

Finding and Taking Responsibility for the One Thing That Matters



By Christine Garde,
 Founder, CouldYou.org
 @CouldYouAfrica

Let me start with some questions and end with a quote.

The questions: Knowing that we all can't do everything, what if each of us did the hard work of discovering our "one thing"? What if we knew what we are passionate about, what we are skilled at and what we love doing? What if we then harnessed that passion, skill and love, and paid attention to one need in the world that makes us mad... and did something about it?

You see, in today's world, opportunities abound for giving time and money to counteract the effects of poverty. In parallel with this, a rise in voluntourism



has highlighted people's desires to do something meaningful.

However, while volunteering at a local soup kitchen, building a school or spending time with orphans can be meaningful, there is often a poor match between skills and needs. When the focus is more on creating experiences for volunteers than on responding to the needs of local communities, serious damage can be done.

I encourage you to watch the TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: **The Danger of a Single Story**. In it, she warns about perpetuating the old story of Africa as a "place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and Aids, unable to speak for themselves, waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner."

This state of affairs will not change if well-meaning foreigners continue to think in terms of providing aid and help to the poor. Instead, what is needed today is for people with generous hearts to partner with local leadership and to fill in any gaps the locals determine. Everyone needs to understand that sustainable change for people living in poverty comes not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

I started **my organization** out of a desire to help people live life at the interface where, as the American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner says, "your deepest gladness and the world's deep need meet." When people find that place, they not only make the world a better place, but they experience abundant



CouldYou? alumna Whynde Kuehn bringing her expertise in Business Transformation to the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Fellows. After many powerful experiences in voluntourism, she recently founded Metanoia Global (www.metanoiaglobal.com).

life, deep joy and satisfaction. Through immersive experiences, we help people unlock their passions and purposes, and leverage their talents, resources and spheres of influence, in partnership with locally-led initiatives that work to find local solutions to local problems, addressing a need that the community requests, not one imposed upon it.

So the answer is not to stop the voluntourism movement, as many people

claim. Rather it is time for everyone to take responsibility for their actions – to do their homework and make wise choices about with whom to travel.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." How marvelous if those words one day became our reality.

Editorial Takeaway

A question: Why not imagine the best of all possible worlds and work toward it in a constructive manner?

While there is undeniable value in

analyzing and repairing the shortcomings of existing systems, dreaming big and acting in the most positive way possible are perhaps of even greater value.