



Press Release

“When my boss suggested I take this trip I thought, ‘sure, I’m up for an adventure,’ never expecting it to impact my life the way it did.” --Lucy Sousa, vice president, Jones DesLauriers Insurance Management.

Businesses make poverty eradication through microfinance a priority

Toronto, ON —“I have just returned from the adventure of a lifetime.” That was the title of the email sent by Lucy Sousa, vice president of Jones DesLauriers Insurance Management Inc., to her colleagues after returning from Peru in January 2006. What she thought would be an interesting component of her job, ended up being a life-changing experience.

Sousa took part in an insight trip with Opportunity International, the world’s second largest microfinance organization, as part of the process for investigating the organization as a possible Charity of Choice for DesLauriers. The impression that the people of Peru made on Sousa was so profound, that she was the catalyst for raising \$37,000 through Jones DesLauriers and associated businesses for the poor.

“The insight trip exposed me to some unbelievably poor people,” says Sousa. “But when we asked each of them what their dream for the future was and I realized that it was no different than ours: ‘to provide a better life and education for my children,’ they would say.”

On Sousa’s recommendation, Jones DesLauriers named Opportunity International their Charity of Choice and gave the organization \$25,000 to create loans for the entrepreneurial poor, in a continued effort to help break the cycle of poverty.

“We had decided that since, as a corporation, we’ve been very fortunate to be successful, we feel that it was time for us not to just give back to the community, but to society,” says Sousa.

But Sousa didn’t stop there. She convinced the Gore Mutual Foundation to kick in another \$2,000, despite the fact that the Foundation usually only donates to local communities.

More recently, Jones DesLauriers entered the Chub Insurance Golf Tournament for Charity. The DesLauriers team putted themselves into the winner’s circle and won \$2,500 for Opportunity International, and a spot in the next competition in Florida. And while they didn’t take the championship, Jones DesLauriers did secure another \$8,000 for Opportunity. The \$37,000 raised through the 2006 Charity of Choice efforts created 440 new jobs for the world’s poorest poor. This means that over 2,200 lives are being directly affected through these loans.

Companies are often attracted to microfinance organizations because of their business-model solution to poverty, but Sousa says there's an even tighter link between DesLauriers and Opportunity.

“When we help the poor through this means, it's not a handout. It helps them with their work and gives them pride,” she says. “But what's great about this partnership is that the majority of Opportunity clients are women as are the majority of people in the insurance industry. So it was a good connection.” Eighty-six percent of Opportunity clients are women. The loan payback rate is 98%.

Sousa plans to continue looking for ways to break the cycle of poverty in 2007. In the meantime, she continues to share her experience to inspire others.

“The only difference between us and the people we met is that we won the ovarian lottery,” she says. “Microfinance provides a means for people to improve the quality of their lives and allows them to provide some of the things we all take for granted—a roof over their heads, food on the table and the piece of mind that though hard work, the cycle of poverty is proven. Hope replaces despair. Courage replaces fear.”

Opportunity International was the world's first provider of microfinance, supplying the entrepreneurial poor with the tools they need—small business loans, business training, insurance and other financial services. Opportunity International Canada works in tandem with Australia, Germany, the UK and the USA to raise and invest funds for 42 microfinance programs in 28 Asian, African, Latin American and Eastern European countries.

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