

Gratitude in Giving



Above: For the Good founder Kayce Anderson plays a game of Hokey Pokey with school girls in Magutuni, Kenya, before a large pad distribution and education session on the organization's very first day of work in the field in 2015.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY KATE LAPIDES

KAYCE ANDERSON NEVER PLANNED ON BEING A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR. Or an innovator. Or the founder of a nonprofit working to improve girls' access to education in rural Kenya. In 2014, the Glenwood Springs resident was still deeply immersed in her research, happily spending a third of each year hitchhiking around the Ecuadorian Andes capturing insects for her lab. She'd recently become a mother to a cherished, beautiful daughter named Blu. She loved her family, her work, and her adventures; her life was rich with everything she loved. And then, one day, a friend nonchalantly asked her if she'd volunteer to sew sanitary pads for schoolgirls in Kenya. That's when she dived into the data and learned that millions of girls around the world drop out of school each year due to lack of access to sanitary pads and the related challenges inextricably weaved with

that lack. The inequality of opportunity this represented struck her so profoundly, she left her beloved research to create a nonprofit dedicated to doing something about it.

"I'm not sure what gives me the nerve to think that I can actually make a difference in a bunch of lives," says Anderson, on her decision to found For the Good, despite little experience in nonprofit management or development work. "I think the stars crossed just so that I recognized an amazing opportunity to leverage my strengths with the strengths of individuals on the other side of the world. The most transformative leaps in my life—graduate school, motherhood, and a significant career shift—were facilitated by a high level of naiveté. Those were always followed by a recognition that I was in over my head."

ONE INNOCENT QUESTION GALVANIZED AN ADVENTUROUS ECOLOGIST TO ABANDON HER RESEARCH CAREER AND BECOME A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION. IN HER JOURNEY TO EMPOWER OTHERS, SHE GAINED AN EVEN MORE PROFOUND GRATITUDE FOR HER OWN LIFE'S GOOD FORTUNE.



Instead of being daunted by her inexperience, Anderson sees great value in being a beginner when launching into unknown terrain.

"Toward the end of grad school, after being exhausted with trying to appear an expert, I learned that being honest about your ignorance is actually very well received, especially if you are working to understand. It's humbling and healthy to remain a learner. Having a learning mindset is incredibly important in development work, especially in a very different culture. In some ways it suits me well to be in this position, because our work with communities is an equal exchange rather a teacher-student relationship. We learn from each other."

For Anderson, the journey from ecologist to executive director of a nonprofit working in Kenya has been alternately exciting, challenging, humbling, frustrating, deeply rewarding, and full of heart-stopping beauty. For the Good began its journey by providing pads and reproductive health education to girls in rural Tharaka-Nithi County, backed by research indicating that lack of access to menstrual hygiene supplies was keeping girls out of school. As the organization delved deeper into its work, however, spending more and more time listening deeply to communities and doing its own surveys, she began to question whether For the Good's focus on pads was addressing the right barrier.

"It's true that lack of pads and an understanding of reproductive health creates barriers to education for girls," reflects Anderson. "But it is only part of the story. Lack of access to pads is a symptom rather than a root cause of the gender inequities that keep girls out of school. To improve opportunities for girls in a meaningful and lasting way, we need to address the source of the problem: the idea that education is not relevant for a girl or worth the return on the investment. It is this idea that we are working to change."

Five years in, For the Good now works with communities to assess and address both the tangible and intangible barriers to girls' education on a hyper-local scale. Driven by Anderson's research on interventions that have proven highly effective in other Global South communities, the organization distills what was transformative in those places and adapts and applies those interventions in culturally relevant ways to the communities they work in. More importantly, staff also listen, deeply, to the people it is their goal to serve.

"The communities we work with are experts; they've been pursuing their way of life rather successfully for eons," says Anderson. "We may have access to information and ideas that will make their communities stronger and more resilient. But listening hard to them is a critical ingredient that allows us to be responsive and compassionate and better develop interventions that are effective and lasting."

Anderson's dedication to creating a better world for girls stems from a passionate belief that every one of them should have an equal opportunity to develop their voice and realize their potential, regardless of geography or circumstance.

"I see a real desire to do something big in the world in these girls, and I feel their frustration at being stifled by others. Most of us in the Global North are incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to empower ourselves, to have opportunities given to us by the circumstances we are born into and our upbringings. As Blu grows up and looks more like the girls we work with, and I see her hunger and potential to do amazing things, I palpably feel the loss that we as a world are suffering when other girls are denied the same freedoms. There is so much curiosity and insight held latent in the millions of girls (and boys) that never have an opportunity to develop themselves."

The challenges of development work are intense and numerous. There are pressing needs, lives in the balance, unexpected complications at every turn. Yet since starting her journey into the work five years ago, Anderson has discovered that one of the hardest dilemmas to solve may be personal, embedded in the geographic distance that separates her work in Africa and her life and family in the Roaring Fork Valley.

"When I am in Kenya, I question my decision to leave my family," reflects Anderson. "When I am at home, I think I need to be in Kenya more often to learn more and develop those relationships. It's hard when your loves are separated by an ocean. My hope is that when Blu and Rayne [Anderson's two-year-old son] are a little older, I will be able to integrate them more into my travel and work. I certainly wouldn't be able to do any of it without an incredibly supportive husband that is willing to single parent for weeks at a time."

CONTINUED >

GRATITUDE IN GIVING (CONTINUED)

Anderson adds, "Ultimately, I hope that my time away from my family will make a better world for them. Through this work, I've been able to feel a deeper connection to other humans and the fulfillment of seeing my labors make tangible impacts in the lives of others. I know myself much better, which has made me a truer friend, mother, and wife. And I've become more aware of my own fortune in the world, which has given me profound gratitude for my life."

FACTS FOR THE GOOD

+ 9.5 million: Estimated number of girls in sub-Saharan Africa who will never set foot in a classroom.

+ 3000: Number of girls in Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya, whom For the Good reached with health information and pad distributions from 2015-2018.

+ 96%: Percentage of girls in Tharaka-Nithi who now successfully transfer onto secondary school.

+ 16%: Percentage of girls in Narok County who transfer onto secondary school. In 2019, For the Good began partnering with communities in Narok to address the barriers that are keeping girls from school and resulting in some of the highest school dropout rates in Kenya.

+ 485: Number of passionate believers in girls' education who've supported For the Good's work to date, changing thousands of lives for the better.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: For the Good hopes to raise \$35,000 on Tuesday, December 10, Colorado Gives Day, to fund its program launch in Narok County. Go to ColoradoGives.org/ForTheGood to add your powerful support and voice. Every dollar makes a difference.





1. Recess games at Osinedate Primary School, Loita Hills, Kenya, 2019.
2. Anderson in the Chogoria market, 2019.
3. Three girls at Entaskera Primary School, 2019.

4. Portrait of Vivian, Entaskera Primary School, Loita Hills, Kenya, 2019.
5. Portrait of Najma, Entaskera Primary School student, 2019.
6. A classroom at Entaskera Primary School, Loita Hills, Kenya, 2019. A significant challenge of education for all children in rural regions is the lack of resources. This includes lack of access to books, school supplies, and additionally, an adequate number of teachers. At Entaskera, four teachers managed eight different classrooms on an average day.
7. Frida at home with her family, Kabariange, Kenya, 2018. Frida lives in the village of Kabariange, in the middle of Tharaka-Nithi County. Frida's mother was born with a club foot and walks with a cane. She walked two kilometers from their home to the Kabariange Primary School to meet and talk to For the Good staff about how important she felt it was to educate her children. Frida's parents were unwavering that she would finish school, despite the sacrifices it meant in the short term. Photo: Kayce Anderson
8. Portrait of Nasieko, Loita Hills, Kenya, 2019. Nasieko was the first in her family of 16 to begin high school; when her family could no longer afford her education, they turned to the Maasai tradition of finding her a husband in exchange for cattle and cash. In 2019 however, with her parents' blessing and the financial support of a For the Good donor, she returned to school.