural resources.” Her vision is “to establish a Women’s Resource Center where impoverished women can learn skills and develop opportunities in environmental management and protection.”

This summer, Olanike will attend the African Women and Water Conference, endorsed and hosted by Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Wangari Maathai. “Along with thirty other selected African women leaders, I will learn the skills and technology to launch a water service project in my community.” Every woman will leave this training with a “toolkit” of skills, technologies, expertise, and seed money to start her own water service project. Olanike says she will also return home with a model for broader training in natural resource management and her Women’s Resource Center.

Olanike received a Master’s Degree in Urban and Regional Planning.

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**Janet Oncel
USA**

Empowering Turkish Women through Mentoring Opportunities in the US



Janet Oncel's vision is to provide Turkish professional women the opportunity to travel to the San Francisco Bay Area to observe firsthand how women are empowered to achieve positions of management and leadership in all sectors of American society. "This experience," she says, "will be a step in accelerating their empowerment. Meeting other professional women in a mentorship program will enable them to ignite their own realities and

success when they return home."

Growing up in San Francisco in the 1960s shaped Jan's view of women's leadership and empowerment. She explains, "This was always my filter. I remember clearly the issues of sexual discrimination and equal pay for women as issues for me and my friends. I'm thankful for women leaders who paved the way for me, and I want to give back and make a contribution to women, especially Turkish women." Jan has worked for more than 25 years in the Market Research Industry, at Gartner Group and IDC, and now at Forrester Research, where she is Senior Account Manager. Over the years, she has been active in many organizations in the Turkish-American community here, including TAFF (Turkish American Alliance for Fairness) and TAAC (Turkish American Association of California), as well as Bay Area chapters of national women's organizations, including WITI (Women in Technology), NOW (National Organization of Women), and the Giving Circle.

With her strong networks and leadership skills, Jan is ready to make her vision a reality. "I want to impact the lives of women in Turkey. My dream is that they will believe in themselves, live up to their potential, and understand that they can do anything they want if they put their minds to it."

Jan holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration.

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**Dilek Percin —
Turkey**

Empowering Women and Improving Communities through Cultural Centers



After the 1999 earthquake devastated the Turkish town of Golcuk, community leaders noticed that post-traumatic stress disorder caused citizens, especially women, to withdraw from social life.

With aid money and the leadership of Dilek Percin, Golcuk built an Art and Cultural Center to draw people out of their homes and engage them in social life again. As Dilek explains, “The Center provides art courses, a library with computers, a speaker series, an Art Café where people can also play chess and meet local artists, and a weekly Art Bazaar where people can sell their handmade goods. Through these activities, our Center helps our citizens through their grief and gives them opportunities to function in society again.”

As Director of the Golcuk Art and Cultural Center, Dilek sees “how the lack of women’s participation in society negatively affects the community and how initial efforts at the Center are positively impacting women and families.” She goes on to explain that “It is only when women are visible in the public arena that they stand a chance of being elected as leaders as well as recognized as decision makers at all levels.” Dilek’s vision also expands beyond Golcuk. “Not only do I want to increase the opportunities to support women in my community, but since this Center is a first in Turkey, I am working to create a model that can be implemented in other towns throughout our country and the world.”

Dilek holds Master’s Degrees in Business Administration and Interior Design.

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**Kim Plewes
Canada**

**Inspiring California Youth to Action on
Global Issues**



“I see a shift happening in the minds of young Californians. Many are looking beyond the material items that line fill their rooms to service for a source of happiness. Yet, when they look into the world of global issues, it is easy for many to become overwhelmed and hopeless.”

After learning about child labor, at age 12, Kim Plewes started to volunteer. “I didn’t know what to do, but I knew that I needed to help stop this horrible exploitation.” She found Free The Children and has volunteered in Nicaragua, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Cambodia and Thailand, helping to build schools and homes and teach English. Now she wants to bring Free The Children to the youth of California.

Kim has worked as a key leader within Free The Children since 1998. As Senior International Youth Coordinator, she has dedicated herself to inspiring, empowering and supporting children both locally, in Canada, and globally. She is now becoming the California Youth Coordinator for Free The Children’s first office in the United States, in San Francisco.

“I hope to create programming opportunities for young people who have a passion to change the world in our new California office. The space would allow young people to come together and learn about children’s rights and about development projects around the world. We can reach out into schools, Boys and Girls Clubs and other community groups, providing vital opportunities for youth to take action through fundraising and awareness raising events. By connecting young people directly to these issues, we will allow hundreds of young people throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America receive a free primary education, sometimes for the very first time...I am ready to take this leap.”

Kim represented Free The Children at the 2006 World Children’s Prize ceremony and speaking tour in Sweden, and at the Power of Youth for Peace conference, held in Egypt for 600 participants from more than 100 countries in 2007. She coordinated Free The Children’s Life in Action program for elementary school children across Canada developing curricula and bringing more than 40 schools on board. She inspired more than 20,000 young people with motivational speeches about active living, healthy eating and social responsibility

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**Suchitra Rao –
India**

Transforming Young Women’s Lives through Education and Girls Collectives

In the State of Karnataka particularly in Bangalore there is great opportunity for However, this opportunity is restricted to the educated and affluent excluding the marginalized, non-literate and rural and urban poor. The young, especially girls, in both rural and urban areas have very minimal access and opportunities to education, vocation and above all choices and power for decision making. Familial, economic and social pressures push these children into early adulthood as laborers, sex workers, as wives and mothers owing to early marriage, with their dreams and aspirations thwarted. Many are also subjected to various forms of violence and abuse.

Suchitra Rao, is a liaison with the key departments of the State Government, UNICEF Regional Office and Civil Society Organizations on issues of child protection for impacting policy on child labor, education, and the Juvenile Justice System.

Suchitra’s vision is to develop youth collectives, especially for girls, which would provide them the hitherto absent platform for right information and knowledge, sharing and peer support. “Youth have also been powerful force for change as my work with girl’s collectives has proved. Leadership of young girls can prevent child marriages, get the government attention on issues affecting them like corporal punishment in schools, child labor, lack of water and toilets in schools making secondary education inaccessible for girls. Confident and ‘aware and knowledgeable’ young girls...will definitely grow up to be assertive women with self respect all, work with youth will gradually impact a balanced perception of people – gender sensitivity and rights of all.”

“Striving to impact policies and focused services by the government on one hand and attitudinal change of community, family and youngsters on the other is the challenge I wish to take up.”

Suchitra has a Masters Degree in Social Work.

Thank you – Suchitra has been funded!

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**Venkata Sandhya
Puchalapalli — India**

Improving the Status of Girls and Women in India



In India, women have no status in society. Countless girls are killed before and after birth, and millions of girls are abandoned. These abandoned children are often placed in servitude and abused. Girls as young as five years of age are sent to work as servants, married at the age of fourteen, and tortured by their in-laws.

In 1992 Sandhya Puchalapalli founded Vijay Foundation Trust (Vijay is Success in Sanskrit) with, as she explains, “the modest aim to take care of a few abandoned girls, very much like my own two daughters, and give them love, care, and all the opportunities my daughters had.” She opened the doors of Aarti Home to five children. Today the number has grown to 82 children ranging from one year to 20 years of age. “The children are an extremely secure and happy lot,” she reports, “and the older ones are preparing for successful careers in engineering, medicine, commerce, and other fields.”

Over the years, working with destitute children brought Sandhya in close contact with women, as she describes, “helpless women abandoning female children because of family pressures, destitute women with no social status abandoning children at birth, unhealthy women lacking the means to support their children and leaving them as servants or worse, open to abuse.” She realized that where women are dependent, unhealthy, and incapable, children will be forsaken and abused. In 2002, Sandhya started a full-fledged support center for women, as part of Aarti Home, to provide access to information, infrastructure, healthcare, and training in order to provide opportunities for empowerment and independence. In 2007, she started a school at Aarti Home to educate young girls.

Since 1992, Aarti Home has impacted more than 25,000 women and children. Sandhya’s vision is “to educate and train many more girls and women and make them financially and socially independent and respected. My aim is a society where no child is abandoned simply because she’s unwanted.”

Sandhya holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Food and Nutrition, Textile Design, Sociology, and Child Psychology, and a Master’s Degree in English.

Thank you – Sandhya has been funded!

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Bedy Yang
USA

Creating Income and Preserving Environment in Brazil



Growing up in Brazil, Bedy Yang observed the challenges that poverty creates for environmental and cultural sustainability. As she explains, “The pressure on poor countries such as Brazil to industrialize has pushed toward devastation of the environment. Impoverished communities have been pushed to exploit the resources around them and to abandon their unique culture in search of survival in the cities, causing nature’s destruction and cultural annihilation, with little improvement in social inequality.”

After graduating from business school in South America, Bedy worked for major corporations as an employee as well as a consultant. After traveling through countries in Latin America, East Asia, and Africa, she “realized that the problems of poverty and environmental sustainability are widespread” and that she “wanted to be part of the solution, starting with Brazil.”

Bedy’s vision is to create a reliable source of income for impoverished communities that are working in a green and sustainable manner. She wants “to create a long-term model to enhance Brazil’s diverse nature and culture, and break the cycle of poverty and environmental destruction.” As co-owner of *bazaarbrazil*, a retail business in San Francisco, California, Bedy sells fair-traded and unique products from the indigenous peoples of Brazil. *Bazaarbrazil* has been acclaimed by clients and the media, including *San Francisco Magazine’s Best of the Bay Area 2007* edition, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and ABC’s *View from the Bay*. For Bedy, *bazaarbrazil* is just the beginning of a scalable model to benefit even more communities in Brazil and beyond.

Bedy holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration and a Master’s Degree in East Asian Studies.

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