

## *Phoenix Forward magazine*

# *David Kenneth Waldman found his place in the world using his nonprofit to help African girls*

By

Jenny Jedeikin

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David Kenneth Waldman had an epiphany that changed his life during a trip to Thailand in 1990. He had traveled to the northern Mekong River region to visit a young girl he'd been sponsoring financially through a nonprofit organization, Plan International.

"As I stood on a dirt road looking up at her small house on stilts, I had a sudden realization," says Waldman, who teaches in the **master's of public administration program** at the University of Phoenix **Maryland Campus**. "I turned to the guide next to me and said, 'I know what I'm going to do with the rest of my life. I'm going to create a foundation for children.' "

Waldman remained true to his word. To date, his 10-year-old **To Love Children (TLC) Educational Foundation International Inc.** organization has given thousands of school-age girls in rural Africa access to books and educational materials, and support for their education.

Waldman decided to focus his efforts on girls because they often don't have the same educational opportunities as boys, and because he believes being educated will help break their cycle of poverty.

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TLC has partnered with organizations in Kenya and Uganda to open libraries in schools and communities, and in 2004 sponsored a walk in Uganda to promote the education of girls. More than 35,000 children, teachers and parents participated, he says.

Over the years, Waldman says, his staff has included more than 100 volunteers in 45 countries. He and some volunteers currently are raising money for a program called “Healthy and Smart” to teach girls in Kenya and Uganda about HIV/AIDS.

The road to creating TLC wasn't an easy journey for Waldman. “The founding of the nonprofit was an evolution of me trying to find my place in the world,” he explains, “and it's been a long struggle.”

Determined to succeed, he supported himself as a substitute teacher, textbook salesman and curriculum developer, and returned to school to gain the skills he needed to accomplish his goal. He also received a General Research Grant of \$3,000 from University of Phoenix to help fund his work.

While earning a master's degree in international relations and a doctorate in public policy, Waldman studied poverty issues in Third World countries and planned how to shape his nonprofit.

In 2002, three years after its establishment, the foundation received “consultative status” with the United Nations, meaning Waldman's work is recognized as aligned with U.N. goals. A highlight of Waldman's career was addressing the U.N. twice in 2007, he says, sharing his ideas to end poverty with the international community.

Today, he balances his nonprofit endeavors with part-time work as an instructor and hopes to inspire others. “I'm trying to teach my students to be creative problem-solvers,” he says, “so that they're able to effect positive change in the world.”

Waldman's professional and personal lives finally are gelling as one. “For the first time in my life, I don't wake up thinking, ‘Oh, I have to go to work.’ For the first time, my work is my life,” he says. “It's exactly what I've always wanted.”