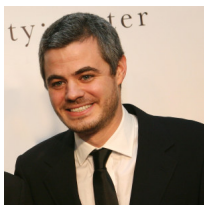


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Clarity is important for water, and it's also true for charity.

When Scott Harrison founded charity: water in 2006, he was targeting people who were "disenchanted with charity," he said in an interview last week. "Most of my friends said the main reason they weren't giving to charity is because they didn't know how much of their money was actually going to go to people in need."

Harrison's solution was to connect donors to their gifts. "We'll never do a [water] well unless we can get a GPS, a photo, a name, and population ... and publicly place them all on Google Earth for transparency," he said.

And 100 percent of donated money from the public goes to water projects in developing nations. Harrison didn't have this worked out initially but has developed the concept of "The Well," in which benefactors give \$1,000, \$2,000, or \$5,000 a month to support the charity's operational costs. That allows the organization to use public donations exclusively for water projects.

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charity: water also places an emphasis on design. "I wanted charity to look like Apple," Harrison said. "Why shouldn't we be telling stories with sophistication, with elegance, with authenticity? And telling them in a newsy way?"

[Water for Christmas](#), a local fundraising campaign for charity: water, will be bringing Harrison to the Quad Cities for a number of events November 21 through 23, including an Iowa Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce dinner. (See the schedule [here](#).) Water for Christmas has raised more than \$100,000 for charity: water in the year it's been active.

Like charity: water, Water for Christmas has a simple hook: "I'm going to ask for water this year." Jody Landers, a Muscatine resident and Water for Christmas leader who is bringing Harrison to the area, said the idea was to pair a holiday that's often associated with consumerism with a problem that's relatively inexpensive to solve.

Furthermore, Landers said, raising money for charity: water was something a small group of people could do simply by talking to people within their spheres of influence -- their churches and social circles. "This was something we could do from our own homes," Landers said. "If we combined our voices, we felt that we could make some sort of impact."

"Jody is a rock star," Harrison said, and she's building awareness along with spurring donations: "There's more value to what Jody's doing than just the 100 grand she's raised."

Harrison noted that with an average donation of less than \$200, charity: water "looks a little more like a movement," and there's certainly a grassroots component to efforts such as Water for Christmas. A tax accountant in New York has sold \$400,000 in water at 20 bucks per bottle during tax-preparation season. "That's something we haven't even begun to tap -- fostering, encouraging creativity," Harrison said. "Just giving people the tools and the platform to be creative, to reach out to their networks."

Harrison might well be the new face of philanthropy. A nightclub promoter in New York City, he had an epiphany while on vacation in South America. He said that he "came face-to-face with what I'd really done for a decade, which was sell escapism. ... I consider myself arrested by God, by my faith, after a decade of wallowing and indulgence. ... I'd lived in exact opposition to my faith, to morality, to service. ... It was about how much I could take from the world."

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He began changing his life by volunteering for two years for Mercy Ships, taking photographs and "trying to use the images and the stories of the work the doctors were doing to change some of my friends back home in nightlife," he said.

water: charity followed when Harrison was 30, and what he has given back can be measured and seen. His organization has raised more than \$11 million from 65,000 donors for more than 1,500 projects in 16 countries, providing clean water to 820,000 people. The evidence is publicly available [here](#).

One of the smartest things Harrison did was select a good cause. Clean water is a simple sell, as it's easy to digest the consequences of not having it. It's a big problem, with lack of access to clean water affecting a billion people. And clean water has an easy-to-describe impact on other aspects of life: Providing a well of potable water has a ripple effect throughout a community, improving health and -- because water no longer has to be fetched from far away -- allowing children to go to school and mothers to do other things with their time, for instance.

"We get to play doctors," Harrison said. "We get to play teachers and educators. We give all this time back, so we get to play economists, as we give women three to four hours back in their day that they were walking for muddy water."

And addressing the problem is, for the most part, inexpensive. "It's not like you're looking for the cure for a disease," Landers said.

Right now charity: water is picking the low-hanging fruit -- areas where solving the water problem is as simple as digging a well, for example. "We know how to help at least half a billion people right now for \$20 a person," Harrison said. The work will get more expensive after that, for instance pumping water uphill.

In the next five years, charity: water aims to attract \$200 million in donations, and \$2 billion in the five years after that. It's a "pretty massive scale that we're going for," Harrison said, but even that \$2 billion would only address 10 percent of the global water problem.

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"Honestly I'm surprised that we've raised so little," he said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek. "There's no better value out there."

For a schedule of Harrison's appearances in the Quad Cities, visit Water4Christmas.com/Events/Scott/Scott.html

For more information on charity: water, visit CharityWater.org . For more information on Water for Christmas, visit Water4Christmas.com

To make a donation to charity: water through the Water for Christmas campaign, visit CharityWater.org/pages/water4christmas