

idealists

SCHOOLCHILDREN WHO COLLECT THOUSANDS  
FOR CHARITY BY PICKING UP LITTER...  
THE AMERICAN TEEN WHO HAS RAISED MORE  
THAN A MILLION DOLLARS FOR AIDS ORPHANS  
BY SELLING DOG NECKLACES...

## WHO SAYS THE YOUTH OF TODAY DON'T CARE?

*Text: Agnès Michot*







# MILLION DOLLAR BABY

"WHEN I SAW THOSE ORPHANS ON OPRAH, I KNEW I HAD TO DO SOMETHING"

With her straight blonde hair, jeans, trainers and T-shirt, 15-year-old Kendall Ciesemier from Illinois looks much like any other all-American teen. She goes to school every day with her girlfriends, does her homework on time, enjoys parties and sleeps in a pink bedroom. But in one respect Kendall is anything but ordinary: over the past four years, she has raised a million dollars for children in Africa.

It all began at the age of eleven, when she saw a report about the AIDS epidemic on The Oprah Winfrey Show. "I saw how the death of their parents was forcing children to take on the role of father or mother and look after their younger brothers and sisters," she says. "Kids of eight or nine were responsible for babies and toddlers. That totally shocked me. I knew straight away that I had to do something."

The next morning she asked her parents for the money for a stamp. Kendall had stuffed every penny of her savings, 360 dollars, into an envelope and wanted to send it to the Christian charity World Vision, to help AIDS orphans in Africa. With that donation she sponsored Benite, an eight-year-old girl from Mauritania. "A couple of months later," Kendall explains, "I received a letter from Benite saying that all was well with her and that she was going to school for the first time. That gave me so much power and energy. If I can change the life of one kid, I thought, then with a little help I can change the lives of many more."

So, with her parents' support, Kendall set up the charity Kids Caring 4 Kids. Its first project was to collect money for Musele, a region in Zambia seriously affected by child malnutrition. To do that, Kendall began designing and selling dog necklaces and T-shirts. And she persuaded children at her school and others in the area to do their bit. In their hundreds, they started baking cookies, selling lemonade, walking dogs, washing cars and giving up their savings to help Kids Caring 4 Kids.

Kendall is not without problems of her own: she was born with a rare liver disease and in 2004 had to undergo two transplants. But even while in hospital she asked family and friends to give money to her charity rather than buying flowers or gifts. Within a couple of years, she had raised \$80,000. Last year, Kendall was selected from more than 20,000 candidates as one of America's top ten youth volunteers. And the plaudits have kept on coming. Former President Bill Clinton turned up at her school to deliver a speech about the wonderful work she is doing. And if that weren't enough, he then whisked her away to make a surprise appearance on the Oprah show. On air, Kendall let slip that she would not be happy until she had collected a million dollars. Perhaps miracles do exist, because during a commercial break one of Clinton's friends - he has remained anonymous - donated \$500,000.



Kendall has now reached her million-dollar target. The money is going to AIDS orphans in Zambia and to Hope for Life in Kenya - a project which finds foster families for AIDS orphans within their own community, as well as providing them with psychiatric support. Kids Caring 4 Kids also funds the purchase of school uniforms, shoes, books and food, and is financing the construction of a Hope for Life Centre.

Despite achieving her goal, Kendall Ciesemier has not settled back into ordinary American girlhood. There is still a lot more to be done, she says. "I want to make people realise that a small contribution can make a big difference."

More information: [www.kidscaring4kids.org](http://www.kidscaring4kids.org).