

First **FRIDAY**

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Q&A

NO BOUNDARIES FOR BIG CAUSES

How Your Colleagues Make a Difference Outside of UPMC

By Katelyn Blough

Caring, helping, saving, comforting. Each of these qualities are so embedded in our daily lives in health care that they become a part of who we are. The chance to impact patients' lives every day makes us lucky.

But many of us take it further. We give to charities that speak to us, and volunteer our time in communities that need our help. We carry the interwoven qualities of our careers far beyond UPMC.



This is a story of a man who listened to begging children on the street corners of Dhaka, a city where 200,000 street children roam, alone, each day.

This is a story of a man who wanted to house, feed, educate, and provide medical care to those same children. A story of a man who went to medical school and started a charity in a foreign country simply to offer these children hope.

This is Richard Hubbard's story.

How did you end up in Bangladesh? Where does the story of Bangladesh Kids begin?

I studied international development in college. I had a professor who went to graduate school with Muhammad Yunus, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for Grameen Bank, a bank established to help the poor by providing them small loans. My professor suggested I go to Bangladesh and intern with Grameen Bank.

While I was there, the street children would come and beg to me on a daily basis and it really caught my attention. The kids were obviously very vulnerable. I would buy them food and ask them to tell me their stories. I ended up moving in with a Bangladesh family to start my own charity, [Bangladesh Kids](#).

It was all word of mouth at first. There's never a lack of need in Bangladesh, and people knew we were there to help, so families would come to us or told us of kids who needed help.

We started with four families, either orphans or kids with single-parent homes. We paid for private schools, housing, food, and medical issues.

What's involved in starting your own organization?

We didn't ask permission; we just did it.

Eventually, I had to form a federally recognized charitable organization in the U.S. There's a whole process of getting incorporated and forming a board of directors.

We also found charities in Bangladesh that could help with administrative support and transferring funds. Essentially, they distribute the money to our agents in Bangladesh and then our agents go and hire tutors or schedule surgeries for our kids with that money.

How does your role at UPMC enable you to fulfill your charity's work abroad?

My charity is providing funds to help kids in Bangladesh, and UPMC is allowing me to conduct research for a global epidemic.

My charity has a partnership with a local hospital in Bangladesh to provide a ventilator machine for babies who have respiratory problems. UPMC has approved my research to track the children and look at their survivorship rates.

I'm spending time at Magee-Womens Hospital to see how they treat the respiratory syndrome here, where we have less than five percent of kids dying. In Bangladesh, that number is more like 50 percent because they don't have technology to treat the kids.

The problem is, the ventilator machines are very big and expensive, but Rice University produced a machine that was smaller and more affordable — a Pumani bCPAP.

continued ►

Richard's story *(continued)*

What memory has made the largest impact on your life?

Jannat's story is unclear, but her mother either abandoned her or died, and her father was killed in an accident. She came to us when she was only six years old.

The thing I always remember most is that she was happy, bright, energetic, and wanted to play despite her horrific back story.

In Bangladesh, all kids take a test at the end of elementary school that ranks them. She was in the top percentile possible of all kids in the country. I was filled with such pride in that moment.



This is a story of a woman who wanted something more from life, a "something more" that simply called her to be a friend.

This is a story of a friendship turned sisterhood.

This is Sonya Charlesworth's story.

Tell me a little bit about Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a nonprofit that helps with developing youth, often from single-parent homes, who need mentors. They match little ones with mentors who can enhance their abilities and what they need.

Your job is to develop a friendship; your job is to be a friend. Be a listener. Be a role model. It's such a small investment of time, but probably the most rewarding thing.

What inspired you to volunteer?

This particular organization spoke to me because I remember when someone encouraged me to believe in myself when I was little, something that didn't require monetary value.

Life is tough and sometimes you just need a boost, a "Hey, you can do this!" I wanted to give someone that.

What advice would you give to someone who is considering becoming a volunteer?

Start small. I was an energetic high school kid who wanted to save the world, but my father would always say, "Come help me in my free clinic this weekend."

Learn from the basics, get involved in a food drive, or raise money to run in the Pittsburgh Marathon. These experiences will set you up to do bigger things later on.

Richard Hubbard, MD, is a graduate medical resident at UPMC whose organization has been supporting about 12 kids in Bangladesh for nine years.

Which one of your "play dates" has made the largest impact on your life?

Over time, when you pull up to her driveway, or show up to a recital or wrestling match, and you see her face light up just because you're there. When she's so excited to see you, that is the best feeling.

Also, to see her want to be a helper now and have confidence is amazing.

What advice would you give to someone who is considering becoming a volunteer?

You can do this. You don't give yourself enough credit. You can do anything. You can make an impact or relationship that will last years. The memories you create will be forever. It will bring a smile to your face and make you feel good.

Sonya Charlesworth is an access lead at UPMC Urgent Care in Wexford and has been a "big sister" to her little one for seven years.

Looking for ways that you can Lend A Hand? | What's your way of showing you care? [Share your story.](#)