

Giraffe Heroes Project

2023 Annual Report

MISSION & MEANS

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Giraffe Heroes Project moves people to stick their necks out for the common good, and gives them tools to succeed.

I. Background



The world needs people who stick their necks out to solve tough public problems. The Giraffe Heroes Project has been a pioneer in finding and honoring such people. We call them “Giraffe Heroes” because they stick their necks out for the common good.

They are men and women, young and old, from every ethnic and economic background, and they’re tackling every public problem you can think of, from environmental pollution to gang violence.

The Project’s strategy is simple—and has been used by every culture and in every age to inspire citizens to act for the common good: people see, hear or read heroes’ stories and are moved into action themselves, helping solve the public problems of most concern to *them*. The Giraffe Heroes Project is the troubadour for our age.

It’s important to note that Giraffe Heroes are taking personal risks and making sacrifices that are way beyond tackling problems. There are many other organizations already honoring problem-solvers. The level of heroism—of risk and sacrifice—required to be named a Giraffe Hero is such that it significantly raises the bar of what’s possible for the rest of us. The term “sticking their necks out” isn’t just a clever tagline; it’s a key differentiator of Giraffe Heroes from other programs honoring service.

Our Team. We get the stories of Giraffe Heroes out to the world, because stories help us all grasp and shape our reality, even when the world is as strange as it is right now.

And this is us. A bunch of semi-crazy idealists, all gig-working from our own places, at wages a lot of people would laugh at.



In addition to honoring real heroes and telling their stories, the Project's leaders write books, articles, blogs, and do online video talks, podcasts and interviews, giving people both the practical tools and the inspiration they need to meet the community and global challenges they care about.

Beginning in 1991, the Project developed and has distributed classroom materials for character development, service learning, civic engagement, experiential learning, and literacy. We are now distributing them online, moving away from on-paper and on-discs. The materials help young people build lives as courageous and compassionate citizens. Using the compelling stories of Giraffe Heroes and a unique pedagogy developed for a wide age-range, Giraffe programs have helped over half a million kids create and carry out their own initiatives to solve public problems of concern to them. In the process they learn critical academic and life skills, including how to be active and successful citizens in their communities and beyond. Much of the curricula is now available to teachers as [free downloads on the Project's website](#).

[Giraffe Heroes International](#) (GHI) is the Project's global arm. At the end of 2023, GHI had seven independent affiliates in India, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Argentina.

All GHI operations are modeled on the same activities that have worked so well for the US-based Project for over four decades—finding local and regional Giraffe Heroes and telling their stories in both traditional and social media. These stories inspire others to stick their necks out too, helping solve the public problems that concern them most, including corruption, injustice, poverty, crimes against women, poor leadership, environmental degradation, tribal violence and much more.

The Project also has a large global audience online. From a base operation near Seattle WA, the Project reaches around the world, via its website at

www.giraffe.org; its [Facebook Page](#); its “Heads Up” emails and its blogs, Op-Eds and videos.

Descriptions of all the Project’s programs are at www.giraffe.org. There, you’ll also find an “[About Us](#)” section that contains FAQs, our most recent 990, a history of the Project, our privacy policy, this Annual Report, brief bios of our Board and staff, and “25 Reasons to Support Us.”

II. A Summary of the Project’s Accomplishments in 2023

(measured against goals set in December 2022)

Program: Giraffe Heroes Stories—selecting Giraffe Heroes, writing and editing their stories, and putting those stories into a searchable web database.

Goal for 2023:

- Commend 65 new Giraffe Heroes worldwide and put them all into our free online database and into social media.

In 2023 the Giraffe jury in the US met twice online and commended 20 new Giraffe Heroes. GHI affiliates (see below) honored an additional 25 new Giraffe Heroes, making a total of 45 new Giraffe Heroes for 2023.

We edited, updated and posted to the [Giraffe Hero database](#) the inspiring stories of all new Giraffe Heroes chosen by the US jury in 2023, complete with photos and URLs for the websites of the Giraffe Heroes, so anyone viewing these stories can link directly to the Giraffe Heroes' own websites to follow their work and to support it.

As time and resources permit, we add to this database a backlog of Giraffe Heroes commended in previous years as well as stories of Giraffe Heroes commended by our GHI affiliates.

We invite you to visit this [amazing story bank](#) of inspiring heroes. This online database is a key part of the Giraffe Project's long-term gift to the world; a treasury instantly available, free, to teachers, parents, kids, media—anybody who can get onto the Internet, anywhere in the world. With this updated database, now more than ever, our website is our “home-base” in the world.



Program: Outreach—bringing Giraffe Heroes stories and Giraffe inspiration and skills to global audiences through traditional and social media.

[Goals for 2023](#)

- [Continue our active schedule of blogs, Op-eds and interviews.](#)

- Continue to expand and improve our social media strategies on Facebook and other avenues to spread the message of courageous, compassionate service and to reach potential allies, partners, and funders.
- Find the funding to go from our [proof-of-concept video](#) to producing more short, impactful videos of Giraffe Heroes and bringing them to the attention of the world, thereby extending the Project's reach beyond text stories,, reaching people whose connection to the world is in short bursts, on their phones.
- Continue to expand our closed group page on Facebook providing a forum for Giraffe Heroes to interact with each other and with Project staff.

Growing outreach: In 2023 the Project continued to adapt to an ever-changing communication environment, especially on our website and in social media. We refined our web and social media operations to take advantage of the latest and best options, making sure that our social media messages and website pages "pop" on phones, tablets, computers—and whatever may come next, especially where young people access the Internet.

More specifically, in 2023 we continued to explore new strategies to reach potential allies, partners, customers and funders. Our Facebook followers get a daily feed of stories of real heroes and many of these followers share these Giraffe stories and messages with friends—who share with still others. [The stories we post on Facebook](#) also go to Instagram.

Giraffe Hero videos: After a pandemic-induced delay, we've restarted the work launched in 2019 and in 2023 began disseminating [a proof-of-concept video](#), the first step of our major project to produce a series of one-minute videos of Giraffe Heroes. Please take a minute to watch it—it'll give you a good sense of the quality and power of the work we do.

Op-eds interviews and blog posts. Project leaders John Graham and Ann Medlock are both steady and informative presences with global audiences on Facebook and in other social media, and on a wide variety of podcasts and interviews. Click [here](#) for a recent podcast (excuse the ads)

Is our story-telling working?

First, the metrics:

Web activity. We gained 12,000 new visitors in 2023 and over half were not in the US, confirming the Project's growing global reach. The most popular pages were

the free downloads of the Project's school curricula, followed by the stories of Giraffe Heroes.

The Giraffe Email service, *Heads Up* gives subscribers the first look at new Giraffe commendees, spreading the Giraffe message of courageous, compassionate service, and attracting support for our work. (If you aren't getting it, email office@giraffe.org and ask to receive *Heads Up*.) In 2023, the number of active readers of *Heads Up* has held steady at about 2,000, despite our efforts to enlarge this outreach. Adjusting to the times, we realize that the cultural overload of emails is a factor.

But the Project's real impact is hard to quantify.

When your mission is to move more people into courageous, caring service, you'll never be able to count all those moves. People who are inspired by Giraffe stories and set out to solve a public problem they see don't tell us about that.

We did get foundation funding, once, for a survey. Not to our surprise, two-thirds of the Giraffe Project members who responded said that Giraffe Hero stories had inspired them to speak out against corruption, build bridges across conflicts, clean up wetlands, take a stand against injustice, be a voice for the powerless or act in other ways to serve the common good.

Anecdotal feedback from people who hear or read Giraffe Hero stories tells us that the Project's storytelling matters even if reliable hard data is hard to get. In message after message people thank us for giving them hope and examples to emulate, and for feeding their hearts and souls when they're exhausted and discouraged.

"With all the terrible news that's coming in day by day, it's so valuable to get a glimpse of hope. Thank you."

"The worse things get, the more the Giraffe Project is needed."

"You're keeping me going, when I've been finding that harder and harder."

"I love these incredible stories—empowering for the soul!"

Responses like that empower *us* to keep on keeping on.

The impact of our work on the Giraffe Heroes themselves. Many Giraffe Heroes tell us that our commendations, web stories, and media efforts have helped them advance their work—bringing them public recognition plus attracting volunteers and financial and other support to their causes. Sometimes the publicity we've created protects Giraffe

Heroes who are in danger of being unfairly disciplined, fired—or worse. On a personal level, Giraffe Heroes often tell us that our commendation has brought them hope in a sea of discouragement—and keeps them going.

- *Giraffe Hero Casey Ruud was a safety inspector who put his job on the line when he refused to ignore dangerous safety violations at the Hanford Nuclear plant. “When things got really tough,” he told us, “I did think of chickening out. But then I’d think, I’m a Giraffe. I’ve got to keep sticking my neck out. And I’d go on.”*

- *Carol and Hurt Porter, of Houston, run Kid Care, a pioneering “meals on wheels” program for kids. When the Giraffe Heroes Project got Kid Care featured on “Good Morning America,” Carol estimated that the organization got a million dollars in additional money, labor and in-kind donations.*

- *Max McYoung, an environmental whistleblower, was one of many Giraffes who report a boost in credibility following media stories placed by the Project. “After your publicity,” he told us, “my Congressman answers my calls.”*

- *Michael Wynne, an investigator with the Florida Department of Revenue who challenged a ripoff of taxpayers, told us, “Being named a Giraffe has been the single most morally uplifting event for me and my family—a single beam of light in a forest of negatives.”*

Program: Giraffe Heroes International (GHI)

Goals for 2023:

- Work with Giraffe Heroes Argentina to support civic engagement and service-learning education in Argentina and
- Spread our Spanish-language service-learning guide to classrooms in other nations.
- Use our media skills to amplify the brave voices of the Giraffe Heroes in Zimbabwe who are risking their lives to help create a government that is honest, fair and competent.
- support all GHI affiliates with coaching, media power, financial and other resources.

In 2023, GHI continued to support our partners overseas in sustaining their own affiliate programs, finding and honoring inspiring heroes in their respective countries and fostering active citizen engagement in places that urgently need role models of compassionate, courageous citizens. GHI also offers citizens the tools and training they need to move into courageous service. Specifically ~



- We continued to pay special attention to [Giraffe Heroes Zimbabwe](#), doing what we can to support our partners there in pressuring the government to bring stability, justice and prosperity to that beleaguered nation. Many of the Giraffe Heroes whose stories are told in Zimbabwe are political activists who opposed the corruption, mismanagement and violence of dictator Robert Mugabe's regime and now are now fighting to pressure autocratic new rulers to finally bring to the country the leadership it deserves. Some of these brave Giraffe Heroes have been imprisoned and beaten, and one was snatched off the streets by government thugs and is presumed dead.

Giraffe Heroes Zimbabwe has now become a significant political force in the country, supporting those fighting for change and giving hope to the many Zimbabweans who yearn for new leadership that is honest, competent, fair and nonviolent.

- In 2023 we consulted with [Giraffe Heroes Europe](#) (GHE) to set up and fund its own program for finding and honoring heroes.
- The Giraffe [affiliate in South Africa](#) is growing rapidly. To date it has found and honored 55 Giraffe Heroes.

- We launched a new GHI affiliate in Kenya.
- [Giraffe Heroes Argentina](#) has successfully introduced state-of-the-art Giraffe service-learning programs to the schools in that country. In 2022 they completed the translation of the Project's flagship *Service-Learning Guide* into Spanish and in 2023 began a professional evaluation, interviewing teachers to learn the impact they saw the Giraffe program having on their students.

For an update on all GHI programs, see www.giraffe.org/global. In a sense, Giraffe Heroes International has been almost *too* successful in generating inspiring new stories of heroes in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and South Africa, heroes who are often risking their lives to combat crises like Covid, corruption, poverty, and crimes against women. We've had to tell our affiliates in those countries to slow the pace a bit until funding catches up!

Program: Civic Engagement Programs

Goals for 2023

- Continue to strengthen civic engagement skills through our books and blogs, and in particular through a K-12 curricula that help kids build lives as courageous and compassionate citizens.
- Build our global dialogue with teachers and other users of our curricula.
- Find the right platform for hosting our classroom materials and publicize that availability.
- Expand the global distribution of *Stan and Bea's Two Tall Tales*, stories of courage and caring for young children.

In 2023, we continued to build our growing global web dialogue with teachers and other users of our curricula. As of December 31, 2023, 2,245 educators had downloaded one or both of our two most popular K-12 programs (including interactive, digitized lesson plans, handouts, audios and videos online). You can find these free downloads at <https://www.giraffe.org/for-teachers-families>. The "Wufoo" system we use to track those downloads gives us names, emails, schools, locations and grade levels

Are Giraffe programs for kids working?

First, the distribution metrics:

Distribution of the Giraffe Heroes Project K-12 curriculum can be measured fairly accurately and we have taken pains to do so. In the two decades the Project distributed its curriculum on paper, in binders, we used a standard classroom size of 25 to estimate that the Giraffe curriculum reached half a million students worldwide.

As paper curricula became increasingly obsolete, we began focusing on digitizing key elements of our curriculum and offering them as free downloads from our website. The popularity of those downloads continues to grow at a nice clip (an 800% increase over the last seven years). We capture the emails of all the educators downloading the programs and so are able to communicate with them, gathering (mostly) praise and sometimes suggestions for improvement.

Anecdotal evidence:

Measuring distribution of the curriculum is easy compared to measuring the impact on individual student attitudes and actions.

The Kellogg Foundation funded several initiatives to gather metrics, using professionals from the University of Washington. Those reports, compiled from questionnaires and interviews with both students and their teachers, indicated that the Giraffe curricula did indeed have the positive impact on student attitudes and actions that we said it would. Details at <https://www.giraffe.org/for-teachers-families> (scroll to bottom).



Since those early studies, it's been clear from anecdotal letters and pictures that many students are inspired by participating in Giraffe service-learning programs in their communities but we have no definitive way of knowing how well that impact "sticks" with them as they grow. Only extremely expensive, controlled longitudinal studies could shed even some light on that question and, convinced by the feedback we saw with our own eyes, we saw no reason to divert money to that end when we could use it to continue to improve the content and distribution of the program itself. We were fueled by feedback like this:

I feel I have helped show people that I care about my town. I feel it has helped everyone realize that the new generation isn't that bad after all...I feel I have made a difference in the town...This unit taught me that if everybody does nothing and just ignores problems, then our world would be awful. I know we made a difference in lots of people's lives... —comments from students who conducted a voter registration drive as part of their Giraffe Heroes Program service project, Thayer High School, Winchester, NH

This program is just a necessity for today's child who has a lack of role models, often in the house, definitely in the media and in society. It's giving a child hope where many have a sense of hopelessness at such a young age.—Florine Fosnick, 2nd grade teacher, Beverly Park-Highline Elem. School, Seattle

The Giraffe Heroes Program *utilizes all the best of modern education—group interaction, consensus, outreach... It's metaphorically sound. It's more than community service—it brings out the best side in kids, the side we all need to see... there is so much violence in this culture; Giraffe stories give an alternative.*—Mary White, Cleveland High School, Seattle

Financial Goal

Goal for 2023

- Return the Project's finances to the black, relying increasingly on the growth in the number of monthly pledges, and on the generosity, skills and enthusiasm of our volunteers.

The Project finished 2023 in the black. See summary financial statement below.

Our 2023 [Federal Form 990](#) is posted on the Project's website. We are especially grateful for the growth of the number of donors who make monthly pledges to the Project, providing a much-appreciated steady source of income especially over the lean summer months. Monthly pledges now account for more than 12% of the Project's contributed income.

III. Giraffe Heroes Project—Financial Information for 2023

The Project's work in 2023 was funded mostly by private donors. Our financial documents are filed on Form 990 with the Internal Revenue Service; you can see a [copy of our latest filing](#) on the Project's website.

The Project's budget is remarkably small for its impact because of the generosity, talent and enthusiasm of our volunteers.

The following is a summary of our financials for 2023, compared to 2022:

	2023	2022
a) Year-end net assets (equity):	37,949	38,316
b) Income		
Contributions from individuals	58,884	60,214
Foundation and corporate grants	0	0
Sales of products and services	116	89
Other income	<u>71</u>	<u>-246</u>
Total income	59,071	60,057

c) Expenses

Program services (80% in 2022)		
Civic engagement programs	2,839	3,294
Giraffe Heroes, selecting and publicizing	10,446	12,118
Outreach	22,455	26,050
Giraffe Heroes International	10,352	12,009
Supporting Services		
Fundraising (9% in 2022)	5,096	5,912
Administrative (11% in 2022)	<u>6,283</u>	<u>7,105</u>
Total Expenses	57,471	66,488

IV. Giraffe Heroes Project — Our Goals, Objectives and Recommendations for Actions in 2023

Giraffe Heroes Stories

- Commend 70 new Giraffe Heroes worldwide and put them all into our free online database and into social media.
- Reformat the Giraffe Hero database to make it more user-friendly.

Outreach

- Continue our active schedule of podcasts, blogs, Op-eds and interviews.
- Continue to expand and improve our social media strategies on Facebook and other avenues to spread the message of courageous, compassionate service and to reach potential allies, partners, and funders.
- Find the funding to go from our [proof-of-concept video](#) to producing more short, impactful videos of Giraffe Heroes and bringing them to the attention of the world, thereby extending the Project's reach beyond text stories,, reaching people whose connection to the world is in short bursts, on their phones.

Civic Engagement Programs

- Continue to strengthen civic engagement skills through our books, podcasts and blogs, and in particular through a K-12 curricula that help kids build lives as courageous and compassionate citizens.

- Build our global dialogue with teachers and other users of our curricula.
- Find the right platform for hosting our classroom materials and publicize that availability.
- Expand the global distribution of *Stan and Bea's Two Tall Tales*, stories of courage and caring for young children.

Giraffe Heroes International

- Work with Giraffe Heroes Argentina to support civic engagement and service-learning education in Argentina and
- Spread our Spanish-language service-learning guide to classrooms in other nations.
- Use our media skills to amplify the brave voices of the Giraffe Heroes in Zimbabwe who are risking their lives to help create a government that is honest, fair and competent.
- support all GHI affiliates with coaching, media power, financial and other resources.
- Launch a new GHI affiliate in Uganda

Finances

- Keep the Project's finances to the black, relying increasingly on the growth in the number of monthly pledges, and on the generosity, skills and enthusiasm of our volunteers.

V. Giraffe Heroes Project Board 2023

Ron Reed, Chair

Melissa Ransdell, Treasurer

Miffy Ruggiero, Secretary

Ann Medlock

Peter Tavernise

Pat Wright/Tia Young