



SASCHA GILES
 on the **SIMPLICITY**
 of **MAKING**
REAL CHANGE



Sascha Giles has a big smile as she talks about her passion for Girl Up (GU) – a global program run through the United Nations to improve the lives of girls in the five focus countries of Guatemala, Liberia, Malawi, India and Ethiopia, locations far from her own city of Brisbane.

Sascha's just returned from a GU Leadership Summit in Washington where she learned how to 'Stand Up' by listening to a young women talk about the lack of education for young girls in Guatemala. As part of the conference Sascha and the other 225 young female leaders were given tips on how to 'Speak Up', with the keynote on the theme of 'Rise Up' delivered by none other than America's First Lady, Michelle Obama.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sascha's highlight of the Washington gathering was the address by Michelle Obama who talked about her Let Girls Learn initiative <https://www.whitehouse.gov/letgirlslearn> which is trying to tackle the appalling number of girls around the world not in school (currently estimated at 62 million). Sascha found Mrs Obama to be 'Confident, inspiring and empowering.'

At 13 years old and a founding member of the Australian GU group that she co-created with eight friends at St Peter's Lutheran College Indooroopilly, Sascha could quite easily be delivering similar inspiring addresses in years to come if her history with Girl Up is anything to go by.

It all started when Sascha's philanthropic mother Cathie Reid learned of the GU program while attending the Dell Women Entrepreneurs Network (DWEN) Gathering in 2012. She told Sascha about it who then did some online research and was inspired by what she read. 'I thought it was something I would like to get involved with because it was so different to other things, as young people have independence with this program and you don't have to get



ideas from adult – you organise the events yourself. It's young people with control over making change.'

With this in mind she shared her interest with her friends the next day at school. Together they spoke to their head teacher and bam – the girls had the school's endorsement to create the first Australian GU club.

Clubs in the global community program required to have a minimum of five members and host two events per year. But Sascha's club aimed higher. They successfully completed five events in five days. They held a bake sale; had a 'wear pink for a donation' day (pink is one of the signature colours of GU); and showed a GU video as an awareness raising exercise because, as Sascha says, 'Not everything is about fundraising.'

The club did a practical exercise where people wrote down what they were thankful for in terms of their personal life - e.g. friends and family - as a way to get people to get thinking about why certain people were important in their lives and why.

Their fifth event was a raffle. Collectively they raised \$996 from the combined activities and all money raised went to GU.

Sascha says, 'Our school was happy for us to do it. So that made it easier to organise events. Most of the boys participate too and it's a really simple but effective way to make change. Make cookies, sell them at school and then donate on line. \$10 can buy pencils,' Sascha says matter-of-factly in a way that suggests we should all be doing something so simple yet valuable.

It's not just cookies the girls bake though; their new fundraising initiative involves making candles – an estimated 200 in

one weekend in a working bee at Sascha's house. Selling for \$5 each and in three different scents, one candle will be pink to mark International Day of the Girl on October 11. All money raised will support GU programs already in existence.

One of the programs that the donations might go to could be SchoolCycle – which is a global giving campaign raising money to provide bikes to girls in Malawi so they can ride to school safely. This program alone is a reality check for Sascha who says, 'Some days I complain about having to walk ten minutes to school.'

Sascha believes that GU has changed her life in that it has given her an understanding of the level of privilege many of us live in in first world countries. 'It's given me a better perspective on the world. For example, I might be worried about having access to Wi-Fi while I'm out, versus the reality that other girls my age might not even have been registered at birth. If they are not registered then they literally do not exist.'

This new perspective is something that the girls collectively learn in GU, they grow from and share. GU has also lobbied Capital Hill for the Girls Count Act to address the issue of birth registrations Sascha is now conscious of.

When asked to summarise what being part of GU means to her, Sascha says,

"It makes me feel like I am making a change, it might be small to me but it is affecting people lives and changing their lives."

If you're a young girl reading this and you want to be part of the Girl Up movement, you can form a club, join a current club or make a donation on line via the website www.girlup.org.