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## Social entrepreneur creates wellspring of support

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By [Deborah L. Cohen](#)

CHICAGO (Reuters) - When Dan Morrison saw women in rural India hauling water for miles, he committed to personally raising \$5,000 to build a well. That philanthropic effort turned into Citizen Effect, a website Morrison launched last year to help others complete similar projects.

"I went home, wrote a Christmas card - a holiday card to friends and family - and immediately started getting \$500 dollar checks," said Morrison, 37, whose well project provided water for Vachharajpur, a small village in Gujarat. "They trusted me and it passed right through to the community."

Citizen Effect ([www.citizeneffect.org](http://www.citizeneffect.org)) to date has provided more than \$203,000 in total donations and completed nearly 60 projects, including funding for water tanks in India, kitchen equipment in Peru, and a women's center in Zambia. The site is promoting more than 100 active causes, including some closer to home, such as efforts to aid those communities affected by the Gulf Coast oil spill.

"With our model, you become the marketing, promotional and fundraising machine," said Morrison, whose non-profit venture has received close to \$500,000 in funding. "We want to reach that 1 to 3 percent of the population that wants to do more, that wants to get the project done."

Unlike micro-lending sites such as Kiva ([www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org)), which mines individual donors for loans to entrepreneurs in under-developed countries, Citizen Effect focuses on completing community projects. It appeals to what Morrison called "citizen philanthropists" that are willing to take ownership of a local endeavor and raise money.

They tap their personal networks, lending credibility to the cause and raising awareness through activities that include email campaigns, parties, runs, bake sales - whatever it takes to meet the goal.

Brian Uzzi, a professor of leadership at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, calls Morrison a "network broker" that brings together resources for mobilization.

"He's multiplying the effect of each individual through his own network," said Uzzi, noting throughout history most social causes have been driven by a handful of highly motivated people. "This website could potentially release an enormous amount of pent up entrepreneurial effort."

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Morrison's move toward full-time philanthropy didn't happen overnight. He spent the early part of his career working as a brand-marketing consultant, strategizing for corporations in the energy, automotive and chemicals industries. But time spent in India in 2006, where he observed the hardships of rural life, took a toll.

"I had already started to go through the transformation of looking at my life," said Morrison, who took time out to get a Masters in Middle Eastern studies. "I needed to align my work with my values."

He launched the first iteration of his website in early 2008 as 1well.org and it started a chain reaction. Soon Morrison found himself attracting the attention of some heavy hitters.

It began with a contact at law firm Akin Gump, who put Morrison in touch with Neel Parekh, an Indian-born partner at New York hedge fund Tiger Consumer Management. Parekh - now Citizen Effect's chairman - introduced Morrison to Michael Slaby, a former new media adviser to the Obama Administration who previously worked at Google CEO Eric Schmidt's investment firm Tomorrow Ventures.

Tomorrow gave Morrison a \$300,000 donation that he said allowed it to beef up its technology and dramatically boost monthly results. The site re-launched last year as Citizen Effect and has since attracted more high-profile attention, including a partnership with actress Charlize Theron, whose Africa Outreach Project is helping to build a foster home for needy children in South Africa.

"They're doing ten times as many projects since before the technology platform," said Slaby, a Citizen Effect director who now heads the global digital practice for Edelman. "They're growing. I think they'll eventually reach critical mass."

Morrison hopes to license a version of the technology to traditional nonprofit fundraising organizations, becoming a source of sustainable revenue that will make Citizen Effect less reliant on gifts.

Until then, he remains committed to bringing more grassroots projects to life, understanding the effect that just a single effort can have on a community.

"Not only did 500 people have access to clean water," said Morrison of his well project. "One woman started a flour mill; one woman started a grocery store. They have their time back. We've really given them freedom and choice to be able to do what they wanted with their lives."

(This is part of a monthly series about "Accidental Entrepreneurs" running on Reuters.com that will profile entrepreneurs who never expected to start their own business and are now running successful companies. If you think your company qualifies, please email Deb Cohen at [smallbusinessbigissues@yahoo.com](mailto:smallbusinessbigissues@yahoo.com))



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