



SOWHOPE Newsletter

"Where there is despair, let me sow hope." FRANCIS OF ASSIS

One Microloan Grant, Many Businesses

In Nigeria, a group of women are reaching out to their neighbors to teach them how to create and run businesses. They began with 10 women, supported by a \$1,000 SowHope microloan grant. Each one purchased materials for their small enterprises and invested in small business training seminars. The women meet together regularly to report and to encourage each other. As soon as they paid back their loans, they started all over with a new group of 10 women. This has been repeated again, so that the original \$1,000 grant has been used for the third generation of training and small business ventures. These are women whose lives have been changed radically by this economic opportunity.

One woman in the group is Lydia J. Because her family was too poor to support her, she went to live with an uncle. Her low status required her to do much of the daily chores of preparing meals and caring for the children. She was teased that she would never have a husband, but Lydia was a very determined young woman. She had a good attitude.

She went to school as a young adult and through some good friends, she met a wonderful man, a pastor. They fell in love, married, and have two daughters. Her husband encouraged her to finish her education and she made it all the way through university, earning the equivalent of a BA degree in business. She was offered a job in a bank, but she decided to open a small kiosk to give her greater flexibility in her own schedule, allowing her more time with her family. Lydia wanted to expand her business. To do this, she gathered with a group of women who had received a SowHope economic grant. Lydia used her first microloan to start making her own bread and selling it in the kiosk. She was so successful that she now employs another woman to help her make the bread. She hopes to make enough profit to buy a dough mixing machine and hire more women.



Microloan recipient, smiling from her kiosk

Lydia and the other women meet monthly to discuss their individual businesses, holding each other accountable – not only for the repayment of the loan money, but for doing all they can to make their businesses solid enterprises. Lydia is a regular trainer of business practices at these meetings. The women sometimes invite their husbands to these meetings! They are changing the culture of Nigeria- one woman, one family, and one village at a time. All of this for about \$35 per woman!

Literacy Classes Change Lives

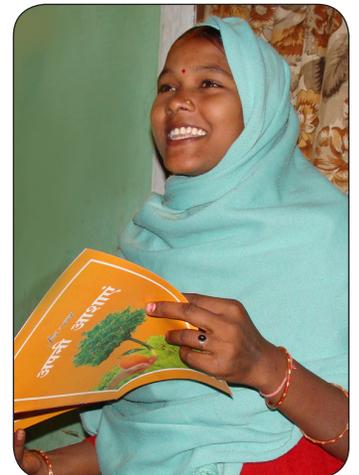


Women in the literacy class learn to do basic math

Since the inception of SowHope in 2006, over 10,000 women in six countries have benefited from microloans, literacy classes, and AIDS care and prevention. One of the areas where large numbers have been impacted is in India, through nine-month literacy classes. 4,200 women, over a two-year period, were sponsored to learn to read, write, and do math to the 5th grade level.

The local NGO that partners with SowHope finds the teachers, organizes the classes, and provides the materials. The classes had an 86.4% graduation rate! The women have also been taught the basics in: small business, good health practices, nutrition, and legal rights. They have also received a physical exam – many for the first time!

Class members experienced additional benefits as well. All the children of the learners attend school and become literate. Additionally, 1,876 of the graduates volunteered to teach another person what they had learned, and were provided with materials to do so. These basic skills and understanding of how to care for themselves and their family members have resulted in a rise in dignity and self-confidence for the women, plus a wonderful sense of community as the women have acted together to support one another. The total cost of \$126,000 means that only \$30 per woman has brought about this astounding result!



The joy of reading

Meet a SowHope Volunteer



LaRissa Paras, teacher of world cultures, history, and geography at Greenville High School, was so passionate about her topic that she also created a Culture and Diversity Club as a forum for student action. Three years ago, when LaRissa spotted a flier describing SowHope's first Photo Exhibit, she was excited about its mission and its correlation to her classroom. At the photo exhibit, she was introduced to Mary Dailey Brown and to SowHope. She loved the idea that even a small amount of money or effort could result in a great difference in the lives of poor women, and realized

that the organization was something she wanted her students to know about.

For the past three years, LaRissa has invited SowHope to talk to her students about the issues that affect the poorest of the poor around the world. Each time, the student group has grown larger as student interest and enthusiasm has increased. This past year, Mary spoke to more than 200 students! These students have raised funds and decorated receiving blankets for the birthing center in the Congo.

LaRissa thinks that many people want to help, but don't know exactly what to do. She has seen that students, who have little in the way of finances, can still support SowHope through their creativity and their deep desire to make a difference. They have been very creative with their own mini-fund raisers. LaRissa is contemplating a lone-run this summer to raise funds. Here are a few ideas of what you could do among your co-workers, friends or in your neighborhood. Have a garage sale where all the proceeds go to SowHope. Give a birthday party asking for donations to SowHope as gifts. Lemonade with a portion of the cost going to SowHope. These students and their teacher serve as an example of enthusiastic, creative volunteering to sow hope where there is despair.

PLEASE HELP US...

The SowHope story needs to be told... and you have connections. It may not have occurred to you, but you know people who would love to hear the SowHope story. Whether one person or a thousand, invite Mary to tell the story at a casual gathering (book club anyone?), a formal event (we'll help!) and everything in between. Ideas: coffee, tea, churches, clubs, classrooms, etc. Call 616-433-1575 or e-mail to mary@sowhope.org.

3rd Photo Exhibit a Success!

Over \$14,000 was raised for SowHope projects at this year's Photo Exhibit! Amid a striking display of over 40 stirring photographs, more than 200 people mingled, talked, ate, and strolled through the elegant setting. Live violin and acoustic guitar music provided a backdrop to the emotive and enlightening images depicting both the beauty and the burden of women in the Third World. The evening included a stirring talk by SowHope's CEO, Mary Dailey Brown, who inspired guests about the mission of the organization, the 15 projects slated for induction this year, and her recent travel to Africa, the Middle East and Asia where she met with partners and beneficiaries in eight countries.

One poignant story was of a focus group of women in Bangladesh. About 75 women were gathered in a cramped, windowless room to share their opinions about the just completed 3-year microloan project funded by SowHope. A small number of women were sitting in the front row wearing burqas, the all-enveloping cloak that shows nothing but the eyes of the wearer. Because of the apparel, Mary had little to indicate how these women were responding to the questions she was posing about the effectiveness of the project. Mary knew that in a public place, which included a few males, none of the women would normally allow their faces to be seen. Women in the Third World have little to no voice. Sitting there, Mary realized that the burqa also takes away their face, greatly inhibiting human interaction on even the most basic level. However, as the interchange of the focus group proceeded with many women responding enthusiastically to the questions, sharing personal answers and experiences, one of the older women in the front removed her veil, displaying her face and began to make comments. As the others saw this, eventually, they too removed their veils and entered cheerfully into the interchange! Gazing at these beautiful faces, Mary knew she was witnessing a victory for basic human dignity and self-expression! What a demonstration of the power of sowing hope!

MISSION STATEMENT

TO INSPIRE
WOMEN AROUND
THE WORLD
BY PROMOTING
WELLNESS,
EDUCATION, AND
ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES



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