

The Washington Times

Sunday, September 6, 2009

Business leaders lend savvy to charity

Andrea Billups

Kathy Tschiegg, a former Peace Corps volunteer and nurse, runs a medical outreach initiative in Honduras and the United States on a shoestring budget. She operates 16 programs, including a hospital, and distributes medical equipment, supplies and other life-saving services to about 90,000 people in Latin American who otherwise could not afford it.

But even as her Central American Medical Outreach Inc. (CAMO) multiplies every \$1 donated into \$4 of service, she cannot afford to adequately promote her successful nonprofit or raise funds on a wide scale.

Enter Jimmy Park, a U.S. business specialist working with Executives Without Borders (EWB), who has volunteered his high-tech expertise to market CAMO on Web sites such as Facebook and Flickr, help analyze the group's inventory system and "bring us into Web 2.0," as Ms. Tschiegg described the help.

"I don't believe in putting a million dollars into marketing," Ms. Tschiegg said. "But Executives Without Borders, they have filled that void for us. These are executives who really have something to give."

Mr. Park and Robert Goodwin co-founded Executives Without Borders, a New York-based executive matching program, in 2007 to leverage the corporate savvy of some of the nation's top executives and link these volunteers to fledgling humanitarian groups around the world to optimize their efforts in ways that are sustainable.

In turn, the program allows hard-working executives looking to give back to the world an opportunity to integrate social responsibility into their business lives. It also offers corporations the chance to get involved in the global good by cutting some of their talent loose to engage pro bono in something inspiring.

Mr. Goodwin, 38, former assistant secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve affairs at the Pentagon, has seen the great needs of humanitarian groups in war-torn and impoverished areas around the world, and he said he wanted to help them to work in a concrete way - shining a light "on real people, real programs and real results." He described EWB as a group with a "mission heart and a business mind."

By investing in the long-term success of humanitarian projects, Mr. Goodwin said, the executives improve the quality of life for locals in poor areas and extend the hand of democracy in a soft way by influencing the needs of people, not governments.

The marriage of business moxie and models to world projects creates a connection that is fulfilling at both ends. Nonprofits receive needed expertise and leadership, and corporations earn the goodwill of investing in something life-changing -- clean water, medical care, sanitation and health -- beyond their bottom lines.

"Some people say, 'Teach a person to fish and they eat for a lifetime.' We say teach them how to fish farm and connect them to a marketplace, and then the whole village eats for a lifetime," said Mr. Goodwin, an Air Force Academy graduate who worked at the White House in 2005 and previously worked in Baghdad in rebuilding the Iraqi Health Ministry.

Prior to founding EWB, Mr. Goodwin served as chief operating officer for International Aid, providing health care relief and development to hospitals and staff around the world.

"I believe corporations can make more money by doing socially responsible things," he said. "It's about helping people to direct talents and passion as efficiently as possible to make that difference."

The EWB network consists of about 200 to 300 executives from a host of companies around the world. They are connected to one of three current projects in Honduras, Rwanda and India, all aligned to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. They work remotely or on site, matched according to their expertise and availability, and are paid modestly for their living and travel expenses.

Lori Stohs, a former Microsoft Corp. executive from Omaha, Neb., serves on the EWB board and, using her experience as an executive coach, works in a human resources role to place volunteers into the right fit.

"I was tied up in the corporate world for a long time, and I loved it, but I think I got away from my heart. It has always had a mission component," she said. "This lets me serve."

Ms. Stohs also works with an EWB project in India called Nanhi Kali aimed at getting young girls from the slums and rural areas to focus on education. In many Indian families, the youngest girl is rarely educated; she is often left at home to tend to the family.

So far, the Nanhi Kali group has sponsored 55,000 Indian girls, paying for clothes, supplies and transportation to get them to schools that many could not otherwise afford. EWB, Ms. Stohs said, has helped Nanhi Kali's administrators revamp antiquated information-technology systems, creating online sponsorship forms for those seeking to send a girl to school, and using software that helps the organization with marketing and communications.

Executives, including a former producer from the Martha Stewart TV show, have also written a formal marketing and business plan that will allow the group to implement its goals and incorporate it financially as more funds are raised. That way, expansion is maximized in a professional way.

"They really had only marketed themselves in India," Ms. Stohs said. "We wanted to focus on increasing their exposure around the globe."

While money to support EWB was gleaned from private donors -- Mr. Park last week climbed Mount Russell in California in hopes of raising \$14,086 for every foot of the mountain -- greater investment is needed to keep the program alive and expand it to others in need.

The group sees its reach as greater than corporate engagement.

"Even though we are doing the business side, it's to instill the humanitarian mission we were founded upon," Mr. Goodwin said. "In terms of national security issues, we haven't yet leveraged all aspects of our national manpower, including our spirit, our can-do ability, to get things done. ... We hope change how our country is perceived around the world."