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Nicole Kudyakov  
*Seattle University*

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# Local Nonprofit Uses Seattle U Community Connections to Fight Against Energy Poverty

Nicole Khudyakov , Staff Reporter

Seattle University prides itself on the number of students and faculty that practice community service and engage in solving issues ranging from environmental sustainability to social justice. The school works to cultivate an environment where students are encouraged to volunteer within their communities and establish local connections while doing good.

Kilowatts for Humanity (KWH) is a non-profit that was created as a result of this creed. KWH works to widen access to electricity in remote communities by designing and implementing the necessary infrastructure to create a permanent power source, through solar-powered electrical systems.

The organization works with rural communities, largely in Zambia, to understand their needs to support them throughout the process of connecting a power supply, as well as post-installation energy management. They also serve as advisors to other humanitarian organizations that may need guidance regarding the electrical needs of communities receiving aid.

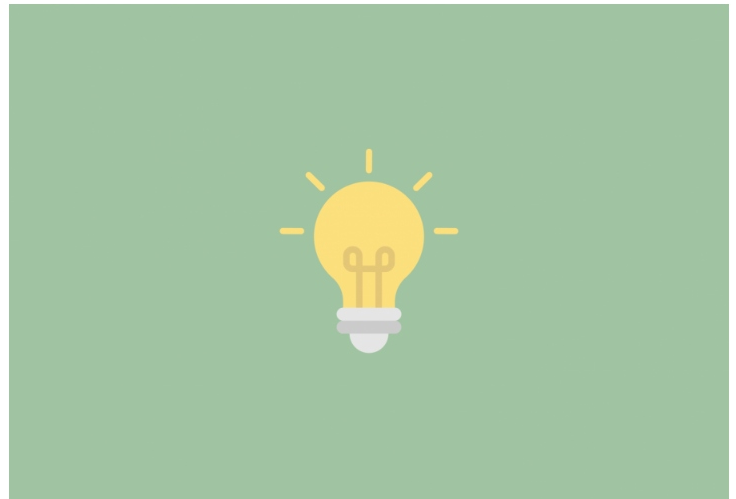
According to Seattle U's Director of the Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP), Jenna Isakson, who co-founded KWH, along with Seattle U Computer Engineering Professor Henry Louie in 2015, KWH's goal is to address energy needs within these communities.

"We're bringing together people who are interested in putting their expertise, interests and skills to work for the common good," Isakson said. "And the common good we're looking to address is energy poverty."

The non-profit recently hosted their fifth annual Light Up the Night Fundraiser last week, where they were able to raise over 27,000 dollars. The fundraiser featured a trivia contest about KWH's work and an auction, where attendees could bid on items to be donated directly to rural communities. KWH members and volunteers, such as fourth-year electrical engineering student Christiana Tembo, also spoke about the non-profit's ongoing and past projects.

For Tembo, KWH's values aligned well with her own desires for the future, as this project is the first step to fulfilling her eventual long-term goal of bringing more renewable energy sources into her home country. Tembo was born in Muanda, a town in the Republic of Congo that had limited access to electricity.

"I've always been fascinated by power and energy," Tembo said. "As a little girl, I really thought that electricity was the thing that made people happy, so I remember telling my parents I would provide electricity to all the houses in the village so everyone would be happy."



Through their connection to Seattle U, KWH collaborates closely with the community through class engagement. This involves quarter-long projects with students from different fields. Students can have their senior design project sponsored by KWH. This year Tembo is working in partnership with the Black Farmers' Collective by designing a solar-powered off-grid system for a local farm, KWH's first local project to date.

"That's something we really want to expand into more, is working here in the U.S., more locally in Seattle, addressing energy needs through these sustainable programs as well," Isakson said.

This kind of dedication is a large part of what keeps KWH growing as an organization. According to Louie, KWH's steady expansion and growth has been the result of a lot of time and effort from their members, who are all volunteers.

"We've grown as an organization. We're a lot wiser, we have more resources," Louie said. "The landscape has changed as well, in terms of energy access and what's possible and what other people are doing, and we've learned a lot."

Fourth-year communications major, Peter Truong, is taking part in these volunteer efforts through his internship-style class in the Communications Department. Truong is a part of a team of communications advisors. This course allows Truong to gain some practical experience working with an established organization by managing the team and creating a communication plan for their professor and their client KWH.

"[There's] a lot of stuff that I never really considered [to be skills that I needed before because I was never put in a leadership position]," Truong said. "But now that the pressure's on me, obviously, I have to step up and really provide for more than just for myself."

Truong was initially drawn to KWH's mission after listening to their presentation about how giving electricity to one community can change their outlook.

"I feel like it's something that I never really took into consideration, that there are people living without things that I take for a basic necessity...and that kind of blew my mind," Truong said. "I spend a lot of electricity and imagining my life without it is kind of impossible to me."

The non-profit welcomes the perspectives of students from all disciplines to participate in reducing energy poverty.

"Anyone is welcome, they just have to be able to find out who we are, we do our best to advertise, but we really like and value having a diverse group of students that work with us," Louie said.

In past years, KWH has also relied on engaging with students in engineering and computer science to work out solutions to issues surrounding design challenges. Overseeing these technical design aspects is just the start of these student volunteers' journey. If students are interested in getting involved with KWH, they can contact Jenna Isakson on the OSP website.