



SOWHOPE NEWSLETTER

"Where there is despair, let me sow hope." - Francis of Assisi

MISSION STATEMENT: "TO INSPIRE WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD BY PROMOTING WELLNESS, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES."

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Literacy Changes Lives

According to the last census taken in India, the illiteracy rate for women in 2001 was 46%. Although an improvement over 1950's rate of 91%, it means that almost half of the females are illiterate. SowHope has recognized that this inability to read results in women being exploited as they agree to unfair contracts; are unable to read the most simple instructions on medicines; and have little awareness of the possibilities for them economically.

Literacy changes all that as it increases women's confidence, makes them aware of the importance of school, and enables them to become entrepreneurs. Women often report gaining a sense of dignity after becoming literate. For all of these reasons,

SowHope has partnered with those who are bringing literacy to the women of India. Reeta and Premavati are two women whose lives have been changed by learning to read.



Reeta, 27, was raised in a poor home, and had no opportunity to go to school. Her illiteracy meant she could not count money, so she was often cheated by shopkeepers because she could not calculate her change. Because she could not read bus numbers, she could not use public transportation and so walked long distances. When an adult

literacy class began, the teacher visited Reeta, encouraging her to participate. Motivated by the teacher's support, she enrolled. She caught on quickly, and it revolutionized her life. Now able to read numbers and do easy arithmetic, Reeta questions shopkeepers about prices.

Premavati, 20, is married and a mother. Because Premavati was illiterate, her husband did not allow her to buy anything, nor give her any money. Premavati did not have any idea how much money he earned.

When a literacy class started, the teacher's invitation led her to enroll. Through the nine month course sponsored by SowHope, she learned to read, write and do math at a fifth grade level. She now manages the household finances.

Premavati also took part in the self-help training with the literacy class. There she learned how to prepare detergent powder and shampoo, which she makes for her family. She plans to sell these products in the future to supplement her family's income.

What positive changes these classes have made in women's lives! Their families and communities have been influenced as well. SowHope's mission to promote wellness, education and economic opportunity is founded in a woman's ability to read. Literacy classes are fundamental to reaching these goals.

A Timely Encounter for Congo

A few months ago, Mary Dailey Brown, President and CEO of SowHope, read a news article that described the grim situation in the war-torn country of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). News of women who had been brutally raped during the conflict left her deeply burdened.

Immediately upon finishing the article, she pledged to do whatever she could through SowHope to assist. She had no idea of how to proceed, since SowHope had no contacts or partners in the DRC. The next day, while visiting her brother, she joined him on Sunday morning in his church. During a greeting time in the service, she turned to say hello to a man nearby who immediately said, "You're Mary Dailey Brown, the President of SowHope!"

Startled, Mary asked, "How do you know me?" "I go to your website to get inspired!" he responded.

Mary inquired, "Where are you from?" He answered, "The Congo."

Further conversation revealed that this man, Flori Buki, had been present at the only other visit Mary had made to this church, months earlier. She had shared a pressing need of one of SowHope's partners, who was in the midst of a violent outbreak of war. She also had the chance to share briefly about the work of SowHope.

Flori was encouraged as he heard about the organization and its purpose. A lawyer in the Congo, Flori is presently living in the United States to attend law school here and intends to go back and serve in politics. He is full of vision and hope for his country.

The end result of this friendship will be a trip to the Congo in mid-August, arranged by Flori, to introduce Mary to possible partners for SowHope. Flori has multiple contacts there who are already working to heal the many issues women face in the DRC. Mary and a SowHope board member, Dr. Pamela Ogor, are looking forward to learning more about how SowHope can inspire women there. They will also visit new and existing partners in Uganda and Kenya.



Women victimized by rape in Congo.

Photo: Courtesy USAID

Volunteering As a Couple



Although SowHope has multiple *individual* volunteers, there are also *couples* who have teamed together as volunteers, bringing their united talents to the tasks at hand. One such couple is Alan and Marney Salmon, who have assisted in a variety of ways. When asked what drew them to volunteer for SowHope, their answers differed, but their response was the same – to help.

Alan heard about the organization through Marney, and found SowHope to be an organization that met his criteria for support. He sees it as an inspiring, necessary and totally worthwhile work, enjoys the fact that it is a grass-roots organization, and likes the confidence he has knowing that his contribution makes a difference. Alan says that all of this, plus seeing that financial aid is getting to those who truly need it, makes SowHope a good match for their voluntary service.

Marney had seen the needs of women as she had traveled through Asia and South America, and admits to being shocked at how hard the women worked and yet how little they received for their efforts. Determined to make a difference in their lives, she was investigating how to best accomplish this when she was introduced to Mary Dailey Brown. Marney was seeking a way to get access to women and their crafts, thinking she could then sell their products here for a fair price, while at the same time creating awareness of their plight. As she heard about SowHope, Marney realized that everything she wanted to do and more would be accomplished through Mary's project.

Both of them have been involved in the annual Photo Exhibit – Marney organizing, coordinating the venue and food, and sharing some of her own photographs from her travels. Alan has acted as host and also offered resources so other volunteers can get the job done. Marney has also enjoyed working at the Women's Expo booth, meeting new people and introducing them to SowHope. Both have found it meaningful to carve out time from their very busy schedules to devote to SowHope activities.

They both encourage others to volunteer. Alan says "Find something that you truly believe is worthwhile and which you can support from the heart." And Marney adds, "This is a wonderful way to feel like I am really doing something that matters." She also suggests that people sign up and figure out what they can do, believing that everyone who is passionate about a cause like this has something to offer.

You can take them up on their challenge – e-mail Mary@sowhope.org or call SowHope office at (616) 433-1575 to have your name added to the list of those willing to assist as a volunteer!

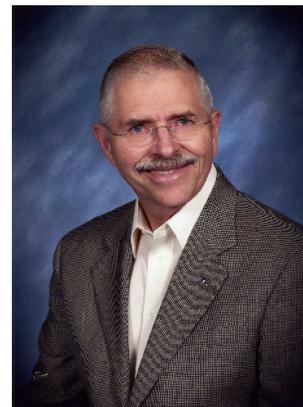
Meet a SowHope Board Member

Take an engineer degree, combine it with expertise in computer systems and financial management and what do you have? A man who can mechanize the data required to run a particular organization's reports, fulfilling requirements for that specific non-profit. That man, for SowHope, is Dave Crawford, Treasurer of the Board of Directors.

When asked how he became involved in SowHope, he replied that he was invited to a meeting that Mary Dailey Brown had with friends where she shared her vision for the organization. Dave was deeply interested when he realized that there were no other organizations that were focused solely on the basic needs of women internationally. In recognition of his talents and his support, Mary asked him to become the treasurer of the organization.

Looking back, Dave realizes that his efforts have been leveraged, since a small amount of effort on his part has already yielded a large impact in the lives of many disadvantaged women. Dave has the responsibility to make certain that all bookkeeping is done according to current accounting rules. He also has studied the needs of the board and has come up with a board report design distinctive to SowHope that supports the board's need for decision-making information.

Dave has been responsible for the bookkeeping for many organizations over the years, and brings with him a passion for the job and a standard of excellence. As he looks to the future of SowHope, he would like to see the vision of SowHope expanded in a major way, to other large cities, forming a much larger supportive base. Dave has watched as those who are exposed to the mission of SowHope become really excited about it, and believes that as the word is spread, the base will increase, which will make it possible to achieve SowHope's long term objectives.



A tax preparer, bookkeeper and enrolled agent with the IRS, Dave is a man with a large heart and a vision – a vision driven by passion, a drive for excellence, and great expectations.

Hosted Events

Please consider hosting an event to let your friends know about SowHope. A Hosted Event can be a breakfast, brunch, lunch, tea, dinner, or evening dessert. You provide the place, food, and guests. SowHope will provide a compelling presentation of our work with women around the world. Contact Trish@sowhope.org for more information.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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