

# MAKING *a Difference*

Winston Churchill once said: “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give,” and these amazing women are not only changing the lives of those in need, they’re inspiring us to transform the world we live in *Words by Yi-Hwa Hanna*

## Lucy Bruce

“Even little ones can make an impact; we’re never too young to start”

Ever since she was a child volunteering in bake sales at school, mum-of-two Lucy has always been involved with charity work. But it wasn’t until she founded Harmony House ([www.harmonyhouseindia.org](http://www.harmonyhouseindia.org)) that she found her true calling.

After marrying her husband, Gaurav, Lucy’s trips to India became frequent. “It broke my heart to see the undernourished children begging on the streets, and the more I visited, the more I felt compelled to help,” she says. They travelled around Delhi to find a charity to work with and convinced friends to generate funds for it, only to discover that the money wasn’t being used in the right way. “I felt like I’d cheated everyone who gave the money—and the children—and I felt guilty; like I’d let everyone down,” she explains. She lost her trust in working with so-called charities and felt she could never be sure the resources would go to those who

needed it most unless she did it herself.

Soon, Harmony House was born. A day shelter for slum children, it provides the kids with education and nutrition as well as medical services for everyone in the village by volunteer doctors from Delhi.

“At first, the kids didn’t want to come because they were too busy taking care of siblings or working. We went to the slums, educated them about the benefits and we soon had 75 kids within six months,” Lucy says. Now, they have over 600 kids, from six-months old. “At 16, we try to get them into college and help them pay for it.”

Lucy has been astounded by the support shown by the UAE’s residents. “I love that I get to meet so many amazing people who truly want to help and make a difference, and witness moments of complete selflessness.” And she continues to see this through her latest venture, Home Grown. An eco-nursery started

with her friend Beverly Jatwani, it is committed to being socially responsible. “Out of each Home Grown child’s nursery fees, a percentage goes to one in Harmony House. It’s a perfect partnership, and the kids can learn that not everyone is as lucky as they are. They make a special friend through cards and photos,” says Lucy, who firmly believes that even little ones can make an impact, and that we’re never too young to make a difference.

She also believes that the simplest gestures can help, be it donating old clothes or even stopping near building sites to explain to your children how and why the labourers struggle. “We all have to start somewhere. If I’ve ever needed help it’s always been given and I’m really grateful for that. People here realise they have the time and resources to do something to help, and experiencing that first-hand has been a real privilege.” →



Photography: Murrindie Frew, Juliet Dunne, Verko Ignjatovic.

## Cathy Liebman & Christina Decker

“Our goal is to eradicate hunger and poverty, making women self-reliant”

**Passionate humanitarians** Cathy and Christina aspire to make a difference on a global level. Wanting to do more than help charities on a local level, they crave the ability to be more hands-on when it comes to uplifting peoples' lives.

By marrying their passion for fashion and sustainability, Ethical Muse was created to allow the pair to create a viable industry that encourages self-sustainability through selling local handicrafts. A social venture, it provides the means for artisans to sell products, encourage childrens' education, and to make recycled and sustainable products the norm in the style world.

For each accessory purchased from their website ([www.ethicalmuse.com](http://www.ethicalmuse.com)), 20 nutritious meals are given to the Masooli Community School Project in Uganda, with over 5,500 donated to date. “Our goal is to eradicate hunger and poverty,” says Cathy. “And through the organisations we work with and the craftsmanship of our products, the women are now becoming financially self-reliant.”

Cathy loves living in the UAE, where charity is inherent to the culture: “Dubai's location also makes it so easy to become really involved and totally hands-on as we can easily travel to the countries we work with from here. There are so many ways to help out there—it's about figuring out what makes your heart sing, then finding a way to do it!”



## Melissa Higgins

"We don't need to shun glamour to make a difference. Everyone can be style conscious with a conscience"

"Once in a while, something or someone touches your life. In 2010, an earthquake hit Haiti. It was one of the worst natural disasters of all time, and over 250,000 people were killed in under a minute. There are still over a million left homeless. When I became aware of this, it affected me in a way I cannot describe. Since that day, I've been determined to help in any way I can," says the woman behind Frontline Fashion, an online magazine and clothing brand that combines philanthropy with style.

After seeing the destruction in Haiti, 36-year-old Melissa immediately found herself volunteering in the disaster zone, before coming back to the UAE and founding Frontline Fashion ([www.frontlinef.com](http://www.frontlinef.com)) as a way to raise funds for those she had left behind. "People don't need to shun glamour to make a difference," she says; "Everyone can be style conscious with a social conscience." Through her Zanmi range (Haitian for 'friends'), Melissa strives to raise awareness and donates profits to projects in Haiti, including a new orphanage they're building. "This is a project of love not finance; going to Haiti was the best decision I have ever made in my life. No matter your lifestyle, it's always possible to give something back and help others. I can't imagine doing anything else." →

## Gill O'Farrell

"I love the generosity of people here and their desire to help others"

An avid supporter of the Christina Noble Children's Foundation ([www.cncf.org](http://www.cncf.org))—a grassroots organisation set up to help the plight of disadvantaged, abused children—Gill says her involvement in the charity has changed her life. "Some of the stories about the abuse that some children have endured are heartbreaking, but seeing what CNCF does to try to give them back their childhood is inspiring."

CNCF has helped more than 600,000 children across Vietnam and Mongolia, and inspired by her recent visit to the Tay Ninh Centre for Visually Impaired Children in Vietnam, Gill hopes to join their three-month volunteer programme once her daughter, Ellie is old enough.

"I was blown away by my trip and the work that is being done by the centre, where students are taught life skills—so when they have to leave, they have the opportunity to earn a living," Gill reveals. "We do have a tendency to take what we have for granted, and seeing the work being done adds a huge level of perspective to our life. I love the generosity of people here and their desire to help others less fortunate—especially during Ramadan. It's a great occasion to remind us all to think of others."



## Saher Sheikh

“Humans reaching out to other human beings is Adopt-a-Camp’s philosophy. Anyone can do it”

“It all started with a chance meeting with a labourer at my local Spinneys seven years ago,” says Saher Shaikh, founder of Adopt-a-Camp (AAC). An ex-investment banker and mum-of-three, Saher was so moved she began creating care packages to take to the labour camps. With the help of her partners, loving family and countless volunteers, AAC has now grown into one of the most recognisable, celebrated initiatives in the UAE.

“AAC aims to meaningfully improve the lives of the men who build the beautiful cities we live in and through them, to reach out and aid the diverse communities from which they come,” Saher explains. With 43 camps and more than 32,200 men now under their wing, the initiative provides education, events and activities, various medical treatments, hygiene workshops and support for the labourers’ families back home, all for free. “They don’t come here to beg—it could have been any of us in their position. They’ve all become our adopted boys, and like our own children, we try to help them grow to become better, stronger, happier individuals,” says Saher, adding that she’s been blown away by the community’s support.

“We are blessed with so much; the least we can do is give back.” ■

