



Designing for Better Health

A sidebar report

Designing for Better Health was one of two online competitions¹ sponsored in 2009 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and [Changemakers](#), an initiative of [Ashoka Innovators for the Public](#) (Ashoka).² The competitions sought innovative solutions to entrenched social and health problems. Entrants posted their ideas on the Changemakers website, where social entrepreneurs from across the world provided comments and feedback. See the [Program Results Report](#) for more information about the competitions.

The *Designing for Better Health* competition solicited solutions that encourage people to make better decisions regarding their own health and the health of others. Individuals and all types of organizations from any part of the world were eligible to enter. Winning solutions had to demonstrate a proof of impact.

Judges evaluated entries using the following criteria:

- **Innovation.** The solution should be substantially different from other initiatives in the field that encourage healthy living, and be ready for large-scale expansion.
- **Social impact.** The solution must demonstrate impact on its target population, either a specific underserved community or society at large, and have the potential for global application.
- **Sustainability.** The solution must have a long-term plan for continuing financial and community support.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

The *Designing for Better Health* competition received 280 entries from 29 countries and stimulated more than 330 discussions by the online community. Five judges, including Paul Tarini, MA, RWJF senior program officer, chose 10 finalists. The Changemakers

¹ The other competition was *Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing*. See the [sidebar](#) for information about this competition.

² Ashoka is an Arlington, Va.-based international organization that strives to shape a global, entrepreneurial, competitive citizen sector that allows social entrepreneurs to thrive, and enables people throughout the world to think and act as changemakers. Changemakers is an initiative of Ashoka that aims to grow new ideas through transparency and collaboration.

online community then picked three winners. Each winner received \$5,000. The winners were announced in June 2009:

Child Promoters on Oral Health. An alternative to achieve wellbeing

Sponsored by: Francesco Cammarano Pellegrino (program operates in Caracas, Barquisimeto, Guarenas and San Juan de los Morros, Venezuela)

Child Promoters on Oral Health. An alternative to achieve wellbeing began in 1998 and currently operates in four cities in Venezuela. It teaches oral health to children in their schools and teaches students to be promoters of oral health. Program dentists, dentistry students, and volunteers instruct children between the ages of 3 and 12 in how to care for their teeth. Approximately 20,000 low-income boys and girls receive training each year.

Through Child Promoters on Oral Health, children are encouraged to integrate oral health practices as a natural function of living. They are helped to transfer their knowledge and oral health practices to other children, their parents, and other adults. And, through their contact with health professionals, children lose their fear of dentists.

The program also introduces dentists and dental students to dentistry's social role in promoting oral health to vulnerable populations.

As a result of the Child Promoters on Oral Health, by 2009:

- More than 55,000 Venezuelan children received preventative dentistry treatment.
- 700 Venezuelan children were trained as oral health promoters.
- 180 preschools and education centers received oral disease prevention information.
- Over 500 dentistry students were introduced to the initiative.

The program is funded with donations from private companies. Additional resources are provided by universities. Plans are underway for industry-sponsored oral health programs that generate registration fees to further support *Child Promoters on Oral Health*.

Just a cloth piece?

Sponsored by: Anshu Gupta (New Delhi, India, program operates nationwide)

Launched in 2005, **Just a cloth piece?** is a nationwide initiative that focuses on menstrual hygiene among women in India. In India, shame and silence associated with menses make it a taboo subject, even among women. Without knowing the health risks, millions of menstruating women use sand, old rags, newspapers, and even plastic bags, due to the lack of available and affordable sanitary pads.

Just a cloth piece? promotes menstrual hygiene education. It also operates an affordable and hygienic cloth napkin production and distribution system that is benefiting tens of thousands of women every month. Through the program, old cloth is collected in India's urban areas, sanitized, and recycled into clean pads that are distributed mostly to women in rural areas. Each pad costs end-users approximately one penny. The program is also helping women in rural areas learn how to manufacture pads themselves to further reduce costs to consumers.

As of 2009, Just a cloth piece? produced 100,000 hygienic cloth pads per month that benefit 20,000 women. The program's near-term goal is to reach 100,000 women monthly.

Just a cloth piece? receives support from corporations, colleges, schools, hospitals, hotels, and individuals. In 21 Indian states, it has built partnerships with 150 grassroots groups that include units of the India army, nongovernment groups, community-based organizations, and social activists.

In addition to building its current base of support, Just a cloth piece? intends to advocate around menstrual health issues at national and international venues to attract additional investment to the program.

Healthy Amazon

Sponsored by: Diego Garcia Montufar (program operates in San Francisco de Yarinacocha, Peru)

Launched in 2008, the **Healthy Amazon** initiative combines sanitation and nutrition through a low-cost waste management program that produces compost for family gardens. The family gardens, in turn, produce vegetables that help remedy child malnutrition in the Amazon region of Peru.

Every indigenous community in the Peruvian Amazon lacks appropriate waste management, and most children living in those communities suffer from malnutrition. Healthy Amazon encourages people to abandon the traditional habit of burning compostable waste or throwing it into the street and to instead offer the waste for collection.

Healthy Amazon provided San Francisco de Yarinacocha with its first waste management service. Some 95 percent of the community's 2,000 residents participate in the program, thereby reducing the risk of preventable illness associated with waste contamination.

The program also encourages parents to grow vegetables in their family gardens, thereby introducing vegetables into the diet.

Healthy Amazon's agricultural impact includes:

- A family garden program with the potential of reaching approximately 500 children who currently have few vegetables in their diet
- Distribution of compost to 80 artisans who use it to grow trees for hand-craft production
- Distribution of compost to 100 farmers through a partnership with an agro-forestry project promoted by the government

Healthy Amazon would like to export its model throughout the region.

Initial funding for Healthy Amazon came from the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility of Swarthmore College and from Ciudad Saludable.³ The sale of recyclables and compost to businesses and associations partially sustain the program, along with resources from governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Plans for future program sustainability include working with local governments to develop a pay system for waste collection services, the establishment of a commercial vegetable garden and a commercial reforestation project.

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³ Ciudad Saludable is an organization in Peru committed to sustainable development and environmentally sound solid waste management policies.