

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

2015 VISIONS ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends,

*"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Over the past 13 years, we have had the privilege of working in partnership with countless local leaders of all backgrounds who have put this guiding principle into action for the benefit of their own communities and our world at-large. As an organization committed above all else to leadership development and building the capacity of local civil society, the achievements of our local allies in all three countries where we work over this past year in pursuit of this idea have been especially encouraging.

Visions' approach to development has always been from a perspective of equal partners working together and drawing upon each other's unique skill sets and experiences in creating thoughtful, impactful, and long-term solutions to social problems. Ultimately, the hope is that through this approach, local civil society will become empowered, take the lead in coming up with lasting solutions to community challenges, and eventually making outside assistance unnecessary. While the communities with which we work are a long way off from realizing this eventual aspiration, major strides have been made in this regard. We have taken notice of a major shift over the past year in particular across all 3 countries.

We are, as always, excited to share with you all the accomplishments made this past year, and, most importantly, the impact it has had on the lives of so many youth and adults who have experienced and continue to experience incredible hardship.

Your role in this work cannot be understated. We have always been fortunate to have the continued support of so many thoughtful, impassioned individuals who bring their skills, experiences, networks, and enthusiasm to all we do. And to those who financially contributed to our work this past year – thank you! None of this would have been possible without this growing "Visions community."

On behalf of our entire Visions team, local partners, and the thousands of individuals across Sri Lanka, India, and Ethiopia whose lives have been positively impacted by this work, thank you for making a difference and helping to create a more just, educated, equitable, and peaceful world in which all lives have equal value.

With gratitude,



Gregory T. Buie
Executive Director & Co-Founder



Dr. Meera Pathmarajah
CEO & Founder

2015 - PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

USA & CANADA

- Network of Chapters
- (Local) Volunteer Program, incl. continued partnership with Nazareth College & SUNY New Paltz

INDIA

- Leadership/English/After-School Program
- e-Learning Program
- Institutional Development
- Youth Guidance & Support Program
- DREAM Youth Leadership Magazine
- Volunteer Program

ETHIOPIA

- Model Deafness Center
- Local Capacity-Building
- Volunteer Program

SRI LANKA

- Leadership Program
- Early Childhood Education Support
- Institutional Development

OUR IMPACT



26,500+
lives impacted



3,118
leadership students & teachers trained



143
scholarships awarded



2,228
students attended after-school programs



59
leadership & teacher trainings conducted



163
international volunteers traveled abroad



\$1.2M+
invested in education programs



1,844
students trained thru e-learning programs



\$1 MILLION INVESTED
IN EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES ACROSS
SOUTH ASIA & EAST AFRICA SINCE 2003!

MAJOR MILESTONE ACHIEVED!

In October 2015, we officially surpassed the \$1 million mark for investment in educational development projects across South Asia and East Africa! Over the last 12+ years, Visions has partnered with dozens of local nonprofit partner organizations, schools, and other civil society groups in realizing hundreds of educational development initiatives. Collectively, these efforts have made an incredible impact, as evidenced by the stats above. For a grassroots organization, crossing the \$1M mark was an incredible moment, but we hope just the first of many more momentous occasions to come!



ETHIOPIA

After years of research, planning, & groundwork, this year we realized the dream of a Model Deafness Center in Ethiopia – the first of its kind in the country!

MODEL DEAFNESS CENTER – BAHIR DAR

In the city of Bahir Dar (capital of the Amhara Region), Visions has been working hand-in-hand with our local partners in realizing the idea of having a comprehensive service & empowerment center for the highly under-served Deaf community. The dream of establishing this Visions Model Deafness Center was made possible by a \$100,000 grant from the Dream Blue Foundation. The Center is intended to provide education, language development, interpretation, jobs training,



access to information and services, medical care, community awareness, and connection with other Deaf communities & the larger outside world. Collectively, these efforts hold the potential to truly transform the lives of Deaf Ethiopians and support them in leading independent, meaningful, and connected lives. The ultimate hope is that the Center will serve as an example for the nation and the East Africa region as a whole in how to effectively serve and promote the overall development of this marginalized community.



Since its establishment in March 2015 and the successful registration of a new local partner organization (the Kal Center for Special Needs) to host the project, the Center’s programs and the community it serves have expanded rapidly. Some of the major ongoing program activities and services of the Center include all of the following:

- **Daily instruction and tutorial support** both during and after school hours for Deaf children (Grades 1-8) at 3 public schools in Bahir Dar with Deaf classrooms through the hiring of 4 full-time Deaf teachers (*Visions also helped establish a Deaf Resource Room and new Deaf classroom at 1 of these schools*)
- In-class and after-school **interpreting services** for Deaf students in hearing-integrated classrooms (Grades 5 and above) by 2 full-time Interpreters
- **Deaf preschool** for 14 Deaf children (ages 3-6) led by 1 full-time Deaf teacher
- **Community education**, awareness-raising, and outreach activities to reduce stigma and increase general understanding of deafness
- **Livelihoods development** support for 28 Deaf adults (ages 18-30) led by a Vocational Training & Livelihoods Development Officer
- Creation of **public education materials**, including short films (5) & promotional materials, and teacher training materials & supplies
- Regular weekly **instruction in Ethiopian Sign Language** for hearing schoolchildren, teachers, school staff, parents & family members of Deaf individuals, and Bahir Dar University – Special Needs Education Department students
- **Social clubs & activities** for Deaf youth and adults, including a Deaf circus and football club





- **Regular cultural exchanges and special programs** with volunteers from the U.S. and other countries (including 3 U.S. universities). To-date, Visions has brought **50 foreign volunteers** over the past 3 years to Ethiopia to work directly with the Deaf community in conducting educational programs and supporting the ongoing work at the Center.
- **Hearing Testing & Counseling** services and provision of **hearing devices** (mostly for directional purposes) for those identified as potential beneficiaries

IMPACT

Education

- 163%** The rate at which student enrollment increased over the past 3 years (from 32 to 84)
- 96%** The rate at which Grades 1-4 students met grade competencies
- 80%** The rate at which Grades 5-8 students improved their class rank
- 7.39%** The average % increase in academic marks for Grades 5-8 students (across 9 subjects)
- 100+** The # of hearing children who are registered for after-school Ethiopian Sign Language class
- #1** Ranking of Yekatit 23 School (our main school partner) amongst 32 schools in the district for the past 2 years

Hearing Testing & Counseling

- 111** The # of individuals who received hearing testing & counseling from a volunteer audiologist
- 98** The # of individuals who received an ear exam from a local physician (ENT)
- 48** The # of individuals who received a hearing aid
- 85.4%** The % of individuals who received a hearing aid that have retained the device & use it regularly

Livelihoods Development

- 20** The # of individuals who received training, mentorship, & financial support last year
- 85%** The % of beneficiaries who are now earning enough to provide for themselves
- 85%** The % of beneficiaries who were able to save money under this initiative
- \$299** The average amount each livelihoods development beneficiary was able to save

Community Education & Outreach

- 65+** The # of parents & family members registered for weekly Ethiopian Sign Language training
- 1,000+** The # of community members who have attended a training or participated in an event
- 5,000+** The # of individuals in the public reached through educational outreach / advocacy
- 57** The # of local government officials who have attended a community education training
- 88** The total # of international volunteers & visitors who visited the Center last year
- 202** The # of individuals residing in Bahir Dar city center identified during our deaf census



Livelihoods beneficiaries - 2015

"I spent many years moving from place to place, trying to give my son access to a proper education that would also address his interests. I won't forget how we suffered. Now the day is bright." ~ Ayal Tsegaw (Parent)

At the end of 2015, we received notification that we had been selected as a recipient of a grant from Dining for Women for \$46,728 toward the "Empowerment of At-Risk Deaf Women & Girls in Ethiopia through Education, Mentorship, & Livelihoods Development." We look forward to continuing our ongoing work and broadening our reach in Bahir Dar, and now in the capital of Addis Ababa as well.



Dining for Women



INDIA

Another transformative year, our work in India continues to expand and flourish! We have launched a number of new initiatives and scaled up existing programs. Read on to learn more...

E-LEARNING PROGRAM

This year, Visions launched an e-Learning Program at 9 schools (across Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra) that is currently benefiting 1,400+ primary schoolchildren. These students, of which 98% live at or below the poverty line, now have access to tablet devices pre-loaded with interactive, self-paced, skills-developing digital learning programs and content. While the content is focused on improving Mathematics and English-language skills, students are also developing much needed technological literacy. Teachers are being trained in blended learning methodologies (that is, how to integrate use of the technology with meaningful and interactive in-class instruction). The underlying intent is to reduce the learning gap, develop critical skills, and promote academic achievement in core subject areas.



69.4% *The rate at which student absences declined at participating e-Learning Program schools*

50% *The rate at which school-identified "slow learners" decreased at e-Learning Program schools*

YOUTH GUIDANCE & SUPPORT PROGRAM

Bridging the gap between school and either higher education or the working world has always been a major challenge and concern for youth worldwide. At the end of 2015, we kick started a new initiative – the Visions Youth Guidance & Support Program – with the aim of providing a more holistic set of support services to high-achieving youth who find themselves at this critical juncture. Starting with our first batch of Visions India Leadership Program graduates (whom we have been training for the past 4 years), we initiated efforts in individual counseling, test prep, enhanced English-language training, parent involvement, application prep, and more. As a result of these efforts, we are expecting at least 12 of these



youth (7 girls & 5 boys, all of whom are from *dalit* families, grew up in boarding homes, and do not otherwise have the financial means to afford higher education) to attend university!

Thanks to an amazing team effort, these students (who are pursuing everything from Aeronautical Engineering to English to Medicine) are mostly tapping free full-ride scholarships, though Visions is providing further support (about \$500/year per student) to help them cover entrance exams, living expenses, books, etc. Please help these students realize their dreams by making a contribution today!

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

This year, Visions was proud to provide general donor-driven institutional support to the following schools in India:

- Gwalior School (Gwalior, MP): **\$2,000**
- Him Jyoti School (Dehradun, UK): **\$55,030**
- Ramana's Garden Children's Home & School (Rishikesh, UK): **\$15,000**





“DREAM” YOUTH LEADERSHIP MAGAZINE

A natural evolution of our ongoing Leadership Program in India, Visions is now publishing a quarterly "DREAM Youth Leadership Magazine" in order to share ideas, experiences, knowledge, opportunities, and inspiration for the benefit of the more than 2,300+ youth served by Visions' programs and their peers. The first 2 publications were released in late 2015 and are available on our Visions website.

As the only Tamil-language publication in the state of Tamil Nadu focused solely on the idea of youth leadership development, each publication follows a theme, such as youth leadership at school or during a time of natural disaster. It is our hope that this tool will help create a sense of community and enable the sharing of stories, insights about the role of youth in society, critical educational resources, opportunities for personal growth, contemporary and historical examples of strong leadership, and more.

LEADERSHIP / ENGLISH / AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

In India, we currently have 900+ youth participating in our Leadership / English/ After-School Program in 26 rural villages throughout Tamil Nadu (specifically the Tiruvannamalai, Thirukovilur, and Ulunderpet Districts). These youth receive daily after-school tutoring and mentorship by young adults who are themselves from the communities they serve. Our 26 young adult trainers (one per village center) make a minimum 2-year commitment and receive regular training and support by Visions staff throughout that period. In turn, they provide regular English and Leadership & Life Skills training to the children in their villages, as well as coordinate periodic service opportunities for youth to put their newfound skills and talents into practice for the benefit of others. Students and parents alike are holding each other accountable in ensuring children regularly attend school and these after-school sessions. Everyone deserves the right to live their best life, and everyone has the ability to make the world a little better – through the Visions Leadership Program, these youth are doing just that!



Where it all began – today, we continue our efforts to help reshape civil society & fill vital education gaps.

SRI LANKA



LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

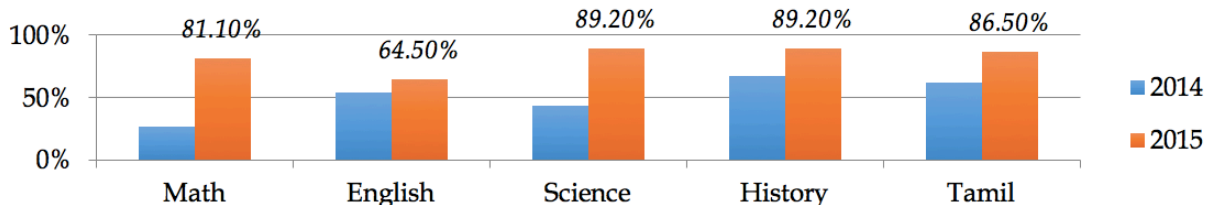
Our thriving Leadership Program continues to be our flagship initiative in Sri Lanka. This year, we welcomed the next batch of students into the program as another class graduated on. In total, **63 youth** from Grades 10 & 11 participated in 2015. These students received year-round tutoring in all core subjects, mentoring, specialized leadership training, and other support.

“We do not have enough teachers to teach all subjects properly. So I am very happy that you selected our village for support. ...Not only am I improving my marks...I have a new awareness about myself, and I am changing step by step...The teaching methods are very fascinating and useful. Day by day, my curiosity is growing to participate more... this program is very useful for us.”
~M. Nithy (Grade 11)

We know from collecting both testimonials and data (particularly in student academic performance) that this program is having a very beneficial effect. We offer the following insights based off data collected from the 37 total students from Grade 10 who participated in the program last year:

IMPACT DATA

Increase in Student Pass Rates among Grade 10 Visions Students



Subject Test Scores Improvement (end of Year 1):

Tamil: **83.8%** of students improved their test scores from previous year
 Math: **83.8%** of students improved their test scores from previous year
 English: **62.2%** of students improved their test scores from previous year
 Science: **86.5%** of students improved their test scores from previous year
 History: **70.3%** of students improved their test scores from previous year

Group Average Test Scores (end of Year 1):

	Tamil	Math	English	Science	History
Grade 9 Average (%)	44.9	28.0	33.8	39.7	50.0
Grade 10 Average (%)	57.0	41.1	40.3	50.9	59.4
% Difference	+12.1	+13.1	+6.5	+11.2	+9.4

*Average group test scores in Math, English, and Science were in the “fail” category prior to the program. Now, group average test scores in all 5 subjects are in the “pass” category.

79.2%

The rate at which our Sri Lanka Leadership Program students passed their O/L exams last year

4

The # of students from Mathurankernikulam (an area deeply affected by war and economic hardship) who became the first students ever in their village to pass their O/L exams and move on to their A/L studies



1

Young woman (K. Priyatharshini from Kithul) scored the highest marks in her village

"I am so happy, because I passed my O/L exams. I scored the highest and was ranked first in my school. The reason I was able to achieve this result is because of the Visions classes. In my village, there is no place to have extra classes. The other problem is a lack of teachers in important subjects. Because I was not getting good marks, my school selected me as a student for this program. I have started to study hard since that day. Now I can see the results, not only in my education, but I also received a good character certificate from my school recently. This Leadership Program helped me to develop life skills too...I wish to participate in the Visions programs continuously. Thank you so much, Visions, for supporting me to do well in my studies."



EARLY EDUCATION SUPPORT

In today's age, we all know the incredible importance that early childhood education plays in the overall development of young children. Yet, in many corners of the globe, such critical development and support is a luxury. In 2015, Visions made a contribution to support teacher & staff salaries at AHEAD Trust, a Jaffna-based nonprofit organization providing vital early childhood education in Northern Sri Lanka. Previously, Visions supported the development of the preschool and the provision of computers and musical instruments, as well.

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE – TECHNOLOGY BLOCK

As one of the most highly esteemed private institutions in Northern Sri Lanka, St. John's College in Jaffna strives to educate and empower youth to achieve academic and personal excellence. Founded in 1823, St. John's served as a haven for educational excellence in the war-affected North throughout the civil conflict and continues to serve the greater community and hundreds of youth affected by poverty, conflict, and internal displacement today. This year, our friends at St. John's opened their much anticipated 4-story technology block. Through the generosity of the Paul Family from North Carolina, Visions was able to contribute \$5,000 toward this impressive undertaking.



JAFFNA FACULTY OF MEDICINE – ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Another donor-driven initiative, Visions made a \$1,000 donation to the Jaffna Faculty of Medicine – Alumni Association in support of their Medical Students Welfare Fund, which helps provide vital scholarship support to high-achieving medical students in financial need.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE – VISIONS VOLUNTEERS

2015 Visions Volunteers

Aaron Williams
 Ahalya Prakash
 Alexia Venezia
 Anita Kirkland
 Brittany Hughes
 Catherine Clark*
 Cathryn Brown
 DeYan McCarthy
 Emily Thompson
 Gregory Buie*
 Hayat Ali
 Helina Walker
 Jada Quinlan
 Jamie Walker
 Jayme Kaplan
 Joanne Kruchten
 Josh Carroll
 Kalie Hagen
 Kai MacDonald*
 Kaitlin MacDonald
 Katie Capulli
 Laura Keech
 Lindsay Sherling
 Maria Gillin
 Meg MacDonald*
 Morgan Sommers
 Naveen Paul
 Paula Brown
 Rachel Hayes
 Rebecca Swenson
 Rob F.*
 Rohan Paul
 Sabine Wyss
 Sally Neiser
 Shannon Quihuiz
 Shyamala Nagendran*
 Suphanit B.
 Tea Papke
 (Wesline Nikethana)

** denotes volunteered more than once in same year*



"The opportunity I had to work with the Deaf community in Ethiopia was amazing. Beyond learning Ethiopian Sign Language, seeing Ethiopian history and artifacts, and learning the cultures of both the hearing and Deaf population in Ethiopia, I learned a lot about myself. I'm so grateful for all the friends...I made while abroad and all that I learned from them. This trip was truly an inspiration and gave me memories and lessons I'll remember for a lifetime."

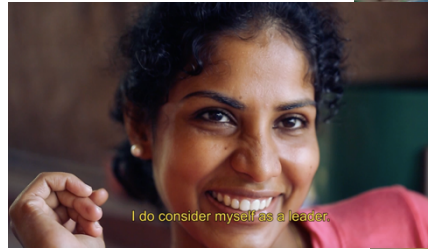
~ Cathryn Brown

"My recent trip to Ethiopia was another wonderful and eye-opening experience... The work that Visions has been doing in Ethiopia is incredible. Thanks to Visions, Deaf young adults and adults have a place to gather with one another and learn Ethiopian Sign Language and be integrated into their local communities... The Ethiopia trip is right up there with the Sri Lanka trip I did in 2013; can't decide which one I enjoyed more."

~ Sabine Wyss

“VOICES OF EMPOWERMENT” DOCUMENTARY & 8 SHORT FILMS RELEASED

In 2015, we released our first short documentary – “Voices of Empowerment” – which tells the story of 3 youth whose lives have been forever impacted by Visions’ efforts. We also produced 3 short films highlighting our work in India and 5 short educational films about deafness in Ethiopia. Make sure to check out our videos on our YouTube page!



OUR VISIONS CHAPTERS HARD AT WORK...



LANCASTER

“Songs for Seva” Concert
4/18/15

PITTSBURGH

Carnival Fundraiser
4/16/15



LOS ANGELES

Film Screening
4/24/15

Dinner with Guest from India
10/18/15



ORANGE COUNTY

Film Screening
4/25/15

NEW PALTZ

Ethiopia Trip Presentation
10/20/15



BOSTON

Film Screening
11/12/15

TORONTO

Film Screening
11/13/15

DAVIS

“Dheem Tana 2015”
4/4/15

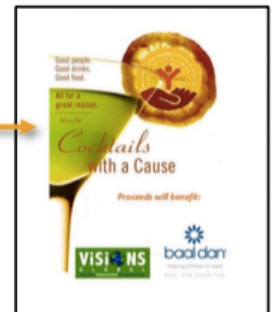
Film Screening
9/26/15

“Culture by Candlelight”
11/21/15

NEW YORK CITY

“Cocktails with a Cause”
4/2/15 & 7/23/15

Colombia Teachers Fair
11/2/15



ST. HELENA

Film Screening
9/25/15

SACRAMENTO

Tiferet Coffee House
10/11/15

EDMONTON

Recycling Drive
10/15

Comedy Night
12/30/15



2015 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

OUR TEAM

Support & Revenue

Contributions and Grants	\$537,250
In-Kind	\$19,056
Investments/Other	\$11
Total	\$556,317

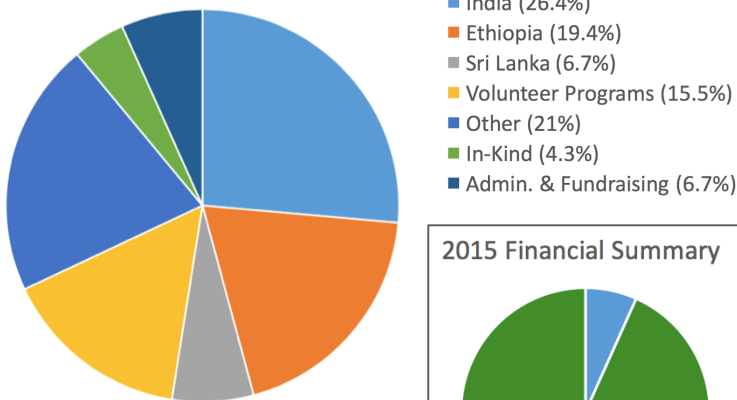
Expenses

Programs (Sri Lanka)	\$29,503
Programs (India)	\$116,465
Programs (Ethiopia)	\$85,659
Programs (Other)	\$92,409
Volunteer Programs	\$68,259
In-Kind	\$19,056
Administrative & Fundraising	\$29,590
Total Expenses	\$440,941

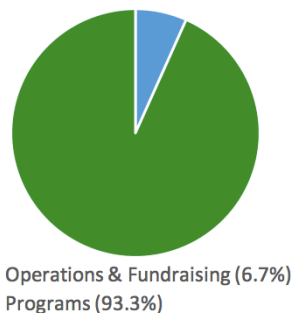
Assets & Liabilities

Total assets	\$187,271
Total liabilities	\$3,886
Current net assets/funds balance	\$183,385

2015 Spending (by category)



2015 Financial Summary



Follow Us



Board of Directors

Gregory T. Buie, *Executive Director & Co-Founder*
 Dr. Meera Pathmarajah, *CEO & Founder*
 Dr. Shyamala Nagendran, *Secretary*
 Adrienne Gaines
 Niru Sahadevan
 Venita Sivamani

Volunteer Team

Hayat T. Ali, *Toronto Chapter Director*
 Marie Avilez, *Phoenix Chapter Director*
 Wendy Gold, *Saugerties Chapter Director*
 Neeharika Jaladanki, *Davis Chapter Co-Director*
 Mary Grace Hamme, *Boston Chapter Co-Director*
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 Gurdeep Sareen, *New York Chapter Director*
 Leka Sivakumaran, *Edmonton Chapter Director*
 Viji Sritharan, *Boston Chapter Co-Director*
 Manvita Tatavarthy, *Davis Chapter Co-Director*
 Vietly Vu, *Web Coordinator*

Staff

U.S.A.

Gregory T. Buie, *Executive Director*
 Sally Neiser, *Program Officer**

Sri Lanka

Biyooru Kaneshapillai, *Sri Lanka Leadership Program Manager*

India

Shylet Moni, *India Leadership Program Manager*
 Joseph Sagayaraj, *India English Program Manager*

Ethiopia

Aynalem Ayalew, *Ethiopia Programs Manager*
 Abel Wudu, *Deaf Educator*
 Askal Tamir, *Deaf Early Childhood Program Officer*
 Demelash Tsegaye, *Deaf Educator*
 Fikadu Weldemikael, *Interpreter*
 Hailemarkos Kebede, *Deaf Educator*
 Lawayesh Ashenef, *Livelihoods Development Officer**
 Mekedes Tadele, *Secretary/Cashier**
 Melekem Assefa, *Finance & Accounting Officer**
 Samuel Tizazu, *Deaf Educator*
 Tirengo Yersaw, *Interpreter*

*denotes a part-time position

MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TODAY!

We are only able to do our work with the generous support of donors like you. Please consider making a contribution today of any amount to help enable thousands of deserving, underprivileged youth to receive a meaningful education:

- By Check:** Mail a check made out to “Visions Global Empowerment” to:
 1621 Barry Avenue #PH1
 Los Angeles, CA 90025
- Online:** Simply go to www.visionsglobalempowerment.org/donate and make a one-time or recurring donation