

“PBS NewsHour Weekend” Feature — Ozark Water Projects



- Posted by Jennifer Gibson on 03 May 2017

The benefits of giving are well-known. It can increase happiness, and some studies say it might help people live longer.

But how can people who seem to be on the receiving end give something back? Arkansas has one of the highest poverty rates in the country, and in 2015, 27 percent of children under 18 were living at or below

the poverty level. A project started in the Ozarks is giving kids around the state a chance to get involved in helping people in more impoverished areas around the world without spending a dime.

Ozark Water Projects is an initiative that gives Arkansas kids a chance to help people who lack access to clean water. The non-profit gets 35 cents per pound of old shoes they sell to a distributor. Those shoes go to micro businesses, mostly in African countries. The money Ozark Water Projects gets for the shoes is used to build or repair water systems in areas that lack access to clean water in African countries and in Haiti.



Karla Allen co-founded Ozark Water Projects with her husband. "Kids are constantly outgrowing shoes, and parents never really know what to do with them. And so, when we go to a school and I explain to these bright-eyed young children how they can help other people with their stinky, old shoes, they giggle and laugh, and they just usually bring in tons and tons of shoes."



Allen says she has seen a remarkable response from children in the poorest communities. "One of the poorest schools in the Little Rock School District, they brought in a bunch of shoes, like 1,500 pairs of shoes, and the kids were so overwhelmed with what they had done. The counselor there called me about a week later, and she said, 'You're not going to believe what's happened.' She said, 'you know, everyone gives to these kids. They get the backpacks. They get all of these things. People give them so much.' And she said now she had kids coming to her thinking of ways that they could help other people that didn't cost them anything."

Children at these schools do not stop at donating; they also organize the donation drives in their communities. Students at Rural Special Elementary in Fox, Arkansas, have been traveling to other schools, giving presentations on the need for access to clean water around the world and showing kids how to set up the donation drives in their communities.



Echo Mitchell, a student at Rural Special Elementary explained what inspired her to get involved. "Eventually, if you help enough people, you're going to see it come back to you. And it may not be through payment, but it's going to be in a way that you'll never expect. And it's going to be the best way possible."

Ozark Water Projects plans to build three wells in Haiti this summer once they collect enough shoes, about 35,000 more pounds.



Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCvDVeKDAWc>