

Making Ripples

Donating Christmas

by Amanda Bancroft

What do you see under your tree? It's a wonderful thing to find thoughtful gifts, and a bonus to the world if those gifts are ethically sourced and sustainably produced. Often, there is nothing better than an "upcycled" present, or a hand-made gift directly from someone you love (macaroni noodles and yarn encouraged). But if your basket-weaving skills or shopping savvy are as challenged as mine, there are things which fit under trees even though they are quite invisible to us.

Beneath the full evergreen branches enveloped in colored lights and striped candy canes, sits a child under five years old. Now if any of us were to walk past the tree and see a child (who we did not know) sitting there, we may be rather alarmed or surprised. But recall that this child is invisible, so nobody will worry. Despite the beautiful decorations, this particular child sits and admires nothing more than the simple fact that they are breathing, because this was not a given fact for them a moment ago. In a world where malaria is one of the biggest killers of children under five, it is most amazing that Santa brought them to sit under our tree and remain alive.

It's true that the Disney Frozen Friends collection, including Anna, Elsa, Olaf and Sven, also fits under the tree for \$39.97 from Walmart. But for just \$6, a bednet prevented a mosquito from biting this child and inflicting them with malaria, thus saving their life much like Anna saved Elsa (just less dramatic).

Many of us love the high-tech gadgets we get at Christmas. Not surprisingly, charity has become high-tech, too. Using science, we now have the ability to know how to save the greatest number of people with any given donation, whether that's six dollars or one hundred dollars. Dozens of randomized controlled trials have tested the mechanisms that make charity tick most effectively. The more effective our donations become, the more lives we can save and the greater the ripples we can make.

Recent (replicated) research has discovered that the most effective method for keeping children in school in Kenya is deworming pills that improved school attendance for fourteen years with a one hundred dollar donation. (A single dollar provides one treatment.) That same one hundred dollars, if spent on scholarships or school uniforms instead, would have increased attendance by only several months. It makes intuitive sense – unhealthy kids with scholarships and uniforms will still be unable to attend school – but luckily we don't have to depend on a hunch or a guess.

Learn about these gifts and others like them at Charity Science, where people are signing up to "donate Christmas" using Christmas.CauseVox.com. You can take quizzes with the DIY Charity Assessment and see how you score in evaluating charities compared to what the science says.

Christmas is almost here. What do you see under your tree?

Ripples is an emerging online educational center inspired by a holistic approach to making a difference. Follow our journey to live sustainably and make ripples with our lifestyle at: www.RipplesBlog.org.