Young philanthropists can effect real change

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Younger philanthropists have had access to an unprecedented amount of information about the world in which they live, including the many serious challenges facing people and the planet. Their commitment to solving local, national and global problems is remarkable, and they bring unique skills and perspectives to their philanthropic work.

An excellent example is 24-year-old Denver native Jessica Posner. While studying abroad in Nairobi, Kenya, Jessica learned that 66 percent of girls in Kibera - the largest slum in Africa - trade sex for food as early as age 6 and that only 8 percent of girls in Kibera ever attend school. Jessica found this situation to be intolerable and co-founded Shining Hope for Communities to combat gender inequity and poverty in Kibera. With limited resources, the organization opened the area's first free school for girls and, in just a few years, has created a gardening program; a library; an Internet-ready computer center; ecologically friendly latrines that convert waste to methane gas, which can be used for cooking and electricity; income-generating projects for women living with HIV/AIDS; and Kibera's first accessible community health center, staffed by a full-time nurse. In recognition of her work, Jessica received the 2010 VH-1 Do Something Award, including a $100,000 stipend that she's investing in more programs for girls and women in Kenya.

Much has been written about the responsibility of parents to teach younger generations the importance of giving back to the community and the role that philanthropy plays in a meaningful life. (See, for example, my February column, "Involve Kids Early in Family's Giving Ethos"). Equally important is that children and grandchildren enlighten their parents and grandparents about their philanthropic efforts and goals.

Share your vision, enthusiasm and ideas with your parents and grandparents. Invite them to join you at a meeting or event of a nonprofit organization that is important to you or to one you think would have particular meaning to them. Ask them to volunteer with you for an afternoon to learn about the nonprofit work you are doing. If you donate to a cause, ask whether they will match your gift. Whenever you can, show your family's older generations what you are passionate about and encourage them to join you in your commitment to making a difference.

Likewise, learn everything you can from the more experienced philanthropists in your family. Ask parents and grandparents what causes they care about most and why. See if they're willing to involve you in helping to create and implement the family's philanthropic goals. Inquire about how philanthropy fits into their estate plans and how
you can help perpetuate the family's charitable legacy. Meaningful multigenerational efforts greatly increase the likelihood that philanthropy will be a positive family experience that brings generations together around shared purposes and values.

If you are a younger person wanting to learn more, there are many organizations working to support "next-generation philanthropy." The group 21/64 offers great tools and information for young philanthropists; Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy seeks to strengthen the next generation of grantmakers; Generation Waking Up engages young people to create a thriving, just and sustainable world; and Resource Generation organizes younger people with wealth to leverage resources for social change.

Local resources for younger donors include three chapters of Active 20/30 in Fort Collins and Denver (www.da2030.com, www.rma2030.org); GoodSpark; the Gordian Fund; Mile High Society Project; My Colorado Project; Roots and Branches Foundation; and the Young Philanthropists Foundation.

Younger philanthropists such as Jessica are moving mountains by bringing new energy, creativity, skills, passion, resources and perspectives to help solve the problems that challenge our community, nation and world. The synergy of multigenerational teams of philanthropists working together gives us hope for real, long-lasting and transformational change.

**Nonprofit of the Month**

Since 1970, Third Way Center has achieved impressive success rates with Colorado's most traumatized and abandoned youth, ages 15 to 18. With seven licensed residential treatment centers, two alternative high schools, a community after-care program, robust vocational training and volunteer mentoring, vulnerable young people are given one last chance to prepare for adulthood. Rather than living on the streets or going to jail, there is a "third way."

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