

# The Napkin Doodle

by Gabrielle Posard, Encinitas, CA

Every idea, good or bad, begins somewhere. The origin is sometimes as insignificant as the paper napkin it's been written on; but it might spark something bigger than you ever imagined possible. But here's the catch – your idea only develops if you keep working it, keep sharing it, and keep trying to get adults to listen.

At age 12 I started what would become a national charity with the goal of changing the paradigm of commercial food waste. An unlikely activist, I didn't realize there was an issue of hunger in my sunny Southern California beach town until my sister, Camille did a news story for her high school broadcasting class. Her topic: active military families who needed charity food distributions to feed their kids. I was shocked and appalled seeing military families waiting in line for hours to get free food! At the time I had no idea military families, seniors, and former middle-class families are the new face of hunger,



Photo by Katy Dransfield, Eureka Springs, AR

since the economic downturn.

My sister eventually made this story into a documentary about hunger. Our family spent many evenings at the diner table talking about hunger, and I started to learn more. That's when I discovered from an EPA report that 96 billion pounds of good food is dumped into landfills every year, enough to fill 91 Empire State Buildings. Edible food rotting in grocery store dumpsters is bad enough when over 16 million children go to bed hungry every night, but this waste also has negative environmental impacts.

One afternoon I was out to lunch with my parents and arguing that the food grocery stores can't sell (but that's still good) should go to feed the hungry not into landfills. My parents, both with economics degrees, pointed out the "barriers" of getting food to food banks before it spoils, and concerns companies would have about liability. I stubbornly pointed out that the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act protects food donors nationally, so liability isn't the real problem. The issue is public awareness.

That's when it hit me. This is like the start of the recycling movement before it became mainstream. Unless you see a recycling logo, you have no idea if a product or a company is "green." That's when I doodled on my napkin a bent fork, spoon, and knife in a shape similar to the recycling symbol – a logo for food rescue. I'll never forget the look on my parents' faces when they saw it. They were stunned that I had come up with a potential solution to change the paradigm of corporate food waste. Donate Don't Dump was born.

I started looking for help, recruiting teens from

school, dance class, and on social media. My sister wrote me and my idea into the documentary "One in Seven, The New Face of Hunger." The film premiered at the San Diego Film Festival, and I was asked to speak at screenings across Southern California to increase public awareness.

That's when I met and started collaborating with big anti-hunger organizations like Feeding America, Interfaith, and the North County Foodbank, who now rescue millions of pounds of food a year. The law firm DLA Piper took us pro-bono thanks to attorney Michelle Glasser, and we became an official 501(c)3 national charity. The Leichtag Family Founda-

tion gave us a \$10,000 grant, Sodexo another \$10,000, and Donate Don't Dump took off. We are part of the North County Food Policy Council, the San Diego Hunger Advocacy Network, and the bill we co-sponsored was just signed by the Governor into California law.

Four years after my napkin doodle, Donate Don't Dump is an all-volunteer, youth-powered, teen-run organization with over 4,000 members, empowering kids to get involved in alleviating hunger and helping the environment. We rescue and distribute over 20,000 pounds of food a month to help hungry families. Our chapter presidents are as young as Natalie, age 7, who organizes her Brownie troop with coin drives and thank-you drawings for donors, to our interns who receive college credit at Cal State San Marcos.

Solutions to seemingly insurmountable issues like hunger and saving the environment can be achieved when even the smallest hands work together on an idea simple enough to fit on a napkin. ♦

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