

# HIGHLINE

notes

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10-year-old Sawyer  
Anderson is changing  
perceptions of basic  
necessities and the world  
one book at a time.

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# BRINGING WATER TO THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

Written by: Erin Hemme Froslie

Sawyer Anderson is only 10 and has already experienced a valuable life lesson: Kids (and cookies) can change the world in big ways.

Over the past two years, the fifth-grader at Oak Grove Lutheran School has helped to raise enough money to build 35 wells for water-scarce villages in Africa. In addition, she wrote and illustrated a book about her efforts and now shares that story through presentations.

Sawyer was inspired to help kids a half world away when her dad, Mark Anderson, took a mission trip to the south-central African country of Zambia. He came back with stories about children who were injured or worse as they walked long distances to access water.

One story affected Sawyer deeply. An 8-year-old named Brian was fetching water when a poisonous snake bit his arm. His arm needed to be amputated. He also lost his sister when she drowned in a shallow well.

When Sawyer heard Brian's story, she knew she needed to do something. "I was in shock because he was my age," she says.

Sawyer decided to raise money for Wellspring for the World and World Vision, two organizations that

secure clean, safe water for people living in water-scarce nations. Her goal was \$50 – enough to provide clean water for one person for life.

She and her grandma baked monster cookies to sell at a rummage sale. By the end of the day, the elementary student who is often busy with dance lessons, theatrical events, sports, and music activities had raised \$188.

"That was exciting, but I thought we could do more," Sawyer says.

So she sold more cookies – a few people even offered donations but told her to keep the baked goods – and raised more than \$1,200. Then she set her goal even higher: \$2,500, which after matches from Wellspring and World Vision would build a well in one village. By the time Sawyer was done selling grandma's cookies (with a lot of help from some friends to fill orders for 84 dozen cookies), she had raised almost \$5,000.

"People use water for cooking, cleaning, brushing their teeth, bathing . . . for everything," she says. "Kids can't even go to school if

they're too busy fetching water."

Social media posts (with an assist from dad) helped Sawyer bring attention to Brian's story and more donations flowed in. Then she decided to design and make a chitenge bag to auction off at a charity event for Wellspring. Chitenge are typically skirts made from colorful African wax fabric, with smaller pieces and scraps used for other accessories in parts of Africa.

The bag sold for more than \$6,000.

"I was very much like . . . wow," Sawyer says. "It was crazy."

That success motivated her to invite others into her fundraising circle. She asked one of the pastors at her church, Hope Lutheran in Fargo, whether kids at the church could help design and sell additional chitenge bags. More than 100 volunteers partnered to make and sell these Bags of Hope for \$50 a piece – the amount it would take to provide one person with clean water for life.

By this time, she had raised more



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than \$26,000 for clean water.

But the project kept multiplying in impact. Some people bought more chitenge bags than they needed and asked Sawyer to find someone who could use them. After some research, she decided to give the bags to the Jeremiah Program, which helps single mothers finish college and find employment.

While that decision was meant to benefit participants in the Jeremiah Program, it also helped Sawyer expand her ability to raise awareness about the lack of clean water around the world.

After meeting Sawyer, the Jeremiah Project's development director encouraged the elementary student to write a book about her experiences.

So, she did.

This past summer, Sawyer published "Water Works," which she wrote and illustrated. All of the proceeds from the book, which sells for \$10, support Wellspring and World Vision.

In the book, Sawyer tells the story of Brian but softens it with details designed to be more friendly for young readers. She also tells a gentler version of the story of Maria, who was blinded by a venomous snake while gathering water from a shallow well. Her 2-year-old daughter guided her back to their village.

Since she started her philanthropic endeavor, Sawyer has given more than 90 presentations to organizations, schools, businesses and church groups.

More than 780 million people

around the world don't have access to clean water. Sawyer hopes her book raises awareness about this basic necessity and changes lives.

Earlier this year "Water Works" was distributed to 1,000 schools in Zambia through World Vision. The book is also being translated into Vietnamese and will be published in Vietnam.

"None of us could imagine where this all would lead," says Sawyer's dad, Mark. And that may be the point.

As Sawyer points out, her book doesn't really end. The last words of the book are: "I guess a kid can make a difference." That's as much a challenge as it is a statement.

"I didn't end the story because it's not over yet," she says. ■