

BeadforLife

It began with one woman's desire to create and share — and three other women's willingness to address that need.

Ugandan Millie Grace's paper-rolled beads caught the attention of Torkin Wakefield, Ginny Jordan and Devin Hibbard during their visit to a Ugandan refugee camp in 2004. Torkin described the intrigue in watching Millie rolling beads as a "women's moment."

Through the beads, the traveling Boulder County women saw the palpable story of women who — despite living with poverty, AIDS and war — still wanted to create something beautiful. They saw a story that could reach millions crossing oceans and racial boundaries.

Their little spark of a nonprofit, called BeadforLife, started with a \$5,000 viable business grant in the summer of '04 and was profiled in Oprah's "O" Magazine by fall of that year. While none of the three women had business backgrounds (two being psychotherapists), they had keen people skills and an eye for recognizing the potential of a story rooted in the heart.

In just four and a half years, their organization, spanning two continents, now employs 300 beaders and more than 40 employees.

BeadforLife is expanding its programs this year. It will begin offering a week-long high school curriculum about extreme poverty and how to help. The group is also launching a new strategy in Uganda to connect poor,



Ginny Jordan and Torkin Wakefield of BeadforLife sell necklaces for Ugandan women.

skilled artisans to the global market.

Jordan and Wakefield attribute the nonprofit's rapid growth to a "Circle of Engagement." They found that people generally want to do good for others, but they just need an outlet.

The BeadforLife process

is a cycle of nourishment.

Imagine: A Ugandan woman named Josephine makes a couple strands of beautiful, paper-rolled beads. A Boulder woman visits the BeadforLife store (1143 Portland Place, Suite 1, in Boulder) and purchases two necklaces for \$10 each, one for herself and

How to help

Hold a "beadparty," which brings women together to have fun, buy beads, eat African food, watch a video and write to the beaders. Forty percent of the hostesses hold more than one party. To learn more about this and other ways to help, check out www.beadforlife.org.

one for her sister in Ohio. Josephine earns money to support herself, her husband and her six grandchildren (three of whom contracted AIDS from their parents). Fascinated by the beads' story, the Ohio sister, in turn, finds on the Web site (www.beadforlife.org) that she can hold a "beadparty" to share the story with others. Out of that party steps an older woman who decides she wants to spend some of her retirement time volunteering in Uganda with the beaders teaching them financial management skills.

The Ugandan woman in the above story makes three times more for a necklace than she could sell it on the open market in Uganda.

"They would remain a member of extreme poverty (living on less than \$2 per day), a population that makes up 45 percent of the world," says Wakefield.

Meeting the standards of the Fair Trade Federation assures that BeadforLife provides a quality product, helps artisans participate fairly in the global market, avoids degradation of the environment and provides healthy working conditions for its beaders.

Jordan and Wakefield stress that the success of fair trade products depends on their ability to elicit pride in their consumers, not guilt or shame. Indeed, the beads are the carrier of a story of female pride, a story that women around the world not only identify with, but also desire to own, share and pass on.

— *By Amanda McCracken*

Photo by Jonathan Castner