



Jody Greenlee and
Marguerite Doyle

inspirations: FINDING FREEDOM THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

How a nonprofit formed locally is creating opportunities
for women and families across the globe. *by Kate Savage*

The fire that fuels Jody Greenlee's life passion started, as is so often the case, with just a small spark. After ten years of traveling to Guatemala on an annual basis with a Lexington-based nonprofit medical group, Jody had been able to witness firsthand the abject poverty and struggles experienced by widows and their children in this Central American country. She was moved to help them in their plight. But it was a chance meeting with a young mother of four in desperate straits with a son suffering from hepatitis and no medication available that created the motivational springboard for Jody to take her deep desire to another level.

"What I didn't know about starting a nonprofit was vastly more than what I did know," Jody said. "It pays to be naïve when starting something bigger than yourself; if you're educated on the demands of nonprofit management, you most likely would turn and run!"

But this she said recently with more than ten years of hindsight.

In 2009 Jody successfully formed Finding Freedom through Friendship (FFF), with the vision of making it an organization where program participants in Guatemala would be able to find personal, economic and emotional freedom through friendship. In Jody's lexicon, the word "friendship" blankets a very broad definition. In brief

terms, it means supporting single mothers and their children with food, housing and education. "We are a hand-up, not a handout nonprofit," she said, "we are relationship-based, comprehensive in scope, and with a goal of creating generational change in the lives of those participating in our program."

But in real terms, this translates into the donation of homes for widows and their children, the concrete replacement of dirt flooring – an enticing bed for parasites and pathogens, and the repair of leaking roofs. Upgrades to a widow's lodging options can range from buying land to building a house, renovating or renting. Greenlee said, "It is impossible to properly parent when a widow is trying to keep her children dry, fed, educated, and safe while living in abysmal housing."

Also included within this wide interpretation of "friendship" is scholarship assistance to help with school fees, supplies and uniforms, donations of daily meals, microloans, training classes and the procurement of supplies to help support women-owned micro-businesses.

In 2015 the addition of a board member, Marguerite Doyle, originally from Egypt provided the unexpected but welcomed opportunity to take the FFF program further afield.



“Expanding into Egypt helped us realize that our business model could easily travel into any country where impoverished women are trying to raise children on their own,” Greenlee said.

“This is a 60+ hour a week unpaid job,” Greenlee said. “My friends know that when I go off the radar, FFF is having a busy week. Thankfully my husband is a great cook!”

Support comes primarily from individual donations with some contributions from foundations, as well as revenue from an online store they manage. “Funding a nonprofit is what keeps me awake at night. There’s no question that the need will always be bigger than our financial resources,” she explained.

Everything raised goes towards supporting the organization’s programs.

The numbers resulting from all this dedication and hard work are impressive.

FFF has funded 45 micro-businesses for a total of \$29K. That allowed 304 Guatemalan and Egyptian students to receive financial support since the nonprofit’s inception, at an average annual cost of \$318 per student with 11% of students being selected for higher education. Jody says her most rewarding and moving experience has been “the donation of forty-two houses (to date), which has provided generational housing for hundreds of widows and their children.”

Greenlee is acutely aware of the connectivity of the greater global community but is grateful to have started her nonprofit here in Lexington. “It’s a wonderful city full of compassionate and intelligent people, many of whom are seeking to make this world an easier place to inhabit for those who are struggling,” she said. “Inspiring, sustaining and empowering fragile families is the most impactful way to create a secure future for ourselves and each other.”

Jody and her organization are certainly working hard to influence and affect this outcome. •