

## **THE STORY OF MCW** ***Creating Local Change through Global Exchange™***



### **Introduction**

Organized to highlight MCW's growth over the last nine years, this timeline reflects how MCW co-founders Rob Alsbrooks and Eddie Bergman continue to turn their own vision into reality—inspiring, mobilizing and learning from community members, youth retreat participants, board members, donors, supporters, among many others, who have found that every corner can be a “miracle corner.”

### **1999: First Steps**

Rob Alsbrooks of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Eddie Bergman of Long Island, New York shared an idea about empowering young people to be leaders of positive change in their own communities and the larger global community. At the time, Rob was 28 years old and Eddie was 19. They were inspired by Paul Bergman, Eddie's brother and Wharton Business School<sup>i</sup> student, and their personal mentors, including Dr. Peter White, Eddie's East Northport High School teacher, and Dr. Edward Shils, founder of the Wharton School of Entrepreneurship at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Herman Wrice, a Philadelphia-based activist and grassroots community organizer.

Rob and Eddie traveled together to the Ivory Coast to help build a three-room schoolhouse and develop a micro-agricultural initiative for women. The trip was made possible, thanks to their own shared vision and the support of encouraging friends, family, and mentors. Inspired by their experience and each other's personal stories, they then decided to continue to work together to empower youth worldwide.

With continued guidance from Dr. Wrice, Dr. Shils, Dr. White, and others, Rob and Eddie founded Miracle Corners of the World (MCW). The name of the non-profit organization was inspired by the vision and work of Dr. Wrice, who had worked with Rob Alsbrooks and other community members to transform drug haven street corners into safe, drug-free social corners in the Mantua community in West Philadelphia. Many called the transformation a miracle, as a headline in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed.

To begin advancing their dreams, Rob and Eddie wrote to people in a number of countries, who they believed might want to collaborate with them. An American woman living and working in Arusha, Tanzania responded positively and the three decided to meet.

To prepare for their trip to Arusha, Rob and Eddie visited Tanzania's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and met with Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago. Amb. Mwakawago encouraged the pair to visit the East African country and offered his support.

### **2000: MCW Launches the Community Development Program**

Rob and Eddie traveled to Arusha in 2000, meeting with peers and District Commissioner Bertha Mende, who expressed strong interests in working together.

DC Mende supported the local government's granting of land in the densely populated area of Majengo Juu, Arusha, where MCW built its first center: the Dr. Herman Wrice Youth Empowerment Community Center. The center offers English and Spanish language classes, IT opportunities, skills development classes, and preschool education. It is also home to the Perfect Youth Group (PYG), specializing in performing arts.

### **2001: MCW Institutes the Healthcare Program: Dental Care, HIV/AIDS Initiatives, and More**

In 2001, MCW co-sponsored a peer education and crisis-intervention training initiative in New York for 40 students from Soweto, South Africa. MCW also tutored students attending the Grace United Methodist Church's Youth Academy in Harlem, New York.

Responding to the needs and desire of the community, in August, MCW organized a Dental Outreach project where students and faculty from New York University College of Dentistry visited the Arusha center for two weeks to provide free dental services to the community. More than 200 patients received treatment.

Building on the dental model, MCW co-sponsored a youth workshop in Mahalapye, Botswana with the local youth organization Tshwarangano<sup>ii</sup> Against AIDS in Botswana (TAAB). TAAB is a student-led organization that empowers Botswana's youth to become "agents of change" by battling HIV/AIDS with interactive education and youth leadership training.

In addition to the workshop, the two organizations developed a common goal and supportive structure for TAAB to continue to build on the workshop's energy. MCW and TAAB joined hands in August 2003 to establish TAAB's second national chapter in Maun, Botswana.

### **2002: MCW Pilots Youth Leadership Retreat Program**

Rob and Eddie were determined to equip young people around the world with the kind of encouragement and support they received when they shared their vision with their friends, family and mentors in 1999. This inspired them to organize MCW's first Youth Leadership Retreat in January 2002. Hosted by New York University, MCW brought together high school and college students from different socio-economic and geographic communities to discuss leadership, social entrepreneurship, cultural competency, and peaceful co-existence, while building the skills, confidence, and networks needed to make a difference globally and locally.

[Between 2002 and 2008, MCW organized 11 Youth Retreats in the U.S., Switzerland, and Israel, involving approximately 100 youth and adult presenters and more than 400 participants.]

### **2003–2005: MCW Coordinates Leadership, Healthcare and Community Development Programs**

In 2003, MCW partner DC Mende was transferred from Arusha to Songea, Tanzania. During her tenure in the rural community, she invited MCW to work in Songea and introduced MCW to her successor, DC Abeid Mwinyimsa.

MCW extended the Tshwaragano Initiative to Songea and helped create Youth Empowerment for Tanzania United (YETU). Like TAAB, YETU empowers Songea's youth to become agents of change in their community, specifically in the battle against HIV/AIDS.

MCW and YETU then shared the initiative with youth from China, who established the third international partnership for the Tshwaragano Initiative: Health and AIDS Initiative for Knowledge and Education on Youth Involvement (HAI KEYI), with support from Shanghai's Jiaotong University. HAI KEYI focuses on increasing sexual health awareness and decreasing social stigma against those infected with HIV/AIDS.

A second Dental Outreach group visited Songea and treated over 500 patients.

In 2004, Tanzania Ambassador Mwakawago was appointed Special Representative to the Secretary General to the UN Mission in Sierra Leone. Based on MCW's success in Tanzania, he suggested MCW

bring their youth-led, grassroots, collaborative approach to Sierra Leone, to advance the post-war reconstruction process.

Later that year, the third Dental Outreach group, with dentists and dental students from the U.S. and South Africa, treated nearly 650 patients in Songea.

In July 2005, MCW held its eighth Youth Leadership Retreat at New York University. The Open Doors Ceremony was held at the Simon Weisenthal Tolerance Center in New York City.

In August, with support from community members and the District, MCW established the Dr. Edward Shils Youth Empowerment Community Center and Dental Clinic in Kipera Village, a forty-minute walk from downtown Songea. The center offers English language education, IT education, preschool education, library services, and dental care. Since then, Dental Outreach groups have visited Songea annually in August working out of the MCW dental clinic.

Also in August, the fourth Dental Outreach group treated patients in Songea.

### **2006 – 2008: MCW Builds on Foundations**

In March 2006, MCW organized its first gala dinner fundraiser dinner at the Kimmel Center for University Life at New York University.

In July, MCW held its ninth Youth Leadership Retreat at both New York University and at Champlain College in Vermont. After a visit to the Rubin Museum in New York City, the Open Doors Ceremony was held at New York University.

In August, the fifth Dental Outreach group delivered two weeks of services in Songea.

In March 2007, MCW organized its second gala dinner fundraiser dinner at the Kimmel Center for University Life at New York University.

In April, Jacqueline Murekatete, an MCW Youth Leadership Retreat alum, internationally recognized human rights activist, and Rwanda genocide survivor, launched her new Human Rights Corner with its inaugural event, the First Annual Commemorative Event on Rwandan Genocide, at New York University.

That summer, Rob Alsbrooks and Brandon Grossinger helped launch Broad Street Beatz, an after-school program devoted to teaching children living in North Philadelphia digital music production and leadership skills.

In July, MCW held its tenth Youth Leadership Retreat at both New York University and at Champlain College in Vermont. The Open Doors Ceremony was held at New York University in New York City.

In August, after performing a needs assessment and building strong relationships with local youth organizations and community members, MCW established the Mwakawago Youth Empowerment Community Center in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Also in August, the sixth Dental Outreach group, with dentists and dental students from the U.S. treated patients in Songea.

In October, Jacqueline Murekatete was awarded a two-year MCW Fellowship. Founder of MCW Partner Initiative Jacqueline's Human Rights Corner, she is helping establish a community center for survivors living in Bugesera District, Rwanda.

After building relationships with stakeholders in Rwanda, MCW was granted permission by the Rwandan government to work in Rwanda. On the basis of this success, MCW anticipates opening the fourth MCW community center in Rwanda in 2009.

In April 2008, MCW organized its third gala dinner fundraiser dinner at the Kimmel Center for University Life at New York University.

That same month, MCW organized its first three-day educational program in New York City, with events focused on socio-economic and political developments in Sierra Leone, the 14<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide, and the Universal Crime of Genocide. More than 1000 people attended MCW's events during this period.

In May 2008, MCW held its first annual Community Development Leadership Seminar in partnership with Educo Africa, a Cape Town-based organization specializing in leadership training. MCW's entire Community Development Program Team, including Leadership Teams and Local Advisory Boards in Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda, participated in a variety of dynamic team-building and communication-focused activities.

The same month, Amanda Blount, former MCW Project Coordinator in Sierra Leone, was awarded a one-year fellowship. Amanda helped coordinate construction of the Sierra Leone center in 2006-7. As a fellow, she will be based in Sierra Leone and oversee the development of the center's educational and entrepreneurial programs, as well as the eventual construction of two new centers in the country.

In July, MCW will hold its tenth Youth Leadership Retreat at both New York University and at Champlain College in Vermont.

## **Looking Forward**

Through the vocabulary of our relationships the MCW story continues to unfold. Empowered by our history, inspired by our present, and compelled by the future, we look forward to learning from one another and continuing to write our history together—transforming visions into reality through the power of our shared purpose, our core values, and our relationships.

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<sup>i</sup> Wharton, part of University of Pennsylvania, is "dedicated to generating the ideas and knowledge that transform global business."  
<http://www.wharton.upenn.edu/whartonfacts/>

<sup>ii</sup> Tshwarangano means "unity" in Setswana