

Peer Insights

R E P O R T

Q&A with Danielle Grace Warren & Wickham Boyle

Just Shea

Principle Series:

Danielle Grace Warren and Wickham (Wicki) Boyle came together by chance.

They had worked together at an organization called The OpEd Project. Danielle was the second in command, and Wicki was a consultant. When Danielle sent out an email to the full cohort of more than 3,000 OpEders saying she was leaving to work full time on this mission, Wicki wrote back without hesitation saying, "How can I help? I am all in." Wicki had spent much of her childhood in West Africa and visited as a journalist, enamored with the region, the people and the culture.

Danielle and her father Dan Warren, had a small charity called One Village Planet where they were working with sustainable women farmers in Haiti. They heard about the wonders of shea and hence visited Ghana in an attempt to see if importing Shea trees to Haiti would be viable.

Alas, as the trees take 20 years to come to fruition, this was not to be a project for Haiti, but what Danielle saw in Ghana was that the women shea harvesters needed an advocate.

Thus Wicki and Danielle formed a partnership that today is known as Just Shea. Below Wicki and Danielle sit down with Family Office Insights to share more about their business, their continuing journey and how people can get involved today.



Family Office Insights is a voluntary, “opt-in” collaborative peer-to-peer community of single family offices, qualified investors and institutional investors.

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Q: What is the impact you’re making on women and their families’ lives in Ghana?

A: The impact we are making is three-fold. The first is the most direct: increasing safety for women sheanut collectors. Many people don't know this, but sheanut harvesters are often bitten by poisonous snakes and scorpions while gathering fallen sheanuts from the forest floor. This was a pin-pointable problem that we felt we could address immediately, and to great effect. So we created a Buy-Back Loan Program for Safety Kits, where we bought wellington boots, hooded raincoats, gloves and a solar light for the harvesters as a loan to be paid back in sheanuts. The women have access to this crop, rather than cash. This not only protected the women, but also increased their incomes. They work more efficiently because they are safer, and thus collect more sheanuts to sell. Simple. Not one woman in the program has been bitten or stung since we started.

Second, we noticed that the women had no place to store their crops, so the nuts rotted or the women sold them by the village roadside for a very low price. By constructing a 16'x60' shea storage warehouse, we provide them the opportunity to aggregate their crop. The net result: we enabled them to double their income.

Third, we set up our own unique version of microfinance allowing the women to use their shea in the warehouse as collateral to take out loans in order to plant crops and pay school fees during the “hungry months” when family funds are in short supply.

Q: How did you bring this idea of helping women raise their socio-economic status to a reality?

A: Persistence, patience, tenacity and the desire to show that, rather than sitting in a corner bemoaning the inequalities of the world. We are two women from different generations who came together to create an organization to effect small, yet significant change in an often forgotten corner of the world, while working small side jobs to keep ourselves alive. We remind ourselves always of this most important thing: “Many small people, who in many small places, do many small things that can alter the face of the world.” It is where we started from and through the kindness of individuals, foundations and family funds we are able to elevate the lives of 375 families with a waiting list of hundreds.

Q: What type of training do these women receive?

A: The women receive training in quality control to increase the type of harvest they bring in as well as safety augmentation. They further receive rudimentary accounting procedures to help them keep track of their own harvest and budget better and stay organized as a cooperative. This group then benefits from the collective leverage engendered and receives better contracts for the fully transparent supply chain that is in increasing demand from informed consumers.

Q: Building out a business such as yours means getting both moral and economic support from those who believe in your mission. How can people get involved in the project?

A: People can get involved in the project in so many ways. By writing donation checks, which are hugely important; by volunteering to host small cocktail fundraisers where we can share our inspirational story in words and pictures; by making introductions to other like-minded funders and organizations; by purchasing Just Shea products, using them and giving them as gifts (at locations like ABC Home and Donna Karan Urban Zen stores). We call this purchasing with a purpose. Why wouldn't all of us want to do that? And people can simply help by spreading the word to people in their circle about the 16 million women throughout Africa who rely on this crop to survive.

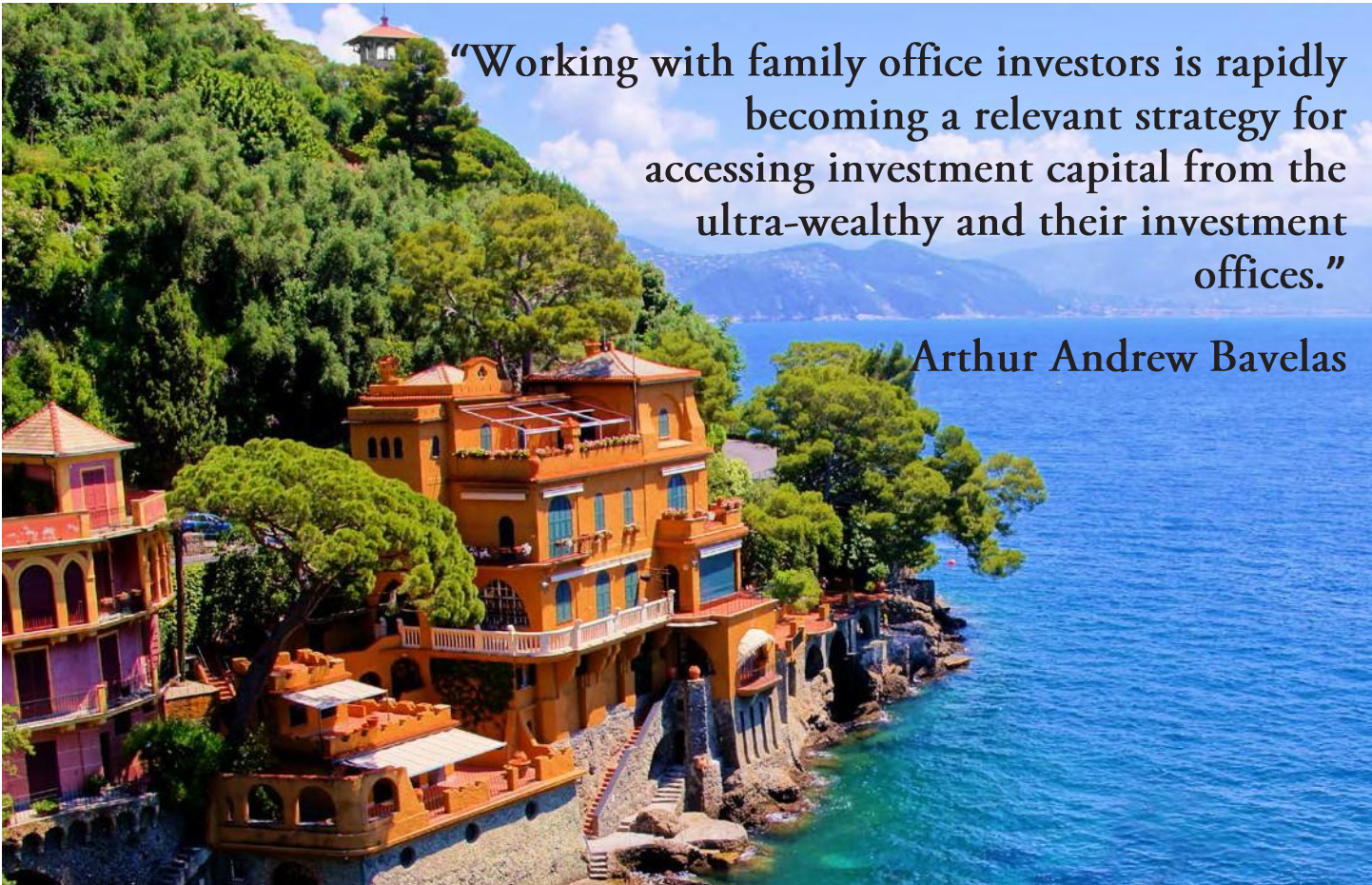


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Danielle Grace Warren (Just Shea, NGO and OVP-WDI) Ghana is the Founder and Executive Director, One Village Planet-Women's Development Initiative & Just Shea, NGO. Warren formalized OVP-WDI as a 501c3 in 2009 (and founded Just Shea, NGO in 2012) after a trip to Ghana to explore the viability of shea trees as a forestry crop in Haiti where she stumbled upon the inequalities that women face in the global shea trade. She is currently living in Ghana working to expand the highly successful Just Shea program to increase the safety, efficiency, and incomes of the women sheanut collectors.

Wickham Boyle is the Director of Special Projects, One Village Planet-Women's Development Initiative. She has helped bring best business practices to non-profit organizations such as The Hartford Foundation, LaMama Theater, The City of New York, The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and the City of Los Angeles, among others. As a journalist she has written for The New York Times, National Geographic Traveler Magazine, MS and many others. Boyle sits on the boards of a number of non-profit boards, including Breast Cancer Warriors, Bundle, and the Church Street School of Music and Art. She has an MBA from Yale and a BA in anthropology, African Studies from NYU.

For more information, please visit, WWW.JUSTSHEA.ORG.



“Working with family office investors is rapidly becoming a relevant strategy for accessing investment capital from the ultra-wealthy and their investment offices.”

Arthur Andrew Bavelas