



Bruce Burchfield

Creator of Extended Family International, a Harrisburg-based organization that loans Iraqi families money to build homes.

While visiting a friend's village in Kurdistan, the northern region of Iraq, Bruce Burchfield witnessed a sobering view of human distress. He saw people trying to rebuild not only their homes but also their lives. A lightbulb went on in the Harrisburg architect's head — housing was something he knew about and the urge to help was compelling.

"My response culminated in the creation of Extended Family International, which gives no-interest loans to families in an effort to help move them into adequate shelters," Burchfield, 28, said of the project that began in early 2009. "As families complete the construction of their home and pay back their loan, their payments are loaned to other families in Kurdistan to do the same."

"The recycling of the funds creates a constant expansion of connections and community, which is why we named our organization Extended Family International. We are all part of a global family as we reach out and help one another," he said. EFI connects donors with the effort to build homes.

The Harrisburg-based organization has helped four families build their homes so far.

"A lot of people thought Bruce was nuts when he gave up his comfortable, secure job, especially in this economy, to go overseas and take a risk to help others," said fellow architect and EFI board member Arif Hasanbhai. "He really lives his life as an example of the things he believes in, and in so doing, he really touches people."

Who or what influenced you to devote your life to helping others?

I personally have been inspired by God to live my life in service to others. The example He has set forth shows us how to have complete joy in life: by loving our neighbors before ourselves. I also believe every person has been created with a unique gift they can use to serve and help others. When we realize that gift and serve in that specific area, we find a sense of fulfillment that we cannot find any other way

How can we motivate people to reach out to help someone else?

If you've ever been helped by a complete stranger, you know just how overwhelming it can feel. When you encounter the gratitude that can come after being helped by someone in this way, I believe you want to allow others to experience that same feeling of gratefulness.

What has surprised you most in your journey since you identified a cause and set about trying to make a difference?

I was overwhelmed at the initial response when people began to give wholeheartedly to help our first partner family. The donors saw a prac-

tical need and realized that they could help in a practical way. I still feel so honored to be a part of a global family who is actively seeking to help one another.

Do you ever get discouraged with the breadth of what you are trying to accomplish?

It is very easy to get overwhelmed with the work that we do ... Everywhere you look, there are needs. I've found that the only way to keep from being discouraged is to focus on helping one person at a time.

It's often said that the giver is just as blessed as the receiver. Have you experienced this?

In the words of the great prophet, Jesus, "Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full — pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over and poured into your lap." This truth hits home with me every time I see the smiles on the faces of a partner family when they move into their completed home. It's such an insurmountable reward to witness their joy. ☪