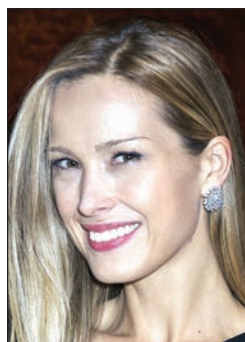


Creating Happy Hearts

An Interview with Petra Nemcova,
Founder and Chairwoman, Happy Hearts Fund

EDITORS' NOTE Petra Nemcova serves as an Ambassador at Large to Haiti. Nemcova is a supermodel with international success, gracing campaigns for Cartier, La Perla, Clarins, and Lancaster. She has also worked with Victoria's Secret and was the 2003 Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition cover girl. She is the author of *Love Always, Petra*, which she wrote to help children affected by the Tsunami. She also co-produced *A Model Life* with Petra Nemcova on TLC in 2007. Her numerous public speaking engagements have addressed important topics such as education at the UN Assembly Education For All conference, disaster preparedness at TEDxObserver, and the power of choice at a number of universities. She serves on the advisory board of the Somali Mam Foundation and the Glamour's Women of the Year Fund. Nemcova has received several accolades for her philanthropic work from several organizations including the United Nations, Women Together, and Do Something.



Petra Nemcova

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Happy Hearts Fund (www.happyheartsfund.org; HHF) is a nonprofit foundation dedicated to rebuilding schools and restoring hope and opportunity in the lives of children after natural disasters. Globally, HHF is active in six countries and has built and rebuilt 70 schools and kindergartens. Since inception, their programs have benefited more than 40,700 children and 337,450 community members.

How did the idea of the Happy Hearts Fund come about? How did you focus it?

After surviving the tsunami in Thailand in 2004, I was confined to bed – I could not move – but I wanted to go and help build schools for those who had lost their loved ones and were dramatically impacted.

When I could walk again, I went to Thailand with my sister and some friends to find out what action would create the biggest impact and be most sustainable. Happy Hearts was formed as a result of that trip to Thailand.

Many times after the first responders come in, we find that the children and communities are forgotten, which drove me to create this program.

We learned that making sure the children had safe schools to go to would make the biggest impact; they can gain a sense of normalcy by going back to their routines in a familiar place. It's also

about educating them, which means they can better help their families and be central to their communities. Once we did this, within six months to a year later, families from other communities would move into a community we had helped because there was a safe school with quality education.

In the beginning stages of Happy Hearts, we focused on education, emotional support, and health. We later realized that we had to make education the main focus. This was critical because one of the most important things anyone in

business or philanthropy has to do is focus on the problem and show results; it's what attracts others to help more.

In the early stages, we were learning how foundations indicate where the money will go, which is a challenge in philanthropy. Understanding that, I wanted to create a structure where supporters could donate not only to a particular country but to a particular school, and could be involved as much or as little as they wanted; everything goes to our children but we had to find how to take care of the admin, and that's where our board of directors comes in, to see that all the administrative costs are underwritten.

What are some of the projects you're working on and the impact you have had?

In 2005, I started to establish Happy Hearts and it became official in 2006. In six years, we have started 70 schools around the world.

The organization was started in Thailand but we are actively rebuilding in Indonesia, Peru, Mexico, and Haiti. We're catering to over 40,000 children and 340,000 community members. The impact is not just on the children but on the community as a whole.

We tend to go into areas that are not attractive for others to be present. So we're coming in when others are leaving or when people have not heard about the disaster.

In every country where we have worked, we have partners on the ground: a local NGO or a corporation with strong CSR or government – in some countries, we have all three partners on the same team.

We leverage our donors with supporters in that country so we can get engaged at the country level. We encourage them to be part of the change from within. Through them, we have seen incredible quality work and learning and sharing with each other.

Most recently, Happy Hearts along with March to the Top, Paramount Group, and Halcyon Gallery, unveiled our newest fundraising initiative: the exquisitely crafted Force of Nature II sculpture by world-renowned artist Lorenzo Quinn. Placed for a limited time in the lobby of 1301 Avenue of the Americas in New York City, with its permanent home in the courtyard of 31 West 52nd Street, Force of Nature II will help raise awareness and funds to build schools in areas affected by natural disasters through the sale of tribute plaques engraved with personal dedications and mounted at the sculpture base at its permanent home. The plaques will go on sale starting on Earth Day 2013.

With so much need, is it tough to say no? How do you decide where to focus your efforts?

It's tough, but you cannot cover all the natural disasters. There are others who are suffering poverty because of abuse or neglect. But we focus on those affected by natural disasters. Our first priority is having a strong partner on the ground; if we don't find such a partner, we don't go to that country. It's also about having an engaged community that is attempting to help themselves and has taken actions to recover.

We try to build in countries and areas where it will be long-lasting for current and future generations.

How have you attracted the right partners for this project?

It's not my job – it's my passion. I know how these children have been forgotten and their lives have been ruined, and it doesn't have to be this way. You cannot control a natural disaster but you can control the actions you take afterwards.

I'm the bridge connecting two worlds – the children and my friends and partners – and bringing happiness to both sides; hence the name Happy Hearts because you create happy hearts for children and supporters on both ends.

Seeing results is very important because you can have the passion but without proof that it's working, people won't follow and support you.

We always challenge ourselves to build more sustainable programs and to create better partnerships.

Some people see the passion and they get it; and others see the numbers and that's what they trust. ●