

Agency for Change Podcast: Hope's In

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You'll never regret using your time to serve others. (Ashley Quigley)

Where your heart breaks, that's where you begin working. (Courtney McGovern)

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of change-makers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman:

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. I am so excited to talk to today's guests, Ashley Quigley and Courtney McGovern. These dynamic individuals are not only directors and co-founders of a nonprofit called Hopes In, but they're also twin sisters who got their start at a very young age. They have taken the concept of hope to new heights, and I can't wait to tell you how they established a mission that goes beyond traditional aid. Hopes In is all about creating lasting impact, fostering purposeful endeavors, and ensuring that no one is left without the basic human right of shelter and support. Ashley and Courtney, welcome to the podcast.

Ashley Quigley:

Thanks for having us. We're so excited to be here.

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, thank you so much.

Lyn Wineman:

I'm excited to talk to the two of you. Honestly, I've never done a podcast with twins before, so this will be twin founders. So I love that. So I'd love to just get started by having you share the really inspiring story of how Hopes In was founded when you guys ... You were in high school, right?

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, we were in high school. Ashley, I can kick us off, but yeah, so we had kind of grown up in a family that fell into international service on a complete whim. My parents had just heard about this opportunity basically to go on this international service trip when Ashley and I were 10. They signed up for it. That kind of opened our family's eyes to international service and something that just became really important to us as a family. So we went to different countries actually building playgrounds. That

was what we focused on in the beginning. Eventually through our work building playgrounds with an organization called Kids Around the World, we went to Zone 3 of Guatemala City.

This is an area that surrounds Guatemala City's garbage dump, which is actually the largest landfill in all of Central America, very big. There's about 13,000 people and counting that live in these communities. We ended up meeting a girl named Monica. She is still very dear to us and a friend, but we ended up meeting her and just getting to know her and her family. She eventually invited us into her home, which at the time was just this 10 by 10 tin shack. They had no running water. They had dirt floors. There was a lot of medical issues with the house too that was causing them. Her and her sisters actually had to be treated for rat bites multiple times.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, no.

Courtney McGovern:

Yes, in the local medical clinic. Saw her house and went back to the United States and were just thinking about her and how to empower her and her family. We found out her sister, who was our age at the time, we were 16, was pregnant with her first child. We thought maybe there's a way that we could change the living conditions for this next generation of their family, and we started a fashion show fundraiser.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, I love it.

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah, so Courtney and I went back to Barrington, which is our hometown, and we thought, well, what are our friends interested in? They all happened to be interested in fashion, so we thought, let's just raise enough money for this one home. We'll aim to set out to raise \$7,500 and that'll be great. We'll build their home. So we ended up doing a fashion show fundraiser, as Courtney mentioned, at a local retirement home in their community center. They donated the space to us. We got about probably 15 of our high school friends. At the end of the show, we realized that we had raised double. So we had enough for-

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, we were so excited.

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah, so with that, we took a group of volunteers down that summer to build the second home after we had done Monica's home. After the week long trip, everyone there had asked us, "When are we going again? That was great." Courtney and I looked at each other and were like, "Oh, well, I guess next year."

Lyn Wineman:

I guess we've started something. First of all, it's not very often you hear somebody say, "We fell international human service on a whim," right? You guys, you just went into it. It's like you're accidental nonprofit entrepreneurs, but your heart's in the right place and you're very passionate about what you do. I can tell. So I know a lot of people out there have thought, oh, I should start a nonprofit. I have this

thing I'm passionate about. I have a need I want to fulfill. I'm curious, what were the first steps that you took? You did the fashion show. You raised the money, but what were some other things you had to think about? Then what is some advice you would have to aspiring change-makers who want to do the same?

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, I think that's a great point, and it's a great question. It's something that we think about a lot as an organization because a big part of our mission is to help develop humanitarian leaders. I think the first thing that we think of is just finding mentors. Being that we were high schoolers when we started this, we had amazing mentorship, whether it was a woman named Cindy Cowdry who really coached us through hosting that first fashion show. This is how you do check-in. This is how you do a raffle, everything, to working with a local organization in our hometown that really focuses solely on helping these grassroots movements turn into formal NGOs. They really coached us and helped us. They actually were our fiscal sponsor for a few years.

I think just looking around your community, whether that's your school community or your town or even the online community to find people who know what you don't know and people who are willing to help you and being open to learn from them. Just another thing we think of is just starting small and just thinking about it one step at a time. Because sometimes when you think of this big picture, this is what I want to change, this is my vision and my goals, it can be overwhelming. But just start with that one small raffle. Start with that one small event. Start with inviting your friends to your living room to talk about what you're passionate about. Have a cup of coffee with someone. We feel like that made a big difference for us.

Lyn Wineman:

That makes sense. Storytelling had to be part of your success too, because you have told me this story and I'm already pulled into what you are doing. You must have a great ability to tell meaningful stories that get people engaged. Any advice on the storytelling side?

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah, I guess Courtney has such a great way with sharing our story and a beautiful way to get people to see our mission. I think part of that is just finding a cause that you are really passionate about. I think that the stories just come naturally from that. We've met so many amazing people from our travels and different members of the communities, different leaders that serve in Guatemala, that once you learn from them and hear about their stories, it's easy to just share that with others and have them feel the same things that you felt when you heard their story.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, that's great. That's great. So tell me about some of the most impactful projects or initiatives you've undertaken in Guatemala City. So you built the first house and then you accidentally raised the money to build the second house. But tell me more and tell me about how the endeavors have positively affected the lives of families.

Ashley Quigley:

So after we did our first home build, that spiraled into one of our main programs, which is home building. But in addition to those five, we had four others that came about that included our medical initiatives, our Fortaleza program, inclusion work, and our internship program. I would say that two of

our main ones that have become some of the most impactful ones are our medical initiatives, which thankfully, thanks to a bunch of different donors and organizations and grants we were able to receive for that program, we created an endowment fund which allows us to grant out medical funds to local organizations in Guatemala. So year round when we're not there, we're able to support these organizations in the medical work that they're doing in Zone 3.

Then our second one, I guess would be Fortaleza, which is a young woman's and teenage girls' group, which we have seen just from meeting with different women and leaders in Guatemala, that this is a big need in the communities as most girls, just as it turns out later in their life, they either drop out of school because they need to work or they become pregnant and need to take care of their children or maybe their younger siblings. So that program is run by two local Guatemalan women who are from the area. Or one of them had grown up in Zone 3, and they mentor these girls and they help to provide them medical support and counseling support with their education and even finding a job. So this program has really helped to impact not a lot of women, but a few individuals. With that, that's really able to help them change their lives and their future.

Lyn Wineman:

I love the ripple effect about what you're talking about too, right? Because they're changing their lives, but this is generational change too. It's helping to break the cycle and really move families and generations of families into a positive place. So that's pretty good stuff. Now, I heard you earlier mention the idea of empowering the next generation of humanitarian leaders. So not only are you impacting generations in Guatemala City, but you're also impacting people, inspiring people to take the next steps as well. Can you talk to me more about what that looks like, what programs and strategies are in place?

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, absolutely. So yeah, this is a big part of our mission because we've realized just how much of a difference getting involved with humanitarian work has made in our own lives and our family's life too and just wanting to really share that with others. I think a big thing that we really focus on as an organization is connecting what our volunteers are really good at and passionate about and trying to plug them into something within our work that they can use their own expertise.

So whether that's doctors that want to give trainings, virtual trainings to doctors in Guatemala, or if it's students that love art and want to sell their artwork to fundraise for families we work alongside, we really try and connect people with what they're passionate about, what they're good at. To do this, we have a few programs. So we do have an internship program which is for high schoolers. Yeah, we were started by high schoolers, and we still want that to be a big part of what we do. So we actually have interns that continue on with our inaugural event, which was called Hopes In Style. They just had their 11th annual fundraiser, actually.

Lyn Wineman:

11th Annual, you guys. That's amazing. So you started in high school. You survived the pandemic. You hit your 10 year. Now you're on your 11th year. Amazing, you two, that's great.

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah, thank you.

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, so there's these amazing high school students that we just try and come alongside them and equip them with fundraising skills, basic nonprofit skills, but really helping them learn how to use their voice and their talents to make an impact and to engage with what it looks like to be an international advocate or someone who is a global citizen really. We have a few other programs. We have our Hopes In Academy, which is a service learning curriculum that is being used in different places. Then we have another program that we started three years ago now, going on its third year. But it's actually an internship program for young adults with diverse abilities. This was something we noticed even within our own volunteer force, was how do we make this a more inclusive environment where people of all different abilities feel like they can get involved, they can use their voice, and make an impact? So we have this internship program, and they're almost fully self-sustaining actually. They engage with their own community as well as advocate for what we do in Guatemala. But they're making a huge impact as well.

Lyn Wineman:

You have been so successful, done so much. I'm really curious, do you think any of that is due to the dynamic between you being twins and that relationship? I'm just dying to ask, what is that like?

Ashley Quigley:

It's great. Courtney and I have been best friends since we were born, so I always think it's probably the best job that we both can have, is working together and then working for this cause, both just have such different skillsets that we've seen play out over the years and knowing that we get to work together and knowing the things that she's able to do and some of my strengths too. I always feel just so confident that we can dream big. And however it works out, it's going to be great, and both of us will be together at the end of it.

Courtney McGovern:

We can be really brutally honest with our coworkers.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh yeah, I hear that. I hear that.

Courtney McGovern:

You didn't do it right, or someone messed up, or we can do better.

Lyn Wineman:

I really can feel your collaboration as we're having this conversation. You literally are finishing each other's sentences too, which usually is a good sign of partnership. The next question I want to ask just has to do with nonprofits in general. Sometimes there's a misconception that, hey, we're raising money. This is just a handout and certain issues are unavoidable. Do you hear people say that to you? And how do you respond to those claims?

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, I think that's something we have heard. It's something we take really seriously as an organization. We actually, as a board, read a really great book called *When Helping Hurts*. I don't know if you've read it.

Lyn Wineman:

So One Helping Heart, I haven't read it yet, but I'll have to check it out.

Courtney McGovern:

Yes, yes, but I think just the basics, what we believe as an organization, is that dignified housing is a human right and it's not a handout. We think a stable, safe, dignified home, it provides stability. Actually where we work, it would take multiple generations for a family to save up for a home, because the average family income is about \$7 a day, and the average family size is five kids with a single parent. So we really believe that a human's physical and mental health really shouldn't suffer because of where they're born into and where they're raised. So when it comes to housing, I think that's probably the main thing that people would think that, when it comes to our programming, would see as a handout. But I think it's really our worldview and believing that this is a human, that people have a door that locks and running water in their home and concrete floors that don't turn to mud every time it rains. It rains a lot, so that's kind of just been our view on things, and that's guided a lot of our programming.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Do you ever go home at night and think, all the little things that we think are annoyances or nuisances or even big problems, and then you think, wow, you're helping folks who have five children and make on average \$7 a day and don't just even have the basic things to stay healthy. You do have to address those ground floor basic issues first before you can start to think bigger. So good on you for doing that. As you think about helping families and preventing issues like teenage pregnancy in at-risk communities, what are some of the strategies that you have found to be really impactful in your work?

Ashley Quigley:

As I mentioned a little bit before about our Fortaleza program, and that's the one that targets the young mothers and at-risk girls, and something that we found to be really successful was hiring Kati and Louisa just because they were on the ground there with the girls. They were able to support them right away if they needed it. They just knew the area and the culture better than Courtney and I did. So we had found that by helping Kati and Louisa with the resources that they would need to help these women, that we were able to best help them in the end.

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, and I think that realizing this has to be holistic. You're not trying to start another purity movement or something like that. You're trying to show people the power of a plan and giving them that opportunity to do that and to dream. 44% of all the children born in these communities are born to teenage mothers. So it is a huge challenge, but because of the way Kati and Louisa have worked with us to really shape this to be a holistic program, we've actually prevented 100% of the girls in our program that either didn't want to have a second child or hadn't had their first yet, 100% have not had an additional pregnancy. So we're very excited about that.

I think it shows that when you come together in a community that's safe, where the girls can ask questions, where they're equipped with the knowledge of what's going on in their own health and what's going on with their own bodies, and pair that with, hey, you can prevent this, and not only can you prevent pregnancy, but you can actually dream beyond what it would look like to just make it through high school. There's scholarship opportunities here. There's access to counseling. So I think that just pairing it all together and putting together those puzzle pieces have made a lot more successful of a picture. We've been excited to see even girls, a girl named Jody comes to mind, who she had her first

daughter at 17, and she joined our program. Through the pandemic, even through having to do her schoolwork literally on a phone, write papers on a phone, she was the first woman in all the known generations of her family's history to get her high school diploma.

Lyn Wineman:

That's amazing.

Courtney McGovern:

So yeah, so we're excited about just this holistic approach and being able to approach challenge of teenage pregnancy in the communities that we work with.

Lyn Wineman:

So I'm really curious, and Courtney, this question is for you, because so much of your work has to do with that holistic approach to preventing unplanned pregnancy. Has becoming a mom yourself changed the way you do or feel about this work?

Courtney McGovern:

Yeah, absolutely. I think we always look at our mission as two part, empowering families in Guatemala and then developing the next generation of humanitarian leaders. In regards to the families in Guatemala, I think it's given me a whole new level of respect. I've always had the utmost respect for the people in these communities because of how hardworking and kind and open they are. But I think just seeing how hard it is to raise a child in an abundance of circumstance of resources, to try and do that and to struggle to provide basic needs for your children has just given me a whole new level of respect and passion really to further our work.

I think in regards to the humanitarian development is bringing a child into this world and thinking about what's the world look like for him? How can I make sure that he's someone who makes a positive impact in it? And how does Hopes In play a role in his life or lives of young people like him? He's still not really talking, so we're not really sure how it's working. Just thinking about how important it is to engage with the world in a meaningful way and try and make it better for the next generations. It's definitely hit home a lot more now that we brought one into the world.

Lyn Wineman:

Well, I've got to imagine just as the two of you were inspired by the actions of your own parents, you are going to do the same for your children as well. So that's fantastic. So looking to the future, I'm curious, what is the vision? And what are the aspirations for Hopes In in the coming years?

Ashley Quigley:

I think in the coming years, Courtney and I just want to see Hopes In grow its impact. I think we've been able to develop a bunch of different programs that we've gotten to be more sustainable over the years by working with a bunch of different people either in Guatemala or here in the Chicago area, and Courtney's in Florida now. So seeing how we're able to grow it and just continue to develop these programs that are sustainable and holistic in these developing communities, we want to just eventually see Hopes In keep lifting up these people and empowering them to make a change and bring them out of poverty.

Lyn Wineman:

That's great. You two are so inspiring. I can't wait to ask you my favorite question that I've asked on every podcast. That is, I'd love to get an original quote from each of you to help inspire our listeners. Who wants to go first?

Ashley Quigley:

You want to go first or should I?

Courtney McGovern:

Well, we sound pretty similar, so whatever quote sounds better, that was Courtney's voice.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it, I love it.

Courtney McGovern:

I can start, Ash. Okay, so let's see. I jotted down some notes, but one thing I said was take what you're good at and do good. So just use your own talents. It's likely that if you want to change the world, you've already got some tools to do that.

Lyn Wineman:

Nice.

Courtney McGovern:

Then the other thing I think that just really speaks at least to our experience is just where your heart breaks, that's where you begin working. You're never too young to make a difference.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow, those are very powerful. I know, Courtney, three quotes, wow.

Ashley Quigley:

Maybe I should have gone first.

Courtney McGovern:

Sorry. I wrote them all down. You can take the second one.

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah, that was Ashley talking, not her.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, yeah. Ashley, any quotes to add to that? Because that was a lot of trifecta.

Ashley Quigley:

Yeah. One that kind of stood out to me that I was thinking was you'll never regret using your time to serve others. Then what goes along with that one too is I guess the impact of helping one person is usually bigger than you think. So I think those two have been something that has stuck with me over the years of when I think about what we're doing and when you want to do something, you think, oh, well it's not really going to do a lot. Or maybe this is only really going to help one person, but you don't know exactly how helping that one person then leads them to help someone else maybe or helps their family. So yeah, those were I guess my two.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely fantastic. You know what? I think that just demonstrates what over achievers the two of you are. I ask you for two quotes, and you've given me five. Fantastic. Thank you for that. So for people who've been listening who are really interested in finding out more about Hopes In, how can they get more information or get in touch with the two of you?

Courtney McGovern:

Well, we are on Instagram. It's just Hopes_In, H-O-P-E-S, underscore, I-N. We also like to keep our website up to date, so it's just Hopes In.org, got a news tab on there. We've got an events tab. So you can really stay in touch and you can also find our contact info there if you want to reach out to Ashley or I as well. We're always looking for new volunteers and to really get people engaged with what we're doing.

Lyn Wineman:

That's fantastic, fantastic. We'll get both of those links in the show notes on our website, so if you didn't get that written down, you can grab those links on the KidGlov website. So all right, Ashley and Courtney, as we wrap up this great conversation today, I'd love to hear from each of you, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to know about the work that you're doing?

Courtney McGovern:

Well, I think that we began just wanting to build one house. I think to remember, any listeners out there, is just a challenge to just start somewhere. Let your passion and your impact grow, because it will. Anything we've done, you can do too. You probably could even do it better than us, so we challenge you to go out there and try and make an impact.

Lyn Wineman:

There you go. There's the challenge. All right, how about you Ashley?

Ashley Quigley:

I guess I would leave the listeners with we're just getting started with our work in Guatemala. I know we've been there for what seems like over a decade now. We're just getting started. We know that with the help of others, we're going to be able to just do so much more in these communities.

Lyn Wineman:

That's fantastic. Ashley and Courtney, it's been such a pleasure to get to know you, to hear more about your story. I truly believe the world needs more people like the two of you, more organizations like Hopes In. So thank you so much for your time today.

Ashley Quigley:

Thank you.

Courtney McGovern:

Of course. Thank you so much for having us.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a change maker you'd love to hear from, visit KidGlov.com, at K-I-D-G-L-O-V, dot com, to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.