

Adara Group expands assistance through philanthropy of business



Audette Exel, centre, with Sister Christine Otai, head of the neonatal intensive care unit at Kiwoko Hospital, Uganda.

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She was so small that the nurses could hold her in the palm of their hands. And she was so mighty that, no matter what, she was determined to breathe, to live, to make it. Her little chest sucked in and out, deeper, deeper. It was a hot Ugandan day. She grunted and twisted. She needed air, and she needed it *now*.

Every year one million low birth weight and preterm babies die in their first year of life, most often for want of breath. Their tiny lungs are not ready for the harsh world and they desperately need breathing support, delivered in lucky countries like Australia through complex and expensive technology. In the developing world, far from our reality of consistent power supplies and the latest equipment, that technology and medical support is often more distant than the moon.

Enter innovative philanthropy, business non-profit hybrids, and multisector partnerships.

Over the past 18 years I have had the privilege of being part of a team at the Adara Group, which uses the power of investment banking to generate revenue to support services to women and children in poverty. Last year, with the launch of a new corporate advisory business, Adara Partners, we expanded our business-for-purpose model. Now, we benefit from the advice of 13 of Australia's most distinguished leaders in financial services who donate their time, effort and expertise to maximise our revenues and deliver aid to women and children in some of the poorest countries in the world. The innovation in our model has allowed Adara to be contrarian, long-term development specialists, through many mistakes and successes, tears and joys. As remote neonatal experts, we have built many powerful partnerships.

First we teamed up with a Ugandan hospital, Kiwoko Hospital, and then the worlds of academia, though Seattle Children's Hospital and the University of Washington, and finally PATH, one of the giants of global health innovation, who work to create affordable vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, devices and health service innovations. We are all united in our dream to find a way to deliver breath, and together have developed a groundbreaking, affordable "continuous positive airway pressure" device that can save those little lives. A clinical trial of these CPAP devices — they cost just \$10 each — will be rolled out across the developing world in the coming 12 months.

It has been a joy to be part of this latest wave of philanthropists. In just a couple of decades we have seen exciting new thinking, amazing new models and giving becoming embedded in even the most market-driven structures in our fast-paced world.

In Australia, more than \$1 billion is donated a year by business and a whopping \$4bn by women and men every year to nonprofits. The Charities Aid Foundation's 2015 World Giving Index ranks Australia as the fifth most generous nation in the world. The spirit of giving is imbued in our lives.

Last week, we celebrated philanthropic innovation at Philanthropy Australia's annual conference in Sydney. And as we did that, I reminded myself again and again that in our rush to innovate, we risk forgetting the traditions of giving that led us here.

As 21st century philanthropists, we are standing on the shoulders of so many others, the early visionaries who led us to where we are today, people who understood at a profound level that giving, not taking, is the most important part of a full life. People who, even when society told them no, reached out to the most vulnerable.

I will never forget driving into the gates of the Kiwoko Hospital 18 years ago, a place that has so changed my life. I had already begun my journey of social entrepreneurship and was drawn to this community, which was at the heart of Uganda's killing fields during the civil war. The hospital was bursting with the noise, colour and sound of Africa: from the warm smoke of the firepit outside where meals were being made, to the laughter of kids kicking around a football. And standing in front of the "maternity unit" was an exhausted nurse, holding a tiny jaundiced baby in the sun. A life that needed nothing more than a heat lamp to be saved. One of the 20 babies a week who were dying for want of the most simple equipment.

And I knew, as so many others have known before and after me, that it was my turn. My turn to do my best: to innovate, to support others. My turn to follow in the footsteps of the philanthropists who had gone before me, and to take the ride of my life.

It took the death of Anna Clise's baby in 1898 to catalyse 23 women to donate \$20 each to start Seattle Children's Hospital, which has since grown into a specialist powerhouse for newborns with a long-term commitment to global health.

It took Ian Clarke, a mad Irish doctor, to go out to the middle of the Ugandan killing fields in the early 80s to treat people reeling from a horrific civil war, solely funded by a few quid from friends and supporters. Good old-fashioned charity.

And it took the power of the Gates Foundation, the big kids on the block, to fund the innovators at PATH, who get up every day to design medical technology for people in far, faraway places.

Our small part, as the social entrepreneur, completes this beautiful piece of music: the traditional, the innovative and the giving, from entities large and small.

"When I started working at Kiwoko, we did not have neonatal facilities and we couldn't do much," said Sister Christine, the fearless leader of the Kiwoko Hospital neonatal intensive care unit who has worked at the hospital for more than 25 years. "Now, we have the means to treat these tiny babies. We are happy because we are saving newborn lives."

Quietly, calmly, she sets up the bottle, the tube and the oxygen concentrator. The oxygen begins to bubble through the water, via the 3D printed blender and into the nasal tube to her tiny body. The perfect mix of blended air and oxygen, at just the right pressure.

The mighty fighter breathes deep and relaxes, recovering from the battle, and gets back to the business of being alive. Just as it should be.

Audette Exel is founder and chairwoman of the Adara Group. More info, philanthropy.org.au