

When Lily Yoseph returned to her Ethiopian hometown, the poverty was heart-wrenching. She's now helping the girls.

By David Karas / Correspondent

“You took me out of the darkness and brought the light into my life. You washed my clothes and clothed me.... I will never forget what you have done for me. Today, because of you, I can read and write.”

Those words were part of a letter penned by Bontu, a young girl living in Ethiopia, who is now literate and able to pursue her education in a country where the opportunity to attend classes is often available only to boys. (Last names have been withheld to protect the girls' privacy.)

Bontu is one of some 70 girls who are supported by Tangible Hope Foundation, founded by Lily Yoseph, herself a native of Kofele, Ethiopia. The nonprofit organization, headquartered in San Francisco, is dedicated to rescuing Ethiopian girls from poverty, gender inequality, and violence.

Ms. Yoseph founded Tangible Hope in 2011 after considering her life's purpose three years earlier, which led her to return to the town where she was born. What she discovered stuck with her.

“I was very overwhelmed, because the poverty was heart-wrenching,” she says in a recent phone interview. “The girls cannot go to school because of poverty.... The girls are doing chores, working every single day.”

Ubo's lasting impression

Yoseph also vividly recalls meeting Ubo, who was 7 years old and had never seen her own image before viewing it on Yoseph's digital camera. That moment, she says, helped her shift her focus to helping girls like Ubo. “It is [Tangible Hope's] goal to make this the last generation of girls worldwide to endure atrocities and hardships and to help those girls become the inspirational leaders who change those around them,” Yoseph says.

Tangible Hope operates on the ground in Kofele, supporting girls by furnishing everything from medical care to school



COURTESY OF LILY YOSEPH

A BRIGHTER FUTURE: Dozens of Ethiopian girls have benefited from Lily Yoseph's nonprofit. She and others say they've seen a visible transformation in the girls.

uniforms and supplies. A lack of such school items can be the chief reason that young girls don't attend school.

When the girls entered the program, the organization arranged for medical

'As soon as I met the girls I could see that the impact Tangible Hope has on their lives is profound.'

— **Chris Ryan**, a supporter of Tangible Hope, the organization begun by Lily Yoseph

checkups for parasites and other common afflictions, while also providing nutritious meals. It offers tutoring and other educational support as well.

Together, Yoseph says, these elements led to a visible transformation in the young girls – distinguishable as early as during the first year of participation.

“The girls are now beautiful, healthy, literate, and full of hope for a fulfilling future for themselves, their families, and their communities,” she says.

Yoseph has recruited girls around the ages of 7 or 8, with the goal of seeing them through their education, from start to finish. Some girls in the program are now 14.

Currently, Tangible Hope functions with Yoseph at the helm and a host of volunteers. Also, one of the board members assists with administrative projects. The organization benefits from donated space and resources, with funding coming from individuals who sponsor participants. In addition, foundations and organizations have made grants.

Yoseph has plans to expand – especially given the 30 girls on the program's waiting list and the many more who could benefit from Tangible Hope's approach.

The nonprofit has land in Kofele, along with an architectural plan donated by a California architect, charting a compound based on the traditional Ethiopian mud hut. In that space, Yoseph says, girls could gather after school to take showers, use a library, and take classes on gardening and technology, among other topics.

Such a vision is a far cry from the humble beginnings of Tangible Hope. It was based in Yoseph's one-bedroom apartment and she was balancing it with three jobs.

“I realized that I could not take Tangible Hope to the next level and work three jobs,” she says. “So now I am receiving a bare-bones stipend from the foundation that allows me, if I am very frugal, to focus all my time and energy on Tangible Hope.”

Chris Ryan, a supporter of Tangible Hope, visited Yoseph's home village in 2015. “As soon as I met the girls I could

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GALLERY OF RECENT PROFILES



Deb Eastwood teaches children in Grenada to swim.



Fatou Sall Ndiaye Mbacké uses peanuts to help women.

see that the impact Tangible Hope has on their lives is profound,” he says in an email. “I was struck by the pride the families have for their daughters and the immense gratitude they have for Lily for helping their daughters live a healthier life. You could see the sparkle of life in the eyes of the girls who are a part of Tangible Hope...”

Mr. Ryan also notes Yoseph’s commitment. “She works tirelessly to achieve her goal of educating and empowering young girls,” he says.

A broader mission

Yoseph also speaks about a broader mission that Tangible Hope is part of.

“There is a movement, and a growing understanding, worldwide about the importance of the education of women,” she says. “I truly believe that education of women is the key to world peace. Through education and empowerment of women across all religions, tribes, and cultures, we will find the common ground where reason triumphs over hatred.”

Still, the young girls in Kofele, Ubo included, remain at the heart of Yoseph’s passion. “These girls had no voice and no choice before Tangible Hope,” Yoseph explains. “Now, they are writing poetry; they are singing. They have dreams for their lives. They will be teachers, doctors ... One wants to be a pilot.”

She adds, “I am motivated by them every day.”

■ For more, visit TangibleHope.org.

The benefits of volunteering on company time

Here are five reasons to give back on the job.

THIS COLUMN is part of an occasional series about how you, too, can make a difference. It is written by the head of our partner organization UniversalGiving, which is dedicated to helping people give and volunteer.



By Pamela Hawley

Volunteer at my company? Perhaps many of you are thinking, “How can I even think about that? I can barely make deadlines as it is. Plus, work is work. It’s not about goofing off or doing personal things. I’ve got to make my sales quota, finish that legal brief, or respond to 60 emails.”

It’s time to reassess! Volunteering is very much alive and acceptable in businesses today. More than 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies have volunteer programs, according to research compiled by Prof. Adam Grant at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. And 60 percent of small and midsize companies offer volunteer benefits, according to America’s Charities.

So let’s take a look at volunteering in the workplace. There are many more pluses than you can imagine. You can:

Get money. What does that mean? The company is going to pay me to volunteer? Well, in a way it’s true, with “dollars for doers” programs. When you are a “doer” and volunteer, your business will then donate to your chosen nongovernmental organization.

Company policies vary greatly. For example, at Exxon Mobil, if you volunteer 20 hours the company provides a \$500 donation. And Microsoft makes a \$25 donation for every hour you volunteer.

Build relationships. You may say, “I have enough friends – I don’t have time for new ones!” But by volunteering, new possibilities can arise. Maybe the person with whom you are volunteering at work also has children. Your kids end up doing fun things together. Maybe it will result in a new partnership in two months, or two years. You will meet a different cohort of people from your workplace who can positively affect your life.

Include your family. With so many families pressed for time, corporate volunteering can allow them to accomplish a number of things at once. Families who volunteer can help create awareness about those less fortunate, give back together, practice their family values, and share time together.

Volunteering as a family also allows you to see what it’s like in tougher areas of your community and the world. These experiences are great topics at the dinner table.

‘Volunteering shows your company that you care about helping others.’

– Pamela Hawley, philanthropy expert

Broaden your company participation. If “getting ahead” is your main goal, then volunteering can be a great opportunity. Please keep in mind that we always want to be genuine in the reasons we volunteer; at the same time, it’s OK to volunteer if it helps in other ways.

Volunteering shows your company that you care about helping others. It shows you



JOHN KEHE

care about being involved in the business beyond your job description. When company leaders see an employee getting involved in ways that are not required, they are impressed. It could be one element that helps you accelerate your management track.

Meet new clients. What a fun way to meet new clients! Your business might offer volunteering in conjunction with another company. Even if a person from the other firm isn’t a potential client, he or she might know someone who is. Expand your network.

Volunteering is a great idea for business, family, and your own personal growth. Next time that work email arrives saying, “It’s time to volunteer!,” take a second look. Instead of thinking you don’t have time, maybe you’ll jump in, give back, and gain more.

■ Pamela Hawley is the founder and chief executive officer of UniversalGiving (www.universalgiving.org). She is a recipient of the Jefferson Award (the Nobel Prize of community service). She also writes the blog “Living and Giving.”