

12-year-old Chiara makes a difference all the way from the US

A 12-year-old girl from the United States recently showed that age, distance and cost do not have to impede one's desire to make a real difference in the lives of countless people.

While on Facebook with her mother, planning their summer trip to South Africa, Chiara noticed an advert for Wonderbag. Attracted to the vibrant shweshwe fabrics and intrigued by what it could be, they discovered a South African manufactured product, a low-tech solution that requires no electricity and uses heat retention to cook food.

Being familiar with the pre-existing partnerships her Californian school has with a few communities in South Africa, Chiara immediately recognised the benefits of the Wonderbag for these individuals and families. "Well, the people there don't have stoves, so they cook over open fires which causes a lot of smoke inhalation, which is very bad for them. So because with a Wonderbag, you just bring your food to boil and then put it in the bag to finish cooking, it can help stop them getting sick from the fire smoke. I also learnt that it saves them time because they don't have to collect so much wood for hours – and that for some women, less time cooking means more time to take their children to the clinic, or even work," explains Chiara.

After making contact with Wonderbag, Chiara arranged that eight Wonderbags were sent to the Kliptown Youth Programme (KYP) in Soweto to trial with their communities.

"We first wanted to find out if the Wonderbag would be useful for the communities we partnered with, and so we talked with the head of the communities and sent over 8 bags for them to test. When they gave us a thumbs up that they were really great and definitely useful – I was so happy!" shares Chiara.

Chiara, supported by her family, decided to do everything she could to get as many of these bags to the community as possible. And so

her entrepreneurial journey began. By organising 9 bake sales and lemonade stands at local sporting events in her neighbourhood, she was able to raise enough money to purchase more than 100 bags.

Anxious to see the impact first hand, Chiara and her family recently came out to SA where they met with the Wonderbag team and toured the local factory in Durban. Wonderbag also facilitated Chiara's visit Hout Bay High in Cape Town, where she learned about their successful commercial food garden initiative that learners around her age run on the school premises via the school environmental committee.

As part of the KYP Mandela Day activation, Chiara and her family participated in the celebrations and assisted in distributing the 120 Wonderbags she almost singled-handedly made a reality.

Chiara will be heading home this upcoming week and plans to challenge other schools and students her age to match or double her Wonderbag donation.

This is a powerful inspiration as to how a 12-year-old philanthropic spirit is enough to make a significant and lasting impact in social development in our country.