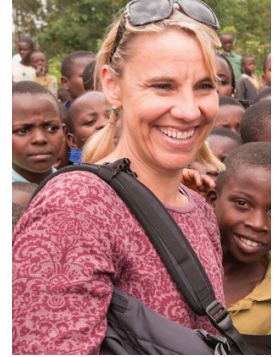


# FANTASTIC VOYAGE

## TRACY EVANS SHOWS HOW A WINTER OLYMPIAN HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE FOR AFRICAN CHILDREN



I get asked the question all the time. “How did a Winter Olympian from Park City, UT decide to start a foundation to help kids 10,000 miles away in sun-drenched Africa?” My answers are simple—my mother and my father. My mother inspired me through the international medical work she has done as a nurse for over 25 years. She encouraged me to go on a volunteer trip to Africa and told me that simply playing catch with a child will light up their life as well as yours. That volunteer trip opened my eyes and changed my life.

My father instilled in me a belief that I could do anything I put my mind to doing. As an Olympian in the sport of Freestyle Skiing - Aerials, I had to remember his words often in my competitive years to make sure I landed on my feet and not my head! That lesson carried over to my belief that starting a foundation was something that I could and would do.

In 2008, after spending two weeks in an orphanage in Malawi, Africa, playing sports that were familiar to the kids as well as introducing them to some new sports, I saw first-hand how much these kids could learn through sport—simple values such as fair play, respect and leadership. What impacted me most was the interaction (or lack there of) between boys and girls. When we played softball with the

kids, there was no prior knowledge of this sport as it relates to gender or culture so to watch boys and girls learn this new game on an equal playing field was eye opening. It was even nice to see some of the girls doing better than the boys. But it was very different when boys and girls tried to play soccer together. The girls were submissive and often let the boys have the ball. What became clear is that there are lessons to be taught in both situations with regard to promoting gender equity, and more importantly, what the kids learn on the field can have a tremendous positive impact in their daily lives.

After returning from my volunteer trip, and deciding on the name Kids Play International, I thought I would simply continue organizing short-term volunteer trips to Malawi and Rwanda, Africa; which I did in 2009 and 2010. Sport-minded volunteer teams brought over sports equipment, played sports with the kids, left the equipment and went home. Needless to say, I learned very quickly that this was very shortsighted and it impacted the volunteers more than the kids. Once we left, the kids wouldn't play until we came back the following year.

So I went back to the lessons that my parents instilled in me. I took some time to surround myself with experts in the fields of sport for development and athlete philanthropy. I built a team that has helped me re-focus Kids Play's mission to use sport to promote gender equity in communities impacted by genocide. We have re-launched our Let's Play Fair! program in the rural community of Gatagara, Rwanda. We're building a foundation dedicated to rebuilding community, breaking down segregation and developing relationships between boys and girls based on trust, mutual respect and fair play.

*For more information, visit [kidsplayintl.org](http://kidsplayintl.org).*