



Non-profit Whole World Water's *raison d'être* is to bring clean, safe water to people who lack it, as soon as possible

Water for the world



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KAMPONG Trach is a rural village in Cambodia with a broken road running through it. Of its community of 5,000 townspeople, nearly 1,000 attend the local primary school. Up until recently the school had no access to clean water. Water for drinking, washing, cooking and cleaning had to be brought in each day from a neighbouring house, but there was never enough. Pupils were frequently missing school due to sickness caused by poor sanitation, and worse.

It took just three days to install a water pump funded by the Whole World Water (WWW) foundation, partnered with Water Charity and in association with the Peace Corp Volunteers. Combined with five other projects that the American non-profit has carried out in poor Cambodian villages, now approximately 30,000 people have access to safe water which they didn't have last year.

"Not to have a simple thing like clean water is devastating for a community. It affects everything," says Karena Albers, a former television executive who founded non-profit Whole World Water, in 2012. "Without safe water, children have limited food, they have stunted growth, they get sick and miss school. Diseases are innumerable."

The charity's *raison d'être* is to bring clean, safe water to all of the world's one billion people who lack it, as soon as possible. "With access to clean water, all of these issues are wiped out almost immediately," she says. Her mission is running in conjunction with the official rollout of the Sustainable Development Goals which began at the start of this year. These 17 global goals seek to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change. Goal number six is "universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services (WASH) by 2030", which is where Ms Albers wants to make a difference.

"It's going to be an incredible feat, one that requires collaboration between many different industries," she says. "The core belief of WWW is that single industries, united on non-competitive sustainable platforms, have the ability and responsibility to address and eradicate global issues, ultimately driving massive, transformative social change for good."

So instead of relying on wealthy donors, Ms Albers initially decided to harness the luxury hotel industry to raise the US\$1 billion she wants for her mission. The idea is simple – that hotels should filter their water at source, bottle it in 750ml reusable glass bottles, sell it to their guests and contribute 10 per cent of proceeds to her fund, of which 100 per cent goes to clean

and safe water projects around the world.

In three years since launch she has persuaded 125 luxury hotels and venues to adopt the scheme, including Fairmont Hotels, several Ritz-Carlton properties, Richard Branson's Virgin Limited Edition Hotels, Raffles Hotels and Soneva Group. Some sell bottles for £1 (S\$1.95), others for US\$12. "We only mandate that they contribute a minimum 10 per cent to the WWW Fund, regardless of what price they choose to sell it for," she explains. So far they have raised over US\$1 million, which she admits is "slower than anticipated".

However, this "is an industry that operates on tiny margins, and if we want WWW to be successful, we need to make an attractive offering". "Although it seems small – at scale – it has the potential to be enormous," she adds.

In an effort to speed up fundraising and awareness, she has come up with a far-reaching campaign that will target the public. It's called Fountains for the Future and takes place between August and September this year in London, backed by two dozen movers and shakers: Ben Elliott, Richard Branson and David de Rothschild, to name a few.

The idea is this: All across Westminster, whimsical water fountains will pop up on roads and squares, allowing the public to draw free, fresh water in reusable non-plastic bottles. Each fountain will be uniquely decorated and signed by a renowned British fashion artist, designer or celebrity including Damien Hirst, Victoria Beckham, Paul Smith and Stella McCartney.

Local restaurants and hotels can sponsor a fountain with their own branding. Then in October, fountains will be auctioned off and monies will be invested in programmes in India, Africa as well as funding a study around the impact of plastic waste on municipalities, says Ms Albers.

"This campaign, beyond weaning the public off branded, plastic-bottled water, is also designed to raise awareness about the global clean and safe drinking water crisis," adds Ms Albers.

"Trillions of dollars are needed to reach all of the 17 development goals in time," she adds. "We all have a responsibility to be more creative in the way we think and behave, whether it's the public, industries, companies and individuals. I'd like to wake up and read some good news in the paper, for a change." **W**

Billionaire is the global luxury lifestyle website and magazine for ultra high net worth and affluent individuals pursuing the good life



PHOTOS: WHOLE WORLD WATER