

PAULA CONSTANTINO

1,000 Women Can Change the World

By Mikell Worley



When I met with Paula Constantino, she set out to convince me that “1,000 women can change the world.” I haven’t had the pleasure of speaking with the other 999, but after my conversation with Paula, I am convinced that this one woman can do it. Paula is a passionate advocate for women in poverty, and she is using her technological expertise to create an accessible educational system designed to improve the quality of life for women all around the world.

The internet isn’t required, nor is electricity. Weather will not interfere with the transmission. A woman in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, will have the same access to the materials as a woman in Cape Town, South Africa, and it will be taught in her native language.

How is that possible? It works like this, an instructor or mentor digitally records a lesson, which is then converted into an Audio Information Module (AIM).

The list of topics currently being recorded include purifying water, how to get a loan or start a business, information preventing the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS, financial literacy, and plumbing techniques. Presentations vary in length from 30 to 45 minutes, and mentors can record lessons electronically over the phone or by using a microphone and computer software, or even over the Internet. Currently Audio Acrobat, a third-party provider, records the AIMs.

The modules are then re-recorded in the language native to the area where it is to be distributed. Next the AIM is uploaded onto a specialized, weather-resistant audio player and shipped off. Women who have never had the advantage of an education can listen to the audio lesson and learn without knowing how to read or needing to take notes. The possibilities are limitless.

The players include batteries that will last up to 20 hours and can withstand multiple broadcasts of the lesson. The machines can upload as many as ten modules, and they come equipped with speakers so that the women can listen in a group. “There are several advantages of having a group of women listen simultaneously,” Paula explains. “They are all hearing the same information, it is more cost effective to have several women hear from one player, and they will be more likely to discuss and process the information [afterward].

“They are dedicated players. [Meaning they can be used only to retrieve] the information that we download,” Paula notes. “That increases the likelihood that [the women using them] will return the players for more information.” There is a token



cost for the players and 50% to 75% of the money is refunded when the devices are returned with an evaluation of the information on the AIM.

Paula envisions complimentary tiers of volunteers to make the 1,000 Women Can Change the World project successful. The first is a support team of professional women who create audio and information modules in their fields of expertise. The women contributing their talents are dedicated to the project's mission "to inspire, enlighten, and empower women." Their focus globally is to eliminate poverty and disease in developing communities. On a local level in the United States, they support women who are victims of domestic violence as well as women who are re-entering society after prison. All women are given resources to enable them to be safe, healthy, self-sufficient, and successful.

It is easy to see from Paula's background how her vision formed. "My undergraduate work was in business administration, with a minor in health care administration that included an internship as an advocate for mentally ill patients with disabilities. That led me to my interest in law. I was a late bloomer and attended law school in my forties, with a concentration on health law and litigation. Insurance companies retained my services to represent doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers in medical malpractice cases, as well as some personal injury cases. My career was based in the New York City area, [where I worked] for about a dozen years from 1986 into 1998.

"Later I relocated to Annapolis, Maryland, where I am currently based. From 1999 into 2003, I served as in-house legal counsel with a technology start-up. This gave me a new perspective on the implications of using technology creatively." About six years ago, Paula's ideas about technology began to mesh with her desire to form a network for women similar to the "little boys club" that serves as the framework of support for men in business.

"The idea of a women's support group was a natural. Women are collaborative by nature and they are consensus builders." As a result in May 2006 the Women's Support TEAM was formed. It has since evolved into "1000 Women" with a goal to meet the needs of women all over the world.

I feel so empowered to know that there are women out there that are passionate about empowering others.

For more information refer to www.1000womencanchangetheworld.org.

"Our first pilot started in Cape Town, South Africa, in the fall of 2008. The women there are forward thinking. They are very progressive and innovative and further along in their development than some of the other communities I considered." Paula made contact through the internet with a young woman based in South Africa. They met through Peace by Peace, a weekly phone conference through the Global Roundtable, an interactive, international conference call where a local women's leader is interviewed about herself, her initiatives, and her vision for

her country. After a series of phone conversations, Paula and her team set the project in motion, and the first training recorder was sent to women in Cape Town on October 28, 2008. One of the trainees, a woman named Charlene, responded

enthusiastically to the program, "I feel so empowered to know that there are women out there that are passionate about empowering others." Since then several other communities in South Africa have gotten involved.

While we are sleeping there are women half a world away listening to the audio tapes and becoming educated and inspired! Each woman who is educated incorporates that learning to improve the well-being of her family and then her community. The implications of educating a diverse audience, regardless of literacy, language, or socio-economic status is staggering. There is no way to measure the broad sweep of possibilities. Keeping current with the advantages of electronics is limited only by our lack of imagination. As technology continues to evolve Paula will be leading the global effort to inspire, enlighten, and empower women. ❀

Mikell Worley is the founder and president of Mikell's Treasures. She has spent more than 20 years designing and delivering self-improvement trainings, has had several cover stories in various magazines, and recently illustrated her first children's book. She is an advocate for women and children.