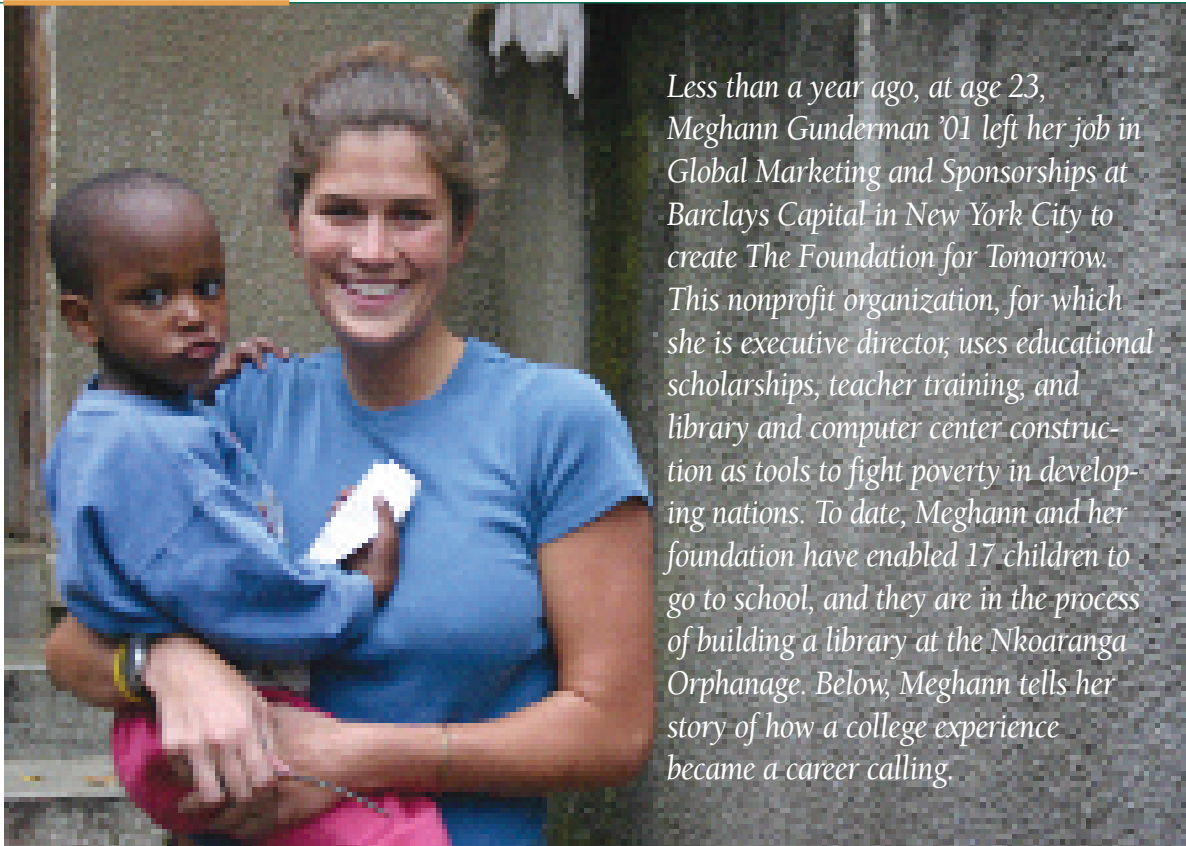


Feature

22

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



Less than a year ago, at age 23, Meghann Gunderman '01 left her job in Global Marketing and Sponsorships at Barclays Capital in New York City to create The Foundation for Tomorrow. This nonprofit organization, for which she is executive director, uses educational scholarships, teacher training, and library and computer center construction as tools to fight poverty in developing nations. To date, Meghann and her foundation have enabled 17 children to go to school, and they are in the process of building a library at the Nkoaranga Orphanage. Below, Meghann tells her story of how a college experience became a career calling.

I Couldn't Wait Another Minute

By Meghann Gunderman, Executive Director, The Foundation for Tomorrow

The Foundation for Tomorrow became incorporated in November 2006, however, its roots go back to the summer of 2004. After my junior year at The University of St. Andrews, Scotland, where I was majoring in International Relations and Geography, I had to research my dissertation. I decided that meant being on the ground in East Africa. Everyone thought I was crazy, including my parents. I was an American woman traveling alone to an impoverished country rife with disease and danger and couldn't speak Swahili. However, I believed I needed to see past the textbooks and into the hearts and minds of the people I was trying to learn about. So I began the journey that has shaped my career and my life today.

That first summer I worked for an NGO (non-governmental organization) in an orphanage in the rural village of Nkoaranga, Tanzania. You think you can prepare yourself for Africa and the poverty you'll see, but until you literally get your feet dirty you can't understand what that means. There's HIV/AIDS, malaria, unsafe drinking water, and malnutrition everywhere. Those are challenges that the children I've grown to love, cherish, and adore face every single day.

Currently there are 34 million orphans in Africa, 12 million orphaned from AIDS. I held the hands of children I knew had little hope of a viable future. It wasn't a "Save the Children" television commercial; it was more painful, vivid, and frightening and I had to do something. Most of these children lost their mothers before their first birthday, and then their fathers abandoned them. Few fathers ever come back to get their kids, but if they do, they come when the children are old enough to earn money to contribute to their income.





I struggled with how I could make a difference. After many sleepless nights I decided that before any major changes could occur within the country, more children needed to go to school. Education attacks poverty at the roots and builds the foundation on which nations can develop. A child can only remove herself from the cruel circle of poverty if she is aware of what the world has to offer.

I went back the next summer and I recruited friends and family to sponsor children who were soon going to “age-out” of the orphanage and had nowhere to go. Thanks to those early efforts I was able to send four children to boarding school. When I returned to the U.S., I began working at the bank but my heart was in Africa. I talked about the plight of African orphans to anyone who would listen and I continued to gain sponsorships.

After leaving my job with Barclays this past September, I headed to Southern Africa for three weeks. Three weeks turned into two and a half months. I went back to see the beauty of the land and the people. My friends living on the continent convinced me that through the kindness and generosity of others, I could make The Foundation For Tomorrow work. I knew I couldn't wait another minute to give a child a chance. Seeing how much the children were eager to learn and go to school made me look back on my blessed days at CCDS and wonder why I had the opportunity and these children didn't. It all came down to geography. Sadly, birthplace determines the opportunities you're given in life.

According to UNICEF, 30,000 children die each day from avoidable, poverty-related causes. Through education, we can mitigate this tragedy. Education isn't a handout; it's a hand up. For the cost of a new pair of shoes we can contribute to an education program in the developing world that can save or improve the life of a child. Simply put, we must find a way. It's callous, indecent, and wrong not to.

I wanted to solidify my efforts but it wasn't until I saw the children's kind and innocent faces again that I knew I had to put my full heart into this. It could have easily been a cause I continued to do on the side, however, I knew I had the passion and ability to affect change on a global scale. The result: The Foundation For Tomorrow, more than just a project, it is a movement to empower Africa's children through education. Won't you help?

To learn more about The Foundation for Tomorrow, please visit www.thefoundationfortomorrow.org.



In the past two years, the CCDS Aquilifer Club has raised enough money to sponsor two children through the Foundation for Tomorrow by holding spring fashion shows. The International Club also contributed to TFFT, and two Lower School classes held change drives to purchase 200 books for a library at the orphanage. Meghann, who was an Aquilifer member at CCDS, visited CCDS in May to thank students for their support. Pictured with Meghann are Aquilifer Club officers Abigail James, Caroline Burton, Carol Bledsoe, and Maggie Melvin.