

Sawyer Anderson

Author, Artist, Philanthropist, Speaker

As pure of heart as the Urban Dictionary meaning of her birth name, ten-year-old Sawyer Anderson is truly a “modern day warrior.” Her tenacity, servant heart, volunteer spirit and benevolent track record are indicative of characteristics you would find in an accomplished international business leader; not a North Dakota grade-schooler with Midwestern roots so deep you would think her ancestors added soil to their bloodlines.

After learning about children and families in the poverty-stricken villages of the south-central African country Zambia, Sawyer had a hard time concentrating. In 2017, her father Mark Anderson returned from a church mission trip where he shared stories about children her age (and younger) who had died or experienced significant injuries after walking several miles to get water, which had to be boiled and processed prior to use. While Zambia and the surrounding region have access to clean, safe water, it lies deep below the ground and the resources and technology to drill bore holes (or wells) to access safe water are scarce and often not geographically feasible.

Sawyer could not erase the story of Brian Chisanga from her mind. Brian is a boy her age living in the Mwamba Region of Zambia – half a world away from North Dakota – whose arm had to be amputated after he was bitten by a poisonous snake while fetching water for the family from the only viable source, a dirty, shallow well. A standard water trip in Brian’s village took two hours. His three-year-old sister, Brelia, died a year earlier after she drowned at the same shallow water source. Today, thanks, to the combined efforts of World Vision, Wellspring for the World and Hope Lutheran Church, along with many others in African villages, Brian and his family now have access to a well that provides clean, safe water to area villagers in far less time (30 minutes round trip).

After learning about the tragedy facing Brian’s family and others, Sawyer wanted to help, too. Shocked, Sawyer thought “*this isn’t fair, every kid should have water.*” Compelled to find a way to make a difference from her cozy, modern home in West Fargo, ND, she set out to raise \$50.00 selling her grandma’s cookies at a garage sale. What followed was an inspiring story of hope and the innocence of a child who



believed she could change one small part of the world. Selling cookies turned into designing, making and auctioning an original chitenge bag. That in turn, led to a broader effort with the Children's Ministry program at Hope Lutheran Church (Hopekids) and many volunteers to design, sew and sell more than 1,400 Chitenge bags. Of those, 300 were sold by Sawyer.

African wax fabric is a common fashion material used in Africa for chitenge (or kitenge in some countries) dresses, bags, infant carriers, blankets and more. Sawyer sold and continues to sell the chitenge bags for \$50 each. This is the cost to provide clean water for one person for a lifetime. In less than a year, Sawyer, with 'a little help from her friends', and a lot of volunteers cutting and sewing fabric, raised more than \$26,000 to develop wells in south-central Africa. This equates to 10 wells and more than 3,000 lives. Her motto: "Buy a bag, save a life, it's an offer you can't refuse" is truly living up to its purpose.

In addition to her recent design and sewing philanthropy project, Sawyer is an accomplished artist, who rarely leaves the house without her sketch book. Her drawings soon will be featured in a children's book that is in development under the name: *Water Works*. She is creating the book to illustrate the challenges African villagers face in procuring clean water and to raise more money for additional wells.

Sawyer is the type of individual who was simply born to help people. During the holidays, for instance, while most grade school students peruse Amazon for the latest toys or technology, Sawyer was thinking of a way to share the Christmas spirit with others. For the past several years, she has deployed a unique advent calendar that supports various volunteers, first responders and nonprofit organizations in the Fargo/Moorhead/West Fargo area during the first 24 days of December. Her *Random Acts of Kindness* have included a variety of volunteer efforts including bringing cookies and coffee to ambulance crews and firefighters, procuring donations for at-risk youth, mittens and caps for homeless people, diapers for a women's shelter and leaving snacks for the mailman. Her efforts served as inspiration for her father's banking business, which now employs *Our Adventure In Kindness* activities through its employee-giving campaigns.

The spunky ten-year-old performer has held key roles in several plays at Oak Grove Lutheran School's Theatre Arts, including 101 Dalmatians, Alice in Wonderland, Violet Beauregard in Willy Wonka KIDS, and most recently in Into the Woods JR. She also won two Oak Grove Theatre Rose Awards as elementary Rookie of the Year and the Beth Nicely Spirit Award. At a recent cancer benefit, her band, The Robin Hoods, opened for regional artist and sensation from *The Voice*, Blind Joe. A dance Captain for the past two years, Sawyer also participates on two competitive dance teams, winning the Most Spirit Award two years running, along with numerous dance awards for jazz/contemporary and hip-hop routines. Sawyer fills her spare time playing on a school basketball team, playing drums and remains very active in Hope



Sawyer Anderson: *Biography*

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Lutheran Church's Children's (Hopekids) Ministry. Her hobbies also include reading, playing with her little sister, Sloane, drawing and drawing more.

Sawyer resides in West Fargo, ND with her parents and two year old sister.