

Vitamin Angels Celebrates 20th Anniversary

A look into the non-profit's worldwide impact and its goals for the future.

BY MARGARET SMITH



Vitamin Angels, founded by Howard Schiffer, has grown significantly since its humble beginnings in 1994. For the past 20 years, the non-profit organization has created a domestic and international presence to help undernourished populations gain access to essential vitamins and minerals. Vitamin Angels focuses first and foremost on pregnant women, new mothers and children under five years old in the hope that vitamin and mineral supplements will provide them with an opportunity to build a foundation for good health.

The group's success is evident in the millions of undernourished individuals that have led fuller, healthier lives thanks to its programs. Moms taking

prenatals provided by the group are giving birth to healthier, heavier babies, and children taking vitamins can laugh, play and just be kids with more energy.

States Schiffer, "When I first started Vitamin Angels, I thought vitamins were a good idea. Now I know they are one of the most critical interventions we can offer to make this world a healthier place."

Pride and Passion

Schiffer and his team are nothing short of proud, passionate and enthusiastic when it comes to their achievements through Vitamin Angels, and rightfully so. In just the past five years, he states that the organization has "reached over 100 million children and mothers worldwide," and this year alone it hopes to "reach 40 million more in 36 states (and growing!) in the United States and approximately 45 countries."

Each year, the Vitamin Angels team commits to increasing the number of children and mothers it reaches as well as the number of communities it serves. Growth and expansion are both key components to Vitamin Angels' overall success, but the team is also committed to quality. "That means that we continue to enhance our technical expertise and training materials to allow our partners in the field to do their job more effectively, and that we are ramping up our monitoring and evaluation efforts to fine tune the quality of our efforts," Schiffer explains.

With a team almost 30 strong, Schiffer expresses his gratitude for not only their support, but also the support from the health industry as a whole. He reflects on the amazing work this network has accomplished over the past 20 years: "I'm proud every time we go into the field and meet the children and moms whose lives we are changing," says Schiffer. "It's those times when I really understand what a profound difference we're making in their lives."

A Committed Team with Supportive Partners

Vitamin Angels has attained supportive partnerships, donors and team members that allow the programs to flourish year after year. One

of Vitamin Angels' life-changing programs addresses the childhood blindness and mortality that is associated with vitamin A deficiency. To do so, the Vitamin Angels team provides undernourished children with a highly concentrated vitamin A capsule twice a

year from ages six months through five years. Surprisingly enough, the cost to give vitamin A to one child is only 25 cents per year.

With help from partners and donors, Vitamin Angels will be able to expand this crucial program. "Thanks to a new partnership coordinated through the Gates Foundation, Vitamin Angels has committed to expanding the pairing of our vitamin A supplements with antiparasitic treatments (albendazole), which increase the absorption of vitamin A by eliminating the presence of intestinal worms," he says. "Our goal is to be reaching all eligible vitamin A beneficiaries with albendazole within the next two years."

Partnerships like these truly make all the difference for the futures of young lives everywhere, and Schiffer is always looking for additional helping hands. "I want to bring more and more people into Vitamin Angels's work and have them realize the legacy that is now before us," Schiffer says. "We can say we all joined hands to help moms and children all over the world, many of whom we will never meet, to give them a chance at healthy and productive lives."

Moving Forward and Upward

What does the future hold for Vitamin Angels? Schiffer says the group plans to focus more and more of its efforts on a child's first 1,000 days of life, a period where "we can change the trajectory of his or her entire life."

And for the remainder of 2014, the organization is working on several exciting initiatives. On September 15, Vitamin Angels is hosting what may be its largest fundraising event to date, Celebration of Angels, at The Resort at Pelican Hill in Southern California, where the group hopes to raise enough funds to reach four million children. Additionally, there will be a few on- and off-line campaigns as well as major retail campaigns in Walgreens, Vitamin Shoppe and Vitamin World this fall. Schiffer says, "These are all wonderful and unique opportunities not only for companies to get involved, but also for companies to involve their employees, or for individuals with a passion for our cause to help spread the word or give."

Due to the support of others, he says that the organization "prides itself on financial health and accountability. We just received our seventh consecutive four-star rating from Charity Navigator—we are 100% committed to ensuring every dollar is used in the best possible way."

Vitamin Angels has a bright future ahead, and Schiffer is blown away by the organization's success over the past 20 years.

"When I first started Vitamin Angels, I thought reaching one million children would be amazing," he says. "Now, we are reaching tens of millions of children. Mary Oliver, the poet, asks 'So tell me, what are you going to do with this one wild and precious life?' To me, Vitamin Angels seems like a pretty worthwhile answer!" **WF**



Howard Schiffer on a vitamin distribution trip.

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