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Finding Solutions Newsletter

VOLUME 11 Number 3



WHY "KIDS" IS MORE THAN EVER RELEVANT TO OUR WORLD... By JOAN DYE GUSSOW

Shortly before the last century ended, a traveler and writer named Pico Iyer wrote a memorable article in *The Nation* magazine titled "The Haiti Test." He was responding to conversations among his acquaintances and regular pronouncements from the likes of Bill Gates about the fact that the world was now one, wired together by the wonders of modern technology.

In response to this notion, Iyer says, he administers the Haiti test. He travels to Haiti "to remind myself (as it is easy to forget) that in most parts of the globe, World Phones, World Planes and the power of the World Wide Web are no more on people's minds than they were a decade (or a century) ago. In fact the world could be said to be growing less and less connected, if only because the gap between the few of us who babble about the wiring of the planet and the billions who do not grows ever more alarming."

As in Haiti, poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, where per capita annual income is less than \$400, where 117 of every 1000 children born die before the age of five and undernutrition stunts one in three of the under-five survivors, where 60% of those over the age of 25 have never had a day of formal schooling and 40% of the schools have no actual buildings. Raised among i-Pods and virtual reality and ubiquitous cell phones that take pictures, realities like these are harder than ever to remember. This is why we need KIDS.

KIDS is devoted to helping children break through the buzzing surface that surrounds them and learn, when they are young enough to remember it for life, that hunger and poverty exist, even when they are not visible everyday. Twelve years ago, when Jane Levine and Larry Levine decided they wanted to find a way to teach U.S. youngsters about hunger on the planet and began to develop KIDS, they asked Jane's cousin, Stephanie Kempf, a teacher in New York City, to write a series of lesson plans that teachers might use to help young people learn about the existence of hunger in the world without at the same time leaving them feeling helpless. The manuscript for the manual was sent to me for a "blurb."

I thought the subject was vitally important, so I said "yes," but I confess to having doubts about what I was about to read.

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About this issue...

We suggest you begin reading this year-end issue with the last article on page 7. You will learn what a good year 2006 was for KIDS and how you can help its growth continue.

Joan Dye Gussow (pg 1) sets the tone for this issue by explaining what KIDS means to her and why she believes that the program is "more relevant to our world than ever."

Lindy Wood of *The Atlanta Food Bank*, returns (pg 2) to continue her discussion of the importance of introducing people to the subject of food prior to beginning a discussion of hunger.

Jen Chapin's article deals with Meditation on Corn (pg 3). Starting with the discovery that her 14 month old son might "be on to something when he finds the just old kernel stuff OK", but the "fresh summer stuff" is his favorite. What we learn from him (and his mother) about corn makes for interesting reading.

Judy Huynh invites us along on her recent study tour of Honduras conducted by *Heifer International*. (pg 5). The participants learned much from the people of Honduras about "sharing with others and caring for the Earth."

Molly Zeff, a senior at Yale University, spent last summer as an intern at RESULTS. She explains why the elimination of school fees is an important step towards universal education (pg 5). In addition to the discussion about the topic, it is uplifting to reaffirm that there are young people like Zeff who are dedicated to making a difference in the world.

Comments are always welcome as is your support.

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On various occasions I had worked, with educators trying to design lessons that could teach hunger without teaching despair, so I knew it was hard. But when I began working my way through what was titled *Finding Solutions to Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference (FSTH)* I was blown away.

I tell this old story partly as an excuse for quoting here what I wrote in 1996 about the manual—and about the entire KIDS enterprise that had produced it: “If I were a teacher,” I wrote, “struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grasp onto this slim volume as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

It would be nice to hope that in the ten years since that was written, our nation’s cynicism and self-absorption had abated, that children were routinely schooled about the injustices and inequalities that keep so many of the world’s kids hungry. It would be deeply satisfying to say that as a result of educational efforts by KIDS and others, our rich-nation isolation had been overcome, and that our children now regularly learned from the people around them how dangerous and unacceptable (and unnecessary) were the monstrous wealth disparities between us and much of the rest of the world.

The fact that none of this has happened, the fact that, given the opportunity, I would write the same comment again if *FSTH* hit my desk this morning should not be read as an indication that KIDS has failed at the task it set itself. It seems inescapably evident that the world into which our young people grow up today is more dedicated than ever to self-indulgence, over-consumption, mock reality and greed than was the case when the first edition of *FSTH* was published. And yet, as any reader of the KIDS Newsletter can attest, there are vital pockets of difference, many of them created by KIDS, working like yeast around the country.

Change begins small and happens slowly. In a time when marketers are busy promoting over-consumption to the vulnerable child market, young people need all the help they can get figuring out what they might do—besides shopping at the mall—that might make a difference. Across the country, in all kinds of settings, and with children of many ages, teachers are using the resources of KIDS to help children find a responsible answer to that question. Those are the children whom we need to hope will be the leaders of tomorrow’s world.

Joan Dye Gussow is an author, serious food grower, and Professor Emerita of Nutrition and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University She is a member of the KIDS Advisory Board. Joan Dye Gussow may be contacted at jeg30@columbia.edu.



BEYOND NOURISHING THE BODY: TALKING ABOUT FOOD IN HUNGER 101... **By Lindy Wood**

I talk about hunger a lot; as the Hunger 101 Coordinator for the *Atlanta Community Food Bank*, it’s my job to get people talking about hunger and poverty. Some months ago it dawned on me that before I got people to discuss *hunger*, I needed to get them thinking about *food*.

I went online and typed “food” in the search line to see what might pop up. One of the first things to appear was the PBS Web site [The Meaning of Food](#), a great site that tells wonderful stories about food and family, food and culture, and food and life. Since viewing the series, I’ve experienced a small but important shift in how I approach my work.

“Beyond merely nourishing the body, what we eat and with whom we eat can inspire and strengthen the bonds between individuals, communities, and even countries” (PBS, [Meaning of Food](#)).

This quote in particular resonated for me. As food bankers we work to strengthen communities by increasing access to nutritious food. Bill Bolling, our founder and executive director, has often said, “Food is the tool we use to bring people together.” We do a lot of work with food: we move it, pack it, ship it, store it and weigh it. We do our core work of distributing it to more than 800 nonprofit organizations with feeding programs. But most of us do very little talking about what food means to us. Fortunately, in my job, I get to do that.

And the message I’ve been putting out there lately is this: Limited access to nourishing food does more than limit nutrition; it weakens communities and the bonds between families and it can separate people from their personal history, their faith and more.

Our society’s relationship to food is also having a huge impact on the bonds between individuals and communities.

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Food used to take up much of our time. We used to have to rely on each other for the harvest and the preparation. Most kids now don't know where their food comes from. Many of us don't sit down to a meal or cook for each other anymore. We grab bites. Food is a commodity—a package—not something most people grow or raise or slowly prepare. SLEWS of people out there don't connect food to a person or a family but rather to a store or a restaurant. How do we hold onto each other like this?

As a hunger educator I need people to care about the issue of hunger. I want them to leave a workshop and go home and feed someone. I want them to donate good food and write passionately to their elected officials. I want them to come back year after year, sort food, start gardens, raise money and educate their community. So, I decided that before I talk about hunger, I needed to get people talking about beautiful, delicious food and whom they ate it with. They needed to tell stories about what they ate as children: what they loved, what they hated and who cooked it for

them. People should speak about the food that is connected to their faith and the people they love. I needed to get to the heart of food.

Inspired by The Meaning of Food, I now begin nearly every hunger workshop with this exercise. We list all the different ways food is a part of our lives: ways that it is an expression of love or a vehicle for nutrients, ways that it gives us energy, how it is a creative process for many of us, and how it is integral to our faith, celebrations, rituals and memories. Then we name foods that connect us with our past, with a person we love or people who are no longer living. We describe how we prepared a meal and who taught us; was it a happy time, a feast or a passage? Only then do we begin to talk about hunger- for only then will we come with a deeper understanding of the loss.

Lindy Wood has worked at the Atlanta Community Food Bank for over 5 years doing community outreach and education around the issues of hunger and poverty. She can be reached at lindy.wood@acfb.org or 404-892-3333 ext 1228.



MEDITATIONS ON CORN...

By Jen Chapin

My 14 month-old son loves corn on the cob. Just plain kernel corn is OK, but the fresh sweet summer stuff, lightly steamed with no butter required, where a good amount of baby effort, enthusiasm, and tooth power is required to strip clean an ear -- that's his favorite. Whole, fresh, local, requiring a little work—as with so much else, maybe he's onto something here.

The season for corn has passed here in the northeast, but it still takes up a fair amount of my thoughts, given that my thoughts, when they are not consumed by family or career, are often turned to our dysfunctional food system. Corn is at the crux. Please feel free to double-check my facts or question my oversimplification, but I'd like to freely meditate on corn for a bit, to follow it on a journey.

To the sadza (stiff "mealie meal" porridge) that makes up the staple of every meal in Zimbabwe, to the polenta that is

enjoyed in Italy, to the high fructose corn syrup that sweetens most of our juices and sodas in the States, corn is now everywhere. Yet maize is indigenous only to Mesoamerica, where it was domesticated many millennia ago from a wild variety much less tender and more tiny than the varieties we know today. Many centuries before American pop music and movies took over the world, this grain became the original vanguard of globalization. In weight terms, its worldwide production now exceeds that of any other grain.

Today, we "harvest poverty" in corn's Central American birthplace by mercilessly subsidizing and "free" trading corn into markets where local farmers simply can't compete. So where once a Mexican farmer could feed his family with tortillas grown on his own small plot, and have some left over to sell in the local market, now American corn is sold there at a price below his costs. He is forced off his land, to enter the crowded and exploitative urban wage

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**KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE® FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)**

Published by:

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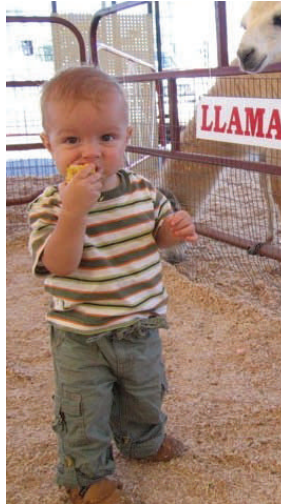
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economy, or perhaps to illegally immigrate to the States.

There he might be a migrant worker, harvesting fruits and vegetables (but not the corn whose heavily mechanized, grand scale production is part of its unnatural cheapness) and barely eking out a living. Or perhaps he works in a slaughterhouse or meat packing plant, preparing beef -- beef that was made fat in its short life by an unnatural diet of corn. It is the corn fed to cows in manure-covered feed lots that makes their ruminant stomachs so vulnerable to infection, necessitating huge doses of antibiotics to keep them alive and growing. It is the corn-fed cows whose stomachs are especially hospitable to e coli, which passes from their bodies into the groundwater, later appearing on the spinach which caused such an alarming outbreak of illness earlier this year.

Perhaps this worker earns enough to bring his family north, where his kids assimilate into the new American childhood of too little activity and too much processed junk food -- especially to those products that are sweetened by irresistibly cheap and ubiquitous high-fructose corn syrup. Obesity, diabetes, or perhaps just a shortened attention span and heightened behavior problems are the outcomes of this strange diet. While once this family lived off the land and had immediate access to fresh produce, however limited, now they have proximity only to gas station "convenience" stores and an unhealthy food lifestyle that is irresponsibly marketed to kids of all incomes and backgrounds.



Corn -- genetically-engineered into pesticide resistant super-breeds, grown on endless acres of mono-culture nutrient-depleted fields, heavily doused with petroleum-derived fertilizer; perverting policy decisions of even the most well-meaning legislator and trade representative; erasing the livelihoods of small farmers across the world and close to home; too plentiful, too cheap, too malleable into useless sugar and starch and cattle fodder.. Wherever we follow it, we see tragedy and waste. Yet it doesn't need to be that way, and it simply can't be that way for much longer.

Anyone who is reading this newsletter doesn't need to be reminded that our food system is not working: food is too cheap on its face, but the hidden costs are taking their toll on economic justice, our immigration system, our environment, our health, our foreign policy and our energy supply. Convenience, quickness, cheapness, and sweetness are not always the answer. Instead, we can labor over

the blossoming of food security and sovereignty that is happening at the grassroots across the world. Let's put a little work and thought into it and enjoy the process -- we do know how.

For solutions and more information, check out: <http://www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc>

Jen Chapin is a songwriter, performer, recording artist and activist who chairs the Board of WHY (Word Hunger Year). She is also a member of the KIDS Advisory Board. Her latest album is "Ready." See <http://www.jenchapin.com>.

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HEIFER STUDY TOUR TO HONDURAS...

By Judy Huynh

In July of 2005, I was privileged to participate in the first Heifer Study Tour to Honduras for Educators organized by Heifer International. This program is aimed at teachers, educators, administrators and educational volunteers interested in learning more about Heifer International's work and the issues associated with world hunger and poverty. There were 23 other educators who were also on the trip. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet people who had received animals through *Heifer International* and to see the changes in their lives.

We met in Miami for the first part of the program. We studied the issues of hunger and poverty and learned how Heifer uses the Cornerstones as the basis for sustainable development, which was defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future." Heifer donates animals to families in need and provides training in the care of the animals. All families who receive an animal from Heifer are required to pass on the gift by donating the first female offspring or the equivalent to another family in their community, so the gift keeps growing.

From Miami, we flew into Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Honduras is one of the five poorest countries in Latin America, with an unemployment rate of around 30% and with about 70% of the population living in poverty. We spent the next few days visiting projects that are funded by Heifer. Everywhere we went the people were very excited to show us their animals and to tell us about how their lives had been changed through the gift of an animal. They continually thanked us for caring about them by supporting the work of *Heifer International*. One man proudly told us about his work in treating health problems in the animals. He invited us to come and visit his "vet store." We walked down valleys and up mountain paths to see this wonderful "vet store;" when we arrived, we discovered that the "vet store" was a small wooden box about 12 inches high, which held a few

bottles of medicine and pills. He was very happy to explain to us what each medicine was used for, and how it helped improve the health of the animals. We realized then how something we considered to be so small could make such a big difference in the lives of people who have so little.

We visited several other Heifer gift recipients during our stay in Tegucigalpa, and each time we were welcomed warmly by the people in the community and thanked for helping them through the gifts of animals. They were all very proud to show us their homes and animals, and to share with us how their lives were improving. One family treated us to dinner in their home, serving us a wonderful meal of chicken soup and fresh vegetables. It was so heart-warming to meet the people and share their joy in the gift of an animal, which gave them hope for the future.

We learned so much from all the people we met in Honduras about sharing with others and caring for the Earth. Each of us on the study tour returned home with a renewed spirit to do whatever we can to end hunger and poverty in the world and to care for the Earth. We know that the choices we make in our daily lives here in the U.S. have an effect on people all over the world. We CAN make a difference in the world, and we can do it by living more simply and in tune with the earth, and by working with and supporting organizations such as *Heifer International* and *Kids Can Make a Difference* in their goal of ending hunger and poverty in the world. As educators, we must teach our students about the issues of hunger and poverty. We must help them learn how they can make a difference in the world, and to believe they can do it because KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE! Our students are our future.

Judy Huynh is a sixth grade teacher at Palo Community Schools in Palo, MI. She focuses on world justice issues in her classroom., She is a member of the KIDS Advisory Board. She may be contacted at preston48@home.ionia.com.

THE ELIMINATION OF SCHOOL FEES: A STEP TOWARDS UNIVERSAL EDUCATION...

By Molly Zeff

In the year 2000, 189 nations at the United Nations' Millennium Summit agreed upon the Millennium Declaration, a document containing actions and targets that were necessary to address global poverty. From these targets grew the Millennium Development Goals, eight ambi-

tious goals that the nations of the world agreed to meet by the year 2015. Two of these grand goals relate to equal access to education

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Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Unfortunately, neither of these goals is achievable as long as one of the most significant impediments to their fulfillment remains in place: **school fees**. Instead of universal access to education in sub-Saharan Africa and other regions in the developing world, parents must pay a fee for their children to attend school. This policy was first instituted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s as part of these organizations' Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). SAPs involved conditional lending, meaning countries would receive loans only if their governments adopted policies that the international financial institutions prescribed. Cutting social spending was among these policies, and funds for education were frequently among the social services that were cut. School fees were usually instituted to replace funds for education that had been previously provided by the federal government.

The problem, of course, is that parents often cannot afford these fees, which in some countries may amount to nearly one-third of the family's income. Families are forced to choose which children they can afford to send to school, and if they have to choose between a son and daughter, it is the boy who gets to receive an education. In this way, school fees not only prohibit millions of children from going to school, they also play a major role in reinforcing gender inequality.

When school fees are abolished, the benefits extend far beyond universal access to education and gender equality in education. When students are educated, their job prospects and future incomes increase. AIDS orphans are more likely to be adopted once school fees are abolished because these fees are a major disincentive to adopt orphans. Educated girls have healthier children as rates of malnutrition and HIV infection decrease, due in part to the fact that women and girls no longer risk HIV infection from being forced to work as prostitutes to pay the fees for themselves, their children, or their siblings.

Zambia and Uganda provide evidence of the connection between health and education: in both countries, the rate of HIV infection among women with a primary school education was half the rate among uneducated women. Among Ugandan women who had also received a secondary school education, the HIV infection rate was one-fourth the rate of women with no education.

How effective is the removal of school fees with regards to enrollment? The dramatic results following the abolition of school fees speak for themselves:

- When school fees were abolished in Malawi, enrollment in primary school jumped from 1.9 million to 2.9 million students almost overnight.

- When school fees were eliminated in Uganda, enrollment in primary school increased by 70%.
- In Kenya, an additional 1.3 million children began to attend school within a few weeks after school fees were abolished.
- In Cameroon, the primary school enrollment rate increased from 88% to 105% because adults who had never been able to afford school returned to receive an education for the first time.

The soaring enrollment rates carry a clear message: parents would like to send their children to school, and children would love that opportunity. Ensheba Khareri, the principal at a Kenyan primary school whose student body increased by 66% when school fees were abolished, explained that universal access gave children "a priceless chance." They had a hunger to learn, you could see it in their eyes, and we were not about to let them down.

Yet simply replacing school fees with government funds is only the beginning of the solution to lack of educational access. When school populations increase so suddenly and so drastically, schools do not have the teachers, space, or supplies to accommodate the new students, and the federal government does not have the administrative or financial capacity to deal with a crisis on this scale. At Ms. Khareri's school in Kenya, teachers were suddenly managing classes that had grown from 50 to 90 students. In Burundi, class sizes in some areas of the country grew to 150 students, and children were taught in tents or even sent home because the school could not provide enough desks. Students at schools across the developing world learn in crowded classrooms and share textbooks and other materials already in short supply.

To address the need for more teachers, classrooms, and supplies, foreign aid for education must be increased. This year, U.S. Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) appropriated \$15 million from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to supporting countries in elimination of school fees. This is a step in the right direction, but we could do much more to help provide universal access. Consider the United Kingdom's commitment to education: in April of this year, the UK tripled its current spending in the area of education by announcing its plan to spend \$15 billion over the course of the next ten years to help the developing world achieve universal education. The U.S. can and should match the UK's commitment, and you can make help make that happen

To learn what you can do, please visit the RESULTS site located at www.results.org.

Molly Zeff is a senior at Yale University, where she is majoring in Political Science. This past summer, she worked as the Global Intern at RESULTS, a grassroots organization dedicated to fighting hunger and the worst aspects of poverty by lobbying for legislation that addresses poverty at the domestic and international level. After graduation, Molly plans to attend law school and then spend her life working on poverty-related issues.



WHAT A YEAR THIS WAS...

By Jane Finn Levine & Larry Levine

It is hard to believe that so much has taken place at KIDS since we last came to you with our annual fund raising appeal.

Before we “reach out” to you, let’s see what KIDS has accomplished in 2006. As most of you are aware, the three “building blocks” of the program are:

- KIDS Teacher Guide—*Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference* (FSTH).
- KIDS Web Site
- KIDS Newsletter—*Finding Solutions*

All three areas experienced increased activity resulting in the best and most productive year that KIDS has enjoyed—a year that we believe we can build on in 2007 and years to follow! Briefly, let us delve into the highlights of the “building blocks:”

- **Teacher Guide-** Katrina had a strong effect on sales of the guide and by March 2006 we had to print another 500 books. Based on our past rate of sale, this quantity would last 12-18 months, but we have sold this print run and have made a second run in the same year! As we discuss the other building blocks, you will see that their increased activity had a positive impact on sales of the Guide.
- **Web Site-** The site has generated through October approximately 750,000 hits. Based upon this rate, we may reach a million hits for the year. Keep in mind that we are not in a class with Amazon.com, but certainly our “product” offering is more limited in appeal than Amazon’s. A more significant figure is “unique visitors”—those who spend quality time on the site. If they come back more than once, they are not counted as “unique visitors.” We had 40,000 of them. Most of our visitors came from the United States and Canada, but included in the top 25 countries were Australia, Great Britain, Germany, South Africa, Japan, China, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Hong Kong and India. The site

has become a major source of orders for the Guide.

- **Finding Solutions Newsletter-** We have seen an increase in those who read our newsletter and make a small contribution to insure the life of the publication. This issue demonstrates the diversity of articles we publish. In turn, the newsletter generates orders for the Guide. We are always on the “hunt” for articles, so please keep us in mind.



A Program of World Hunger Year

This is our once a year time to enlist your support in KIDS. We are dependent on folks like you to keep the program alive and vital. As a matter of fact, over 80% of KIDS’ income comes from individuals just like you. The rest comes from the sale of the KIDS Teacher Guide.

Most of you know that KIDS is a self-funded program of WHY. Since no one associated with KIDS gets paid, and KIDS does not pay rent, it does not take a great deal of

money to operate the program. What it does mean is that almost 100% of the money you contribute goes directly to the program.

If you have contributed before, you know how painless it is. If you are new, we welcome you. In either case, all you need to do is supply the necessary information called for on the enclosed envelope. We gratefully accept donations by credit card or personal check — and any amount is appreciated. Our largest single expense is the production of this newsletter, three times a year. If you are able, a donation of as little as \$10 will defray the cost of supplying you with a year of challenging and stimulating articles.

We hope you will choose to take a moment to make your contribution now.

Thanks in advance for your support of KIDS,

2005 TEACHER GUIDE AVAILABLE

Contains Updated Statistics & Resources

Finding Solutions To Hunger: Kids Can Make A Difference ***by Stephanie Kempf.***

Uplifting, engaging, interactive and challenging lessons for middle and high school students on the root causes of and solutions to domestic and international hunger. Examines colonialism, contemporary development projects, the media, famine vs. chronic hunger, the working poor and more, as well as valuable ideas for how kids can make a difference in their community, and in the world around them.

Price... \$24 + \$6 shipping. Includes free one year subscription to the KIDS Newsletter!

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University*



A Program of World Hunger Year

**1 Borodell Avenue
Mystic, CT 06355**

The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.