



Get Involved: HEAL INTERNATIONAL

Article and photo by: Diane Wallace, Snapfactory.com
Africa photos by: Heal International

Be careful when you start a conversation with Damien Salamone, Executive Director of HEAL International – it might change your life. “Try this,” Damien says as he hands me a tiny plastic cup of something hot. I do, and it’s really good. Damien is in a familiar place behind the counter at skycafé, his coffee shop, when we meet to talk about HEAL International. He has just handed me some traditional ginger spiced tea from East Africa, bought from a family who hails from that part of the world where the tea is grown. It’s dark, richly flavored and sweet, and I immediately want more but Damien has me trying two other types of authentic, traditional teas before I can ask. One of the HEAL Project Managers, Mohamed Abdalla, has also joined our meeting and is filling me in on the seriousness of the family tea-making tradition while Damien is pouring.

The significance of the tea is profound – it’s the basis of the philosophy of HEAL International. Damien Salamone passionately believes that in order for communities to succeed, they must determine for themselves what they need and be able to create a self-sustaining economy. They just sometimes need a bit of help getting it started, which is where this ambitious non-profit organization comes in.

Damien started the work of HEAL International in 2004 after an experience volunteering in Africa. Realizing that healthcare education alone wasn’t enough to make a lasting impact, he decided to sit down with community leaders to find out what they believed their needs were. They told him as much as they appreciate the education, what they really need is healthcare and jobs. With both components they could begin to build their own future. “HEAL was created from the desire to fill the gap of healthcare and community development,” says Damien. “If all we do is donate what we think they need or what we want them to have, we aren’t giving them a future, we’re just giving them our past.”

HEAL International operates on three levels: microfinance, direct healthcare provision, and healthcare-related education. Using these three concentrations, HEAL’s goal is to create opportunities for people to start businesses that earn enough to reinvest in their own communities. Project managers, such as Mohamed, act as fixers to help people on a personal

level. They speak the local language (and sometimes a few more, too) and understand the culture and customs. HEAL provides microfinance to community members, usually women, to start their own businesses. Project managers help with networking and other things that will help new business owners be personally successful. As the business grows, money is paid back to HEAL that is then reinvested in another business. Some of that money is also reinvested for essential needs, like healthcare.

CASE STUDY

Tanzania has one of the worst ratios of doctors to citizens in the world; one doctor per fifty thousand people. Many people there have never seen a doctor, and certainly not the children who live in rural areas and orphanages. The thing is, there are doctors in Tanzania, and there are men and women being educated and trained as doctors there. So what’s the problem? Doctors can’t earn enough money to support themselves, especially in the rural areas, so they go where they can be financially successful. The doctors who do stay are generally found in



the underfunded hospitals in larger cities. The problem for rural families, and children, then, is an economic one.

A REAL RESOLUTION

HEAL International helps build healthcare capacity infrastructure and facilitate the networks that create economic development. One of the programs, Business for Doctors, is one they are working to build. The program takes some of the money that small businesses are earning and pays doctors to come out to that community once a month or as often as the funds will allow. This is a huge boost for the doctors, who typically aren't paid very well at city hospitals. A self-sustaining cycle of keeping the community healthy is now started, and the residents can then take on the challenge of building their businesses and creating more jobs. The initial investment from HEAL into small businesses empowers the community to decide for itself what its needs are and to begin to develop its own economy and health. Notes Mohamed, "imposing change is hard to take anywhere; change from inside the community is the best way" to create new dynamics.

So what's this about a coffee shop? Damien started skycafé at the urging of his then 10-year old daughter, who saw the connections. In 2007, while searching for a way to help support HEAL International, they learned of a grant contest to run the coffee shop at SkySong, the new ASU project located at the southeast corner of Scottsdale Road and McDowell Road. Damien credits his little girl for suggesting that the coffee shop be used as a platform to purchase goods from East Africa (supporting their growing economy), educate the public about HEAL International and raise money to reinvest in the

communities they work in. Damien won that grant. He now donates 25% of the profits from skycafé to HEAL International. And serves a very fine cup of tea.

GET INVOLVED!

Want to make a meaningful change in someone's life? (We're talking about yours.) Volunteer with HEAL International. Damien's philosophy on volunteers: "Volunteers need to see they can change the face of a community." With that in mind, Africa volunteers are required to have a \$500 project budget. It's up to the volunteer to invest that budget in an infrastructure project. (\$1000 is enough in Tanzania to build a real brick-and-mortar building that will stand for the long term.) The volunteer meets with community leaders and HEAL International workers to develop the project, and co-owns the result with the community. Taking these types of small steps, achieving these small successes, is what creates the dynamic environment these communities truly need to grow in. And don't worry - all volunteers receive training, including cultural sensitivity training, to understand fully the context of what their work means in the community. East Africa volunteers assist in teaching about public health, establishing microfinance programs or helping doctors with the delivery of healthcare. For more information about HEAL International's abroad programs contact Damien Salamone at Damien@healinternational.org or 602.334.5530. You can also support HEAL International stateside. "Unfortunately, you don't have to travel very far to find communities in need, or people without access to healthcare," says Damien. "Our success can be measured in improved health outcomes for people living in resource-limited communities." Ways to assist in that success include learning about the issues, volunteering, spending some time in the communities and donating to HEAL International. You can also visit the second floor of SkySong, Monday - Friday from 8am - 3pm, to find skycafé. Visit the café online at www.DrinkTheSky.com.

If you're into healthcare programs, you can join a HEAL International committee responsible for providing one. Or if you like fun and fundraising, you can join the HEAL fundraising team. To volunteer, contact Megan Pendergest, Volunteer Coordinator, at (513) 227 4592 or megan@healinternational.org. To donate, contact Melissa Krohn, Fundraising Coordinator, at (602) 332-5993 or melissa@healinternational.org.

CURRENT ORGANIZATION NEEDS

HEAL International is in need of certified medical personnel who can help to provide services during health events in Guadalupe and Phoenix, and is on the lookout for medical clinics in resource-limited areas that need help. If you know of one, please inform HEAL International



so they can make contact. They also need used medical equipment for facilities in East Africa. Also needed: ADVICE. HEAL International is a young organization striving to provide better services to more people. They are very open to insights from any who have the background and time to offer meaningful advice, either in nonprofit work in general or in healthcare specifically.

Fundraising Dinner Event on Sunday, June 22, 2008, HEAL International is hosting a charity event at Venice Ristorante in Ahwatukee. The dinner event includes flamenco dancing performances and live music, a wine tasting and reception, a silent auction and a four-course meal paired with an excellent assortment of fine wines. Tickets cost \$100 per plate and are being sold only in advance. Venice Ristorante is donating 100% of the profits from the event to HEAL International, and 100% of that money will be used to run HEAL International's healthcare and education programs. Venice Ristorante is located at 4747 E. Elliot Road in Ahwatukee, at the southwest corner of Elliot and 48th Street. For tickets, please contact Megan Pendergest at 513.227.4592 or megan@healinternational.org. Please visit www.HEALInternational.org for more information.

