

global community



# The Miracle of the Sisterhood



Thousands of women all over the globe are making a difference—and not just by giving money. They are gathering their friends, rolling up their sleeves and impacting nations. *Nicole Partridge* and *Deborah Johnson* discover the growing phenomenon which is 'The Colour Sisterhood'.

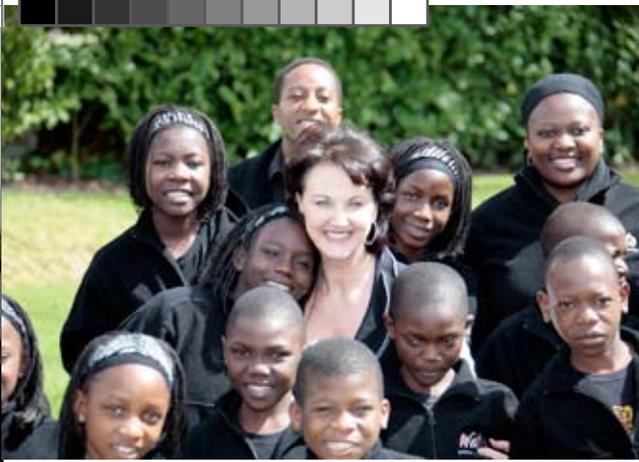
Clockwise from top this page: Sisters to come alongside—Bobbie Houston during a trip to Uganda;

It was Day Two of the 2007 Hillsong Colour Conference. The mood in the morning session was quiet and reflective. Just a few moments previously, more than 16,000 women crammed into the Acer Arena at Sydney Olympic Park, witnessed disturbing video footage and heard first-hand accounts of the desperate situation with child soldiers in Uganda. As the video ended and the lights came up, it was clear women all over the auditorium were visibly moved. Wiping tears from their eyes, they reached deep into their pockets and waited for an opportunity to respond to the need.

But the offering buckets never arrived. Instead, conference host Bobbie Houston stepped up to the platform and gently challenged the women not to give out of emotion, but to see their donation as seed—to sow it, grow it and bring it back next year. Notes and coins were safely tucked away into purses, pockets and make-up bags, and as the conference continued, hearts stirred with ideas for making the money grow.

Seated at the back of the auditorium was Bundaberg mother-of-five Joyanne Devlin, who had come to this Colour Conference satisfied she had done enough. With the help and support of her friends she had already raised A\$38,000 for Watoto Childcare Ministries in Uganda; funds that will help place orphans in purpose-built villages. But now Joyanne felt the call of God on her life to go further, aim higher. She was not prepared for the emotional impact a video on child soldiers would have on her.

“As I was watching the footage, I remember thinking I am the most selfish human being in the world. Along with a couple of girls from my team, I started crying and said: ‘You know what? There are no excuses.’ It’s so easy to get caught up in your own



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difficulties and think I've done my bit. You need to be obedient and let him tell you when you've done that bit. The call won't always be easy.”

For Joyanne, that call first came when she heard Watoto founder Marilyn Skinner speak on the plight of AIDS orphans at a previous Colour Conference. Having lost her own mother at an early age, she felt an immediate connection with the children. Weeks later during her quiet time, God lovingly impelled her to do something. She phoned Hillsong, registered for the Sisterhood and received a fundraising pack, but not wanting to tackle the challenge alone, Joyanne mobilised a group of friends to join her.

#### Commitment to join together

“Inspiring, empowering and mobilising is what the Sisterhood is all about,” maintains Bobbie. “It's sometimes easy to give an offering, to feel like you have contributed and move on, whereas this demands something greater. It requires us to grow up and strategise and stretch and connect with others. That's the miracle of the Sisterhood.”

The strength of this concept was never more evident than at the Sisterhood launch at Colour 2005 when Bobbie distributed a show of interest card after highlighting Watoto's work. “The response I was looking for wasn't just a gift, but rather a commitment to mobilising friends. I was shocked when we received more than 1,000 cards, with half of them indicating a promise to gather others.”

Heather Brown from Christchurch in New Zealand was one of the many who filled in a response card that day determined to fund a Watoto house. Over the following 12 months, she raised NZ\$45,000, a commitment she believes was part of her destiny and purpose.

Understanding the importance of partnership, she now leads a network of 2,000 women in New Zealand committed not only to motivating and encouraging women, but also to raising money for Watoto and other initiatives. “There are a lot of women like me who feel they can do nothing alone,” admits Heather, “but together, we can do so much more.”

#### From a compassionate heart

United by friendship and the cause, thousands of women across the globe, like Joyanne and Heather, have already banded together to raise in excess of A\$2 million enabling the completion of 36 houses and the launch of a baby's home in Uganda's capital Kampala. Apart from the commitment to Watoto, the Sisterhood has also seen more than 4,000 children sponsored through Compassion and has funded many life-changing initiatives in Australia. In 2007, with the focus on northern Uganda, the Sisterhood has helped finance a new Watoto project in the city of Gulu to establish a church, build a Watoto village and rescue and rehabilitate child soldiers.

Moved out of a heart of compassion for the needs being presented, Colour women have focused their skills, talents and



ingenuity, raising this money through every imaginable fundraising activity—from garage sales and coffee mornings to gala balls and sponsored walks. But the blessing has not just been felt overseas, the women themselves have been deeply affected by the opportunity they have been given to impact the lives of others.

For Joyanne, the experience has touched every area of her life. “I do believe I was meant to go to Colour and that God has placed this opportunity in my hand for personal growth.” Heather also speaks enthusiastically about the inspiration she's gained. “It has lifted my level of faith and my expectation and understanding of who God is.” Heather said. With her eyes opened to new possibilities, Heather has also just published her first book, a project she could only have dreamed of before coming to Colour. Now, she will add its proceeds to the list of fund-raising activities she has planned.

#### Women working in partnership

Creating an environment where women are both valued, encouraged and inspired to make a difference in the world, has been central to the vision and mission of the Colour Conference, which is now celebrating its 12th year and from that initial desire has emerged a tangible sisterhood of women who are literally making a difference on several fronts, both in Australia and globally.

Articulating that vision further, Bobbie explains the mandate of The Sisterhood: to rescue orphans, come alongside sisters (both in Australia and around the world) and empower nations. Personally, Bobbie sees her role in the Sisterhood as helping to create an environment that believes in women and lifts the ceiling on their potential. “Women, when they are strong and believed in, can rise up and accomplish amazing things.”

And as for those amazing things . . . Bobbie has a vision to see multitudes of women working in partnership to bring global solutions to poverty and injustice. “I believe God is gathering his daughters for such a time as this, with the intent to raise us up and then sow us in places we never dreamed possible.” The miracle continues . . . CW

For more information on the Colour Conference or the Sisterhood see [www.colourconference.com.au](http://www.colourconference.com.au)  
To find out more about Watoto Childcare Ministries see [www.watoto.com](http://www.watoto.com)