

Trailblazers. Adventurers. Entrepreneurs. Parents. Givers.
Survivors. Officers. Ambassadors. Visionaries. Rockets. Trailblazers.
Adventurers. Entrepreneurs. Parents. Givers. Survivors. Officers.
Ambassadors. Visionaries. Rockets. Trailblazers. Adventurers.
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More Than 85 Broads

Women Making Career Choices,
Taking Risks, and Defining Success
ON THEIR OWN TERMS

JANET HANSON

GIVERS



This chapter goes to the heart of the 85 Broads network. Giving is an integral part of connecting within our community. “Women helping women” has always been the purpose and positive message of 85 Broads. It is the reason I started the network. It is the reason the network has grown beyond industry, geographic, cultural, and generational boundaries. Giving means getting beyond yourself, beyond your own focus and priorities, beyond your own challenges and perceived barriers. Giving can take on many forms—philanthropy, healing, co-mentoring, parenting, and even entrepreneurship—as we’ll see in the stories of the exceptional “givers” profiled in this chapter. They are following their own hearts in finding unique ways to give and to benefit from that giving, both personally and professionally. The scale of the giving doesn’t matter. The form of the giving doesn’t matter. The women of 85 Broads are totally committed to defining and pursuing our passions on our own terms—and equally committed to helping or being helped by others who are as passionate as we are.

SARA M. GREEN

Sara is the founder of Art for Refugees in Transition (ART), a nonprofit organization that develops programs enabling long-term refugee populations to preserve their traditional art forms and transmit them to younger generations. Revitalizing indigenous arts provides a catalyst for rebuilding displaced communities and helping to heal the wounds of war, famine, flight, and other trauma. Sara graduated from Columbia Business School in 2001 with a degree in finance and economics.

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After spending 10 years as a professional dancer and working in various nonprofit organizations, I knew that I needed a change. I no longer felt challenged and was eager to reach out to help others and to make a difference in the world. At the time, I was watching the war in the Balkans unfold daily on television. As battles raged, refugees flooded into provisional camps for safety. Every day I saw the pictures of the refugees,

and I could not help but be moved by the plight of thousands of children fleeing their homelands. Their faces were etched with a pain, a fear, and a hopelessness that they did not deserve to know.

From my experience as a dancer, both in performing and in teaching dance to children, I knew that every child loves to sing, to dance, to play, and to be free. Perhaps, I thought, these children could overcome their pain and regain their lost childhoods through song and dance. The arts would be a way for them to find freedom, to connect with their elders, to preserve their indigenous traditions, and to rebuild their shattered sense of community. That is why I founded Art for Refugees in Transition, a vehicle for using art as a healing agent to empower communities in need. My vision was to help refugee communities cope with the trauma of dislocation by engaging them in arts and traditions drawn from their own cultures.

Having spent a decade working with nonprofit arts organizations, I knew that in order to make this vision become reality I needed the skills and credibility that business school could provide. When I started at Columbia Business School, I wanted to learn everything. I was surrounded by extraordinary people—intelligent, passionate and interesting—and the student body was extremely diverse. Working with two other classmates and a professor in Columbia’s entrepreneurship program, I developed a strategic plan to launch ART, which was eventually chosen to be part of Columbia’s “greenhouse,” an incubator for entrepreneurial projects.

Using a simple model that would involve as few outside “consultants” as possible, ART’s mission is to encourage community elders to pass their cultural traditions on to future generations, not only preserving fragile traditions that can be so easily lost in times of trial, but also rebuilding the links between generations that are vital to maintaining communities.

At Columbia I was introduced to one of my mentors, Janet Hanson, who helped nurture my project. Janet was an inspiration, encouraging me to pursue my dream. She introduced me to Mary Diaz, who was executive director of The Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, an organization which took me on a two-week trip to Kosovo with the International Rescue Committee so that I could examine programs and policies for children in war.

Just as ART was getting off the ground, I suffered a traumatic life-changing head injury, affecting my short-term memory, eyesight, ability to focus, and balance. For months I was barely able to stand. I persevered with my work through a long recovery, graduating from Columbia Business School in 2001 and determined to make ART happen. When I doubted myself, I remembered the words of a Columbia professor who insisted, “How could you have a dream and not make that dream come true?” The classmates with whom I had developed ART had found other jobs, and I was left to develop the organization on my own.

I wanted to go back to Kosovo to put ART into action, but the situation in Kosovo had improved so the IRC sent me instead to two camps in Northern Thailand to launch ART’s pilot program in a community of more than 23,000 Burmese refugees. The program has been a stunning success, with a daily curriculum of classes for the community, including instruction for the younger generation in weaving, instrument making, folklore, singing, and dancing. The Burmese refugees have shown a real and proven appetite for rebuilding their communities and restoring their traditions. Now, two years after implementation, the program is run solely by the refugees and is fully self-sustaining. The momentum of ART’s success in Thailand continued when I was approached by a New York-based foundation that helps to fund and implement humanitarian programs in Colombia focusing on the country’s 3 million internal refugees. After several trips to Colombia, ART implemented its first Latin American program in a displaced community in Bogotá.

There are over 180,000 members of this community, and their enthusiasm and excitement is overwhelming. I was able to partner with Universidad de los Andes, which has assigned several students from their Anthropology, Literature, Music and Fine Arts departments to work with ART to implement, manage, and evaluate the program; the students receive credit for their work and ART has an ongoing stream of employees. Government and UN agencies are also climbing on board. It is incredible!

There are more than 17 million refugees around the world, almost half of whom are children, now living in camps or “temporary” settlements. Most of these refugees will never be able to return to their homes, and they are in grave danger of losing all contact with their roots and of losing the sense of community that is their only identity, and frequently, the only possession they can pass on to their children. My vision for ART is to create an adaptable curriculum that can be implemented in refugee camps and other communities in need all around the world, offering an array of classes, recording facilities, music, newsletters, folklore, and opportunities to organize traditional festivals. ART has plans to create training manuals and film documentaries to assist the elders in teaching the younger generations their cultural traditions.

The true reward in this work is the response I receive from the refugees themselves. ART is the light in their eyes. Tearful elders explain that without ART, their traditions would have died with them. One of the refugees said to me, “You have returned meaning to our lives. We had lost so much.” With this affirmation of our work together, I am ready and eager to expand ART to the next level.