

Empower

Inspiring people to experience the power of their dreams



*Residents of Nyumbani Children's Home, Kenya
(Photo Credit: Gaby Grebski)*

Did You Know?

Pessimists versus Optimists

- How one explains events to oneself determines if one is a pessimist or an optimist. A pessimist believes that a bad event will last forever (is permanent), it will undermine every aspect of life (is pervasive), and it is one's own fault (is personal). An optimist, on the contrary, believes that a bad event is going to go away quickly (is temporary), it just happened in that one instance (is specific), and it was not one's fault but rather was bad luck (is external).
- The consequence of a preoccupation with one's own self and the lack of commitment to others is increased unhappiness, poor health, and a life without meaning. If one engages in an activity in the service of others long enough, it will gain meaning for one. The emptiness and meaninglessness that rampant individualism nurtures will begin to fill. The choice is ours.

From: "Learned Optimism," Martin Seligman, Vintage Books, 2006.

Dear Friends,

Sir Winston Churchill once said:

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

What if everyone, all over the world, could be transformed into optimists who believed in their own power to solve social problems and who could set themselves up for just that task? This is exactly what a contributor to this issue, Mr. Bill Drayton of Ashoka, aims to achieve through his "Everyone A Changemaker" initiative. I hope you will be as inspired by his interview as I was.

Other contributors to this issue also describe enriching experiences that benefited not only those whom they served, but that also brought more meaning to their own lives. When I asked them if they would do it again, their answers were a loud and unanimous "Yes!" Robert Ingersoll captured the link between giving and gaining quite nicely when he said:

"Happiness is the only good. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so."

Enjoy *Empower!*

Lara Mitra
Editor, *Empower*

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Tutoring Program: An Interview with Sidwell Friends Student, Antonia Hitchens



Antonia with Mazia

Lara: What inspired you to start the tutoring club?

Antonia: We had the idea of starting a tutoring program at the end of freshman year. I think there was a collective feeling that both Sidwell students and the communities we worked with would benefit from a local and ongoing project. As we thought about what we wanted to do for our community service requirements in the coming years, one of the issues that jumped out at us was the public school system in DC: we were both lucky enough to be at Sidwell, but there were thousands of kids who weren't having nearly as valuable an experience as were, and this was something that we wanted our program to contribute to. We knew that no matter what, there was always going to be a great amount of need for learning support to young kids, whether or not their school system was failing. Also, if you work with young children you not only teach them reading and school subjects, they also learn from the example you set, and can in turn strive to succeed which would influence many other aspects of their lives. Regardless of whether or not they were "underprivileged," we thought that a tutoring program would be something very beneficial to the kids from DC public schools. Sidwell has the resources and the desire to help other people, and Kidpower DC liked the idea of partnering with Sidwell to start a tutoring program with the kids in their afterschool program, so we

were lucky enough to be able to get the program started the next fall.

Lara: Is it a challenge to get enough students to show up as tutors regularly throughout the school year?

Antonia: There's a lot of interest in the Kidpower tutoring program, and whether it's for service hours or not, there is a group of people who come regularly. For the number of DC kids who come each week, we have the right amount of student volunteers. Having the Kidpower kids counting on their tutors and expecting them to be there each week, encourages Sidwell students to come regularly, and luckily all the tutors are very devoted. A group of freshman also come each week, as part of their service projects, which introduces them to the program and lets them learn about it, but for the most part I think it's important to make sure each kid has an ongoing relationship with someone who tutors them regularly. One of my favorite things about the program is that the kids arrive from a long bus ride after a whole day of school, and yet run right away to their tutors screaming because they're just so happy to see them.

Lara: Have you received any feedback (from the kids, parents, or schools) about the weekly tutoring sessions? If so, please elaborate on the feedback. If not, are you planning to obtain it in the future?

Antonia: This year was the year when we wanted to get a solid foundation for the program. The Sidwell community is aware of the program and has learned about Kidpower. We now have a group of dedicated tutors and an established weekly tutoring program. Now that there is a fully functional program, it's important to start looking at how to make it better and how to advance, and getting feedback is an important part of this. I think everyone gets feedback from the kids each time they meet-- they complain regularly about doing the civics lessons and tend not to get much out of them, so we're looking

into ways to cover important material in ways in which they'll actually absorb the information and think of learning as more than a chore. We definitely have things we want to add, things we want to get rid of, and things we want to change. Overall we feel that the Kidpower tutoring program has been a great addition to the community, Kidpower kids really enjoy it, and it is an excellent opportunity for Sidwell students to take part in. Since the program is through Kidpower, we haven't yet communicated directly with the families of the kids. But next year we want to have a more open forum in which the parents can come to tutoring class at Sidwell to get a taste of what their kids are involved in, and see the work their kids have done and the progress they have made, as well as to receive feedback from Kidpower staff. I also think that with a program in the early stages as this one is, getting feedback from those directly involved can be really valuable for changes and improvements to the program, so we plan to send out a survey to current tutors so that they can give ideas and recommendations for how to better the program.

Lara: What are your goals for the future?

Antonia: The tutoring sessions take place once a week for two hours. Although tutors and kids meet regularly, it's still just a small window of time, so we want to make the most of it and are evaluating how to make the program better for next year. This year, I was talking to one of the girls I work with, and we were writing a letter to President Obama as part of an activity. She asked him to please stop people in her neighborhood from shooting each other and stealing things from stores. Hearing this, I was really shocked because I hadn't fully realized that things like this were truly things that some of the kids we worked with had to face daily. I know that we want the program to go further than just a once a week meeting, and have the Tutoring Club (of which this program is a part) strive to use education as a way of bettering communities that face problems like this. This spring, talking to her buddy, one Sidwell student mentioned the war in Iraq. Her buddy had, first of all, never heard of Iraq, and was not aware that there was a war. We want to not only help the kids with schoolwork, but to help them learn about the world around them and how to make it a better place. In addition to helping with homework and giving the kids help in areas they struggle in or want to improve in, Kidpower supplies a civics curriculum so that tutors and their



Bridget with Malaysia

buddies can work on lessons about American history. The handbook we currently use is written by Georgetown Day School students for a similar program they had with Kidpower. We hope to update, edit and re-write a new version of the handbook. Also, currently the only thing that the Tutoring Club does is the Kidpower tutoring program. We want to expand as a club and become more established in the community as well as doing some fundraising for Kidpower as an organization, planning other activities and looking at other ways to improve learning and education with youth in the district.

Lara: Are you planning any changes/improvements to the program going forward?

Antonia: Right now what happens with the tutoring program is that the kids arrive, are provided with a snack and a bit of time to catch up with their "buddies," and then start working on the Kidpower civics curriculum, and then work on homework. When (and if) this is all finished, they are allowed to go outside or hang out with their buddies. Lots of the kids are either behind or struggling with some concepts in their homework, so we want to take advantage of the time they have with their tutors to master the concepts. Also, we want to focus more attention on reading skills and the importance of reading, and use the tutoring program as a way to give students practice and help with reading, as well as giving them books and encouraging them to read. Like I said, now that we have the foundation set we want to look at how to improve the program so that we can have the optimal experience for everyone.

Ashoka: Innovators For The Public

An Interview with Bill Drayton, Chair and CEO

“He may look innocent, but Bill Drayton is a revolutionary” (Diezeit, No. 46, 10 November, 2005)

Lara: Who are social entrepreneurs and why is social entrepreneurship important?

Mr. Drayton: Social entrepreneurs are drivers of social change. They combine the pragmatic and results-oriented methods of a business entrepreneur with the goals of a social reformer. In an ever-changing world, social entrepreneurs or changemakers who can adopt, embrace, and effect social change are most likely to succeed and stay in the game. Any country that does not sharply increase the proportion of its young people who are changemakers will lack the competitive edge. The architecture of humanity is changing radically in the direction of complete decentralization. Instead of relying on the government or private sector to create

programs to improve society, each individual member of the “citizen sector” should take the initiative to address social problems—that is our only hope to wide-scale and rapid progress.

Lara: Can anyone be a changemaker? In other words, are social entrepreneurs born or made?

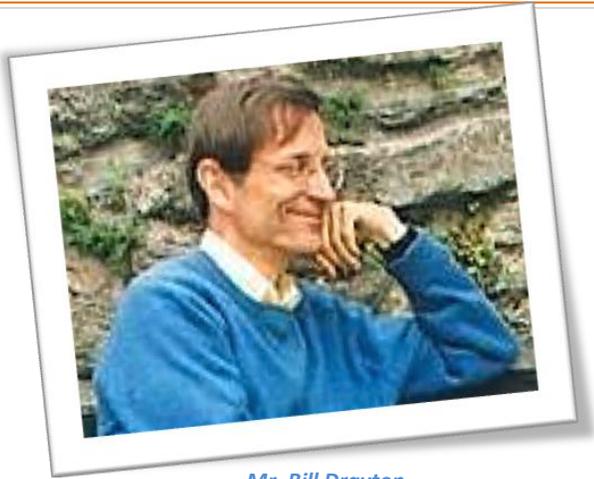
Mr. Drayton: Yes, anyone can be a changemaker as long as they give themselves permission to work towards solving a problem they feel passionately about. Social entrepreneurs can be “made,” but it is easier when you start early. Although adults who are exposed to a conducive environment can develop proactive attitudes, it is much easier to be a changemaker when confidence and persistence are instilled early in childhood. Hence, Ashoka’s Youth Venture Program. By creating an environment in which young adults embrace their potential and



What is “Ashoka”?

Ashoka was launched by Mr. Bill Drayton in 1980. Ashoka’s Youth Venture program started in 1990. Ashoka has funded almost 2,600 “fellows” or “changemakers” in 70 countries. Ashoka’s main objective is a world with “everyone a changemaker.” Ashoka seeks out entrepreneurs with big ideas “fellows,” funds them in their quest to find solutions to pressing social problems, provides guidance and knowledge, and connects them with each other so that they can form a “mosaic” that is far more than the sum of their parts. Mr. Muhammad Yunus, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his microfinance work, serves as part of the Ashoka network offering guidance. Some examples of Youth Ventures supported by Ashoka are: “Melabares Arte Cirsense” or Juggling Circus Art started by Monique, Tamires, and Ana which engages the low-income youth population (11-14 years) of Sao Paulo, Brazil, to promote cooperation, relaxation, and physical training. “SocialConnect” started by Charlotte is another example of a Youth Venture through which volunteers visit assisted living facilities with laptop computers and help elderly residents to set-up email accounts and also compose, send, and receive emails.

From: “Everyone a Changemaker,” Bill Drayton, 2006; other Ashoka literature.



Mr. Bill Drayton

grasp opportunities to effect change, the program aims to increase the chance of these young adults growing up to be changemakers in the future. Young people are a great untapped resource in social change—correctly leveraged, they have the power to “tip” society very quickly releasing unlimited energy and enthusiasm for social change. We would like to have every middle and high school become a place where there will be lots of examples of youth competence and confidence. Right now 2 or 3 percent of people control change. Imagine a world where everyone is really a changemaker!

Lara: What are the essential qualities of a changemaker?

Mr. Drayton: I would say empathy, teamwork, and leadership. It is important to inculcate these qualities early in young people. The proportion of changemakers cannot be significantly increased unless as young people they master these social skills. They need to have a “can do” attitude. They need to feel all-powerful and have the confidence to seek to change the world around them. Adults often exert control inside and outside of classrooms and in homes which promotes a “we can do it better” or “Oh, that’s impossible” culture, stifling initiative.

Lara: What is your advice to wannabe social entrepreneurs?

Mr. Drayton: Just do it! Identify a problem that really bothers you, use your social skills to spread the contagion to your friends, tap the multiplier effect – the more brains at work, the higher the chance of finding an innovative solution, then go test and implement the solution, all the while “entrepreneur” together with your friends so any problems you face along the way can be overcome together without any one of you feeling overwhelmed. Yes, just do it!

Filming the Children Of Nyumbani: An Interview With Sidwell Counselor, Gaby Grebski

Lara: How did you get the idea of making a film on the children of Nyumbani, Kenya? What objective did you set out to achieve with your film?

Gaby: I first spent time volunteering at the Nyumbani Children's Home for HIV positive orphans in Kenya in 2006. I had taken a lot of pictures which I shared with the orphanage to use in any way they wanted. The Chair of the orphanage's Board asked that I do a video to help raise awareness of the orphanage and their various programs in the slums and rural areas with the hope of raising funds and support. I returned in the summer of 2008 and spent several weeks filming there.

Lara: Did you film with a story or message in mind or did the story emerge only afterwards? What is the story or message of your film?

Gaby: I did the film with a story/message in mind which was to bring awareness to the plight of a whole generation of children who have not only lost their parents, often to AIDS, but have been ostracized by their extended families and communities because they were either born HIV-positive or contracted the disease through mother-to-child transmission. Another generation being affected (and cared for by Nyumbani) is the grandparent generation who, instead of being taken care of by their children, are having to bury the children instead. With a whole generation being wiped out by HIV/AIDS, Nyumbani is doing its best to help create a self-sustaining life for those left behind.

Lara: Tell us about the "stars" of your film. How did you pick them and did you get to know any of them closely?

Gaby: The main stars of the film are the children living with HIV at the orphanage who I got to know over the course of two summers, volunteering and working there. Although most of the children are thriving due to the care and medication they receive, I did focus on one little boy, Sammy, who was a heartbreaking reminder that the children still live with the deadly disease. Sammy became resistant to the anti-retroviral drugs available to the children and, after a 9 month struggle to survive, finally died. The film tries to highlight how Nyumbani works to prevent more deaths like Sammy's in the future.

Lara: In what specific ways, if any, do Kenya teenagers differ from American teenagers?

Gaby: The teenagers at Nyumbani differ from most American teenagers because they are living with HIV. Most don't know who or where their families are. Although they are still interested in similar things as American teenagers including pop music, movies and celebrities, they don't take for granted how important education is to their future and that they have to take important medical precautions in order to survive. However, they also differ significantly from other Kenyan teenagers living with HIV because of their good fortune to have the care and support that they receive at Nyumbani. Father Angelo D'Agostino, the founder of Nyumbani, won a landmark lawsuit with the Kenyan government in 2002 to allow HIV positive children to attend public school with other Kenyan children. Despite this triumph, the teenagers at Nyumbani are still often shunned due to their HIV and orphan status.

Lara: What was the most memorable part of your work at Nyumbani?

Gaby: The children and the relationships I developed with them and the staff. I was welcomed into their community as if I, myself, were a long lost relative or family member. As cliched as it may sound, once you are a part of the Nyumbani family, you are always a part of it.

Lara: What suggestions do you have to make places like Nyumbani serve the kids even more effectively?

Gaby: Because Nyumbani serves a very specialized population, medical care and access to an ongoing supply of medications and medical supplies is crucial to its ability to effectively serve the children. Nyumbani works hard to maintain relationships with organizations that can help secure such supplies. Nyumbani also needs expertise in various areas (agriculture/farming, skills training, education) to help it and the children and grandparents it serves become more self-sufficient and self-sustaining and decrease dependence on aid from developed countries.

Lara: What advice do you have for budding film makers?

Gaby: To have an idea for a story or script before you start filming to ensure that you take all the footage you will need. Also, the better you know a



Gaby at Nyumbani Children's Home, Kenya

subject or population, the better it will be represented it in the footage you take.

Lara: How can people watch your film?

Gaby: It can be borrowed from my office any time.

FabIndia School, Bali, Rajasthan: An Interview with Sidwell Student, Rachel Brown

Lara: Please describe what your community service project entailed.

Rachel: I was working at the FabIndia School in Bali, Rajasthan. The school is co-ed, but it has a special emphasis on enrolling and empowering girls because many families in this area would choose, for financial reasons, to send only their sons to school. I was working with students of all ages from nursery school through 9th grade. I was involved in various projects at the school: teaching English, math and geography, and also painting classrooms and constructing a bathroom for the school.

Lara: What was most rewarding for you?

Rachel: The most rewarding part was definitely teaching. It was such a rewarding experience to see the students really enjoying and learning from a lesson plan I had created. The students there were really great and made it a lot of fun for me too!

Lara: What was the most challenging aspect of your community service?

Rachel: I would say the most challenging aspects were teaching and building the bathroom. Teaching was a challenge because I had never taught a class before and sometimes it was hard to keep all the kids engaged in the lesson. Also since I was coming in the middle of the school year, it was not always clear to me what the students had learned and what they hadn't, so I had to do a lot of improvisation. Building the bathroom was hard because we didn't have any shovels or bricks and had to build the whole thing out of stones and hand-mixed concrete using pick axes, hoes and bowls for carrying cement. I did learn how to balance a bowl filled with cement on my head though!

Lara: What lessons did you learn as a result of your community service?

Rachel: I learned many different things from my

service project. How to teach a class and build a wall were some of the practical things I learned, but mostly I learned from the students. Even though we live on opposite sides of the earth I learned that I had so much in common with the students at the FabIndia School, whether it was our taste in music or our dreams for the future. I also gained a new respect for the importance of education. Seeing how hard the students at FabIndia worked and how much they appreciated the opportunity to go to school, gave me a new appreciation for all the opportunities that I have.

Lara: Would you recommend it to others? If so, why? If not, why not?

Rachel: I would definitely recommend working at the FabIndia School to others! The students and teachers at the school are most kind and it was great to work with them. I loved being able to work on different kinds of service projects and it was so rewarding to feel I was really making a difference for the students there. Also spending a month working at the school gave me an opportunity to learn more about Indian culture, which was also a great experience.



Rachel with "buddies"

Why People Give: Guilt or Magnanimity? *By Lara Mitra*

In the world of crime, the motives of a criminal play an important role in deciding the severity of the punishment for the crime. The analysis of the motives of a criminal helps investigators differentiate those who are likely to feel remorse and are unlikely to commit a crime again from psychopaths or sadists who are heartless killers and are likely to strike again. In the American system of law and order, a criminal's motives weigh heavily in administering justice once DNA evidence has established who the criminal is. But how important are motives in other realms of life such as philanthropy?

A group of psychologists recently explored the motives of those who donate money to charities. In their study*, psychologists at Northwestern University worked with 46 undergraduates telling them only that they were taking a handwriting test. The students were divided into three groups. The first group wrote down "positive" words such as "caring, generous, and fair." The second group wrote down "negative" words such as "selfish, disloyal, and greedy." A third control group wrote down "neutral" words such as "book, keys, and house." The students from each group were next asked to write short stories about themselves incorporating the words that they had just written down. Finally, the researchers asked the students if they would donate money (anywhere between 0 and 10 dollars) to a charity. The students who wrote "positive" words said they would donate

an average of \$1.07, while the students who wrote "negative" words said they would donate an average of \$5.30. The control group fell in between the two other groups, saying they would donate an average of \$2.71.

The psychologists concluded that their results demonstrated a correlation between sinning and helping the community. Those who portrayed themselves as "bad people" in the moments before making the donation felt compelled to "cleanse" themselves by assisting the needy, while those who described themselves as "good people" prior to making the donation felt little or no obligation to help the community.

What are the implications of this finding? It is certainly conceivable that at least some philanthropists give in order to right their wrongs. Consider, for instance, the case of the drug lords in Colombia or Mexico who give generously to have health clinics and schools built in their villages to perhaps assuage their guilt. Giving may also be a way to "buy" respect. Yet it would be hard not to think that at least some people give unconditionally for the sheer joy of giving and helping those in need. Living as we do in a world full of need, there is little value in debating the giver's intentions. Whether it is penance for prior sins or whether it is purely out of the goodness of heart, giving is a win-win act.

* Reported in "Sinning Saints and Saintly Sinners," S. Sachdeva, R. Iliev, L. Medin, *Psychological Science, A Journal for the Association of Psychological Science*, Vol. 20--Number 4, 2009.

Tried and Tested Community Service Opportunities:

Sidwell Friends School Community Service
home page:
http://sidwell.edu/upper_school/communityservice.asp

Ashoka: <http://www.ashoka.org/>

Nyumbani: <http://www.nyumbani.org/>

FabIndia School:
<http://www.fabindiaschools.org/bali/index.html>

For more information about these opportunities, please email: lara@empower-through-service.org

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