



NORTHSIDE ACHIEVEMENT ZONE

SONDRA SAMUELS was fed up with the problems in her north Minneapolis neighborhood. A successful diversity consultant, she also had ideas on how to remedy them. “We knew that violence wasn’t the problem,” she says. “It was a symptom of a greater problem.” She banded with other community leaders to form Northside Achievement Zone in 2010 to tackle the core issue—multigenerational poverty—from all sides. Samuels became president and CEO.

“If poverty is a disease that affects the entire community in the form of unemployment, violence, broken homes, and failing schools,” she says, “then we can’t just address the symptoms in isolation.” NAZ employs volunteers—primarily fellow northside residents—who help people connect with career counselors, implement improvement plans for their families, and find academic support. The ultimate hope is that those who grow up benefiting from these services will finish college, return to the neighborhood, and give back, creating a cycle of multigenerational success. It’s off to a strong start. “We have a 255-block area now,” Samuels says. Good news spreads.

MAKING THE LEAP
SOMETIMES A GOOD CAUSE BECOMES A FULL-ON CAREER.

SMILE NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

As she approached a midlife crossroads, **KIM VALENTINI** did some soul-searching. “I made a list of what I wanted to accomplish in the next 50 years, and one of those was a five-hour-per-week project.” That little endeavor was Smile Network International. Those five hours quickly turned into 55, and in 2003 Valentini left her corporate job behind to work full-time running the nonprofit organization she created.

Valentini has 162 passport stamps, each one representing dozens of children who have been saved through a simple surgery to repair a cleft palate and lips. Many cultures see facial deformities as a bad omen. Parents of children with deformities are pressured to abandon them rather than bring devastation into an already impoverished village. Even if families opt to hide or protect children with cleft palates and lips, it’s hard for them to eat, socialize, and build relationships. A simple, inexpensive surgery can change all of that.

Valentini coordinates about eight mission trips each year to perform the 45-minute, \$500 procedure. Sergio García Dominguez is one of the 2,500 kids who has been given a new life by the Smile Network. He was just 8 years old when he traveled 15 miles on foot with friends from his mountain village in Mexico to have the surgery. That was 10 years ago. Now he goes to school, loves to sing and play guitar, and has a viable future.

