

I would like to share my appreciation of the work done by the Women in Development organization; I am truly honored by this award. I would also like to thank the Sawyer family who nominated me. The Sawyers and my parents have been an inspirational example in my life; they have shown me through their actions that they are dedicated to fulfilling the need for affordable housing. All have worked many years with Habitat for Humanity and now are also working through the Caleb Foundation, a New England based affordable housing organization started by Warren Sawyer.

Through my current work with Habitat for Humanity I have come to know many amazing students from high schools and colleges across the nation. These students are doing remarkable things. They are raising funds to sponsor entire houses, creating curriculums on poverty and teaching them in elementary schools, writing to their congressmen and women and petitioning local politicians to change the communities in which they live. There is something about these types of people, philanthropists, which not only motivates but requires them to take action.

While gathering quotes for a national advocacy event I organized this year at Habitat I asked a college student out in California why advocating for affordable housing was important to him. I received a full-page answer back, where he shared his distinct memories of growing up in a single-parent family watching his mom struggle through three jobs to spend over 50% of her income to pay rent for a decrepit one-room apartment. His family was one of the 14.3

million, nearly one in seven, American households that spend more than 50 percent of their incomes on housing every year.

He has since seen his mother become a homeowner and has witnessed a transformation in her life. The last line of his e-mail read, "I know what it is like to struggle, and the difference homeownership makes, how could I not advocate?"

Whatever the details of the story, there is a line that gets crossed—a point when it is no longer possible for one to continue living the way they were. For me it was witnessing third world poverty in Guatemala when I was eleven, coming home, and getting teary in my driveway, too ashamed that I had such a large house when others had none.

I have said that the hardest thing to learn is how to turn someone over to your side—how to ignite that passion for the cause. I believe that our greatest tool to do this is advocacy. It is advocacy that will turn people on and will make the difference between a handful of people to a movement of change.

An illustration that comes to mind is from my not-so-long ago days at NYU, during the beginning of my senior year I started a petition that asked Mayor Bloomberg to seriously make an effort to address the increasing numbers of homeless and the sky-rocketing rent. Our Habitat for Humanity campus chapter got over 1,000 students to sign in about a month. However, what I remember most clearly was not a speech I gave at City Hall during a rally where I presented the petition, but rather the simple comments by a fellow classmate. I was in one of our school's cafeterias soliciting signatures when I came to a brown-haired boy who after reading the petition handed it back to me without signing and said, "I

don't get it. I mean, why have a petition for something everyone obviously supports. Who wouldn't want to end homelessness and have cheaper rent? What's the point?" To which I said, "The point is- at least we are doing something to try and make a difference, to get attention, to have our voices heard. What are you doing?" The student looked at me for a minute and then took back the petition, signed it, and walked away.

The word philanthropy used to conjure an image in my mind of some filthy rich person who threw money to different causes, never really getting personally involved. However, I now see a picture of a person who is committed to living a life of advocacy, a person who not only donates his or her resources, but actively works to improve the welfare of humanity, and who challenges others to join the cause. I hope that you will be that person who brings people to the demarcation line, helps them to cross it so that they are able to look back and say, "I cannot live the same way, knowing what I know now."

Thank you.