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History

The growing global economy has provided opportunity and affluence for those that can tap into it, but for many, opportunity is out of reach due to infrastructural gaps and access to resources. As a result, we are witnesses to a growing disparity of wealth, quality of health and education between the affluent sects of our global community and nearly everyone else. The disparity is most extreme in developing countries with infrastructural disadvantages that make them most at risk of experiencing a perpetual cycle of poverty, hunger and lack of health care. We need to become active participants instead of witnesses, and empower people to reach across the gaps to improve the quality of life for all members of our global community.

In response to this need, Global Brigades, Inc, has ignited the largest student-led international development movement on the planet; with the mission to empower students to facilitate sustainable solutions in developing countries while respecting local cultures and improving the environment.

Global Brigades offers a holistic model of sustainable development through a multi-discplinary and grassroots network of more than 2000 annual volunteers who travel overseas to administer the programming. Current programs include: medical, dental, water sanitation, human rights, micro-enterprise development, architecture and environmental preservation.

Global Brigades' programming creates a mutually beneficial exchange that improves quality of life for disadvantaged people in the developing world, and empowers the students and professionals who initiate the programs. Global Brigades' directors and advisors work consistently with each student leader to share knowledge, develop leadership skills and ensure the programming is implemented effectively. We also maintain offices in the regions where our programs are established to ensure continuity of our programs by building and maintaining long-

term relationships with the communities we serve and the organizations and governments we collaborate with.

The engine behind Global Brigades is the university club operated by the student leaders. Each club acts as an autonomous group with their own constitution, organizational structure, and bank account. Student leaders either establish a new club on their campus to carry out the Global Brigades mission or combine the programming with an existing club.

Global Brigades started, with one program: Global Medical Brigades (GMB) a secular, international network of university clubs that travel to developing countries to provide health care in communities without regular access otherwise. GMB evolved out of a long-standing relationship with one of Honduras' most reputable nonprofit organizations, Sociedad Amigos de los Niños (SAN). Since 1966, SAN has operated orphanages, health care facilities and schools for some of the most in-need and neglected Hondurans. In the last 40 years, founder, Sister Maria Rosa Legol, is said to have raised more than 40,000 orphaned or abandoned children.

Throughout SAN's history, they've been called upon to provide health care relief in rural villages. The need for this escalated in 1998, when Hurricane Mitch ravaged Central America killing more than 12,000 and displacing tens of thousands. With the tremendous need for medicine, more and more U.S. groups traveled to the region to provide humanitarian aid in conjunction with SAN.

Of these groups a number of college students joined to help in the effort, but no formal program existed for them to lead their own brigades or carry out long-term programming in the villages they served. This changed in 2003, when an inspired group of students from Marquette University returned from a medical brigade with a Wisconsin church and created a club on their campus to perpetuate a program of international health relief. That year, the group led two medical brigades treating more than 3,000 patients and laid the foundation for Global Brigades' programming.

Through 2004-2005, members of what would become the Board of Directors of Global Brigades, worked with SAN to establish an official medical brigade department to develop sustainable programming tailored for university students to implement. They formalized processes for needs assessments, established relationships with permanent clinics to sponsor referrals for patients with needs beyond the capacity of the brigade, developed a patient records system to monitor health trends, and broadened its mission to also improve the water, sanitation, and overall public health infrastructure.

Meanwhile, in North America, the grass roots movement was spreading and other universities started adopting the GMB program. By the end of 2005, the University of Michigan and University of Southern California established GMB clubs. In 2006, GMB partnered with graduate school advising company Inquarta to further expand programming on other college campuses. Also, in 2006, GMB launched a website to help scale their growth and provide students with the tools, information and resources needed to lead their own brigade.

In 2007, GMB officially spun-off from the medical brigade department of Sociedad Amigos de los Niños and formalized the U.S. entity, Global Brigades, LLC and developed an autonomous Board of Directors. This shift also represented a movement towards a holistic service model, expanding its scope of opportunities beyond medical relief to include business, water, architecture, law and environmental programs.

The first of these programs to be implemented was Global Business Brigades (GBB), which focuses on economic disparity by empowering students to create micro-enterprise solutions for small, in-need businesses in developing nations. In spring 2007, GBB was conceptualized and a pilot program was conducted to address the economic needs of the same communities where relationships had been developed from medical brigades. The first business brigade took place in Summer 2007 with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) who adopted a community of coffee farmers in El Chile, Honduras. By 2008, the UCLA GBB club has over 100 members, implemented four brigades, formalized a coffee co-op, built a community storage bodega to create a single point of sale and identified North American buyers.

From these early pilot programs, GBB understood the tremendous need to collaborate with nonprofit partners in the communities to continue projects after the volunteers return home. Unlike our health programs where we only chose villages that had no nonprofit partner and no access to health care, it proved imperative to establish long-term partnerships for business brigades to be successful. Later in 2007, Global Brigades teamed with another charitable organization, Plan 4 Success, to help expand GBB operations in Panama where very strong relationships were cultivated with the US Peace Corps, Red Cross, Earth Train and others. In this collaborative environment, GBB student volunteers latch on to existing programs to supplement with funding, labor, and most importantly new ideas.

In 2007/2008, Global Brigades launched its water, law, architecture and environmental programs using our same model. To grow these initiatives, our Board of Directors, began visiting all of the university campuses that have a Global Brigades club. The programs have been very well received and universities have adopted the holistic approach.

In just a few short years, the ambition of that one team of Marquette University volunteers has spread to nearly 60 campuses in both the U.S. and Canada with more than 2,000 annual volunteers serving more than 100,000 beneficiaries throughout Central America, Ghana, Vietnam, and India.

Since our formation, 100% of our U.S. staff, including our board of directors, are volunteers, keeping administrative costs to a minimum and insuring that money raised through our student clubs goes directly to support our in-country programs.

Any extra money raised from our volunteers beyond in-country costs will go towards the “Adopt a Community Center” initiative and other sustainable development programming. In 2008, Global Brigades will begin refurbishing and expanding old, under staffed, and under supplied health care centers in our partner communities in Honduras. We are allocating significant funds and energy to turn these old buildings into centers of rural health care excellence. Each building

will become a primary health care clinic for the community, providing acute care and preventative medicine services to the rural population. It will also serve as a community center with part time social workers and micro-finance / microenterprise development departments.

Executive Directors of the community centers are being identified through a new program called: Gray World. It is Global Brigades' version of the Peace Corps, where highly qualified candidates are chosen to operate our community center. The candidates will live and work full-time in our villages to operate the center and work with local/indigenous community members to empower them to eventually operate the center on their own.

We have identified twenty of our villages that we plan to pilot this program in over the next five years. Each of these villages will also receive a full-scale water purification system conducting through our Global Water Brigades program.

For more information on the long term strategies of Global Brigades, please contact Steve Atamian at steve@globalbrigades.org.