

youngsocialpioneers

Tessa Henwood-Mitchell
23 years old
Forestville, SA

Tessa is the founder and director of Tia International Aid, a youth-led non-profit organisation that aims to improve the futures of disadvantaged children in Bolivia by working directly with local organisations and community groups to create sustainable and lasting change.

Working from a model of empowerment and participation, Tia International Aid focuses on collaborating with the community, working alongside centres and organisations that assist disadvantaged children and youth.

Tia (Spanish for 'aunty') consults with workers and volunteers at these organisations to determine how it can assist them in improving the opportunities, facilities and resources available to children and adolescents in the areas of health, education and employment. To date, Tia has formed partnerships with two orphanages, a rehabilitation centre for blind children and adolescents and an alternative education centre.

Tessa was inspired to set up Tia International Aid after spending much of the past four years travelling through and residing in developing countries. Her experiences in these countries, contrasted with her fortunate upbringing in Australia, gave her a new perspective on life and a strong desire to empower those less fortunate.

"During my travels, I realised that I possessed the means to make real, tangible change – every young person, particularly young Australians, should have a sense of social responsibility," she said.

In 2008, Tessa lived in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for four months, volunteering at an orphanage that housed 83 children, all below the age of 14. After witnessing the lack of opportunities and funding, and the appalling living conditions for the children, she decided to take action and founded Tia International Aid.

Through various projects, Tia International Aid has made a substantial impact on the children and the families it works with, as well as their wider communities. Some of Tia's achievements include restoring clean running water and improving medical facilities and nutrition at an orphanage; providing support and funding for life-changing surgeries to children whose families could not afford them; and implementing successful music and computer programs at a rehabilitation centre for blind children and adolescents.

Current projects include establishing a community-run childcare centre at the alternative education centre, which will enable single mothers to attend classes and obtain an education while their children are looked after in a safe and educationally stimulating environment. Tia is also working on a new model to provide more structured seed funding and co-design partnerships with local organisations who work with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Bolivia.

Tessa has recently been recognised for her efforts in being selected to take part in the Foundation for Young Australians' 2011 Young Social Pioneers program, a year-long program designed to equip young social change makers with the knowledge and skills to successfully manage their project or organisation.

"Taking part in the 2011 Young Social Pioneers program will enable me to become a more effective leader, and will hopefully put me in touch with people who can inspire, challenge and assist me and my organisation," Tessa says.

