

Little Sisters, Big Hearts and Incredible Charity

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If you put them together, Katherine and Isabelle Adams wouldn't be old enough to drive a car. Yet these girls have managed, in the last 13 months, to reach across the oceans and make life immeasurably better for villagers they've never met, in lands far, far away from their own home in Dallas.

That's because these young sisters, ages 6 and 9, have raised a remarkable amount, more than \$120,000 in total, for clean-water projects in Ethiopia and India, all through selling [origami](#) Christmas ornaments that they make and by collecting matching funds for their cause.



Isabelle and Katherine Adams With Origami

It's not every day you'll meet children who can say that before fourth grade they've touched more people than most of us will if we live to be 100. But Isabelle and Katherine have done just that through their project, [Paper for Water](#).

A Very Strong Start

Paper for Water is barely more than a year old, though for the Adams sisters it isn't their first charitable endeavor. They'd previously raised funds for Parkland Hospital burn camp by selling hand-painted wooden cutouts of dogs, so they had some experience with helping the less fortunate. Their father Ken, who's half-Japanese, introduced them to origami, the paper-folding art that goes back centuries in Japan. Once the girls started getting more proficient at it, the family decided to hold a fundraiser to aid those in need by selling origami decorations. But what should they do with the money they might raise?

"We'd been talking about how people didn't have water, or didn't have clean water in the world, and how kids had to spend their day hauling water and not going to school," the sisters' mother Deborah Adams says. "And so the girls wanted to do something about water. We just didn't know who we were going to do it with. Because you just never know how much money actually gets spent on the real project and how much on administration."

The Adams family previously had rented an apartment they owned to a woman who had been on mission trips with [Living Water International](#), a Christian organization based near Houston that's completed water-well projects in [more than 20 nations](#). That's ultimately what they settled on.



Origami by Isabelle and Katherine Adams

To see more on Paper for Water and the Adams sisters, [check out our slideshow](#).

The family arranged to have a display of the girls' origami at a local Starbucks in November 2011. The exhibit opened with 35 ornaments, and the Adams family was hoping to collect \$500 to \$1,000 to donate to the charity. "We thought some would get sold opening night and the rest would get sold over the month," Mrs. Adams says.

Instead, they ran out of stock before the night was over. The family knew then and there that they could considerably exceed the initial fundraising goal. "I don't think we realized that we were at the beginning of this," Mrs. Adams continues. "We just realized that we could probably raise at least enough for half a well."

After their opening night success, they went home to make more origami decorations -- the Starbucks display was supposed to run for the month -- and the next day saw the same result: All gone.

Told by their parents they could choose to help pay for a well in one of around two dozen countries where Living Water did work, the girls turned to a globe to figure it out. "We didn't agree on any of them, and so we just picked Ethiopia," Katherine says. In Ethiopia, a well could be constructed for a total cost of \$9,200. It ended up being a good decision.

Word spread about these small origami wonders, and before long, their story appeared in their hometown paper, The Dallas Morning News. That coverage, in turn, helped lead into the next critical event. They'd gotten up to \$3,400 in sales, which meant they were closing in on covering the cost of half a well. Katherine and Isabelle didn't have long to wait for the rest.

Curtis Eggemeyer, the CEO of Envirocon Technologies, a Midland, TX, cleaning-products company behind Lemi Shine, had been [offering up to \\$50,000 of matching funds](#) for a clean water well project. He wanted his donation to go to Ethiopia and specifically to Living Water International, the same country and organization for which the Adams girls were raising money. He heard their story and promptly sent them a match for the \$3,400 they had already raised, thus doubling their total.

With that encouraging push, they increased their production. "We were actually also folding in the car on the way to school," Isabelle says. "Folding like crazy." It paid off. Through decoration sales and Eggemeyer's matching funds, the sisters had collected enough to pay not for half a well, but for an entire well.

India and Beyond

After that year-end flurry, the family was ready for a rest, but it didn't last long. They'd soon set their sights on a well project in India, something that would require \$5,000 to build. Being old pros by now, they got there, and then some. Ever since, they've continued spreading the word about Paper for Water and the well projects they're helping to fund. Here's a sample of what they've done in the past few months:

- [They've been on local TV.](#)
- The sisters spoke at a [UN Women's conference](#).
- They received an [Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy](#) award.
- Isabelle and Katherine met the Indian ambassador to the U.S., [Nirupama Rao](#), when she was in town.

Most importantly, they charted an ambitious 10-well goal. Selling their ornaments generally at three prices, \$20, \$40 and \$55, the family figured they would need to fold about 37,000 sheets of paper to make that a reality. That meant community involvement would be key.

Fortunately, they've not had any trouble getting it, and their fundraising has grown apace. Neighbors and church members have donated time on the folding, as have friends from Providence Christian School, which the sisters attend, and their classmates' parents. They even got students at the DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science in Minnesota to take part through a connection Mrs. Adams has.

That support has enabled the girls to reach their extraordinary six-figure number to fund the wells -- almost \$70,000 through origami sales and donations and roughly \$53,000 through matching funds, for a combined \$122,590. Every bit of it goes to Living Water International.

Next up, Katherine and Isabelle are hoping to create a workshop-in-a-box that will teach other children how to make origami that they can then sell themselves for charitable purposes.

"In the future, we're thinking about possibly making this kit, with an instructional DVD, paper [and] tassels," Isabelle says. "And we're going to send it to schools and churches ... maybe Girl Scouts and clubs, stuff like that, then maybe making a smaller kit for families."

So can they get the kit up and running? They're not experts with those things, but they've relied on their faith to this point for the undertaking, and that's worked out fine.

"This entire project has been orchestrated, I think, divinely," Mrs. Adams says. "The most incredible things have happened. Every day when they're leaving the house, I'm like 'something amazing is going to happen today,' and it does. I just feel like every day the whole universe is conspiring to help us -- that God's hand is just in all of this."

To learn more about Paper for Water, [visit their Facebook page](#). If you would like to contact the Adams family and the project through the mail, the address is: P.O. Box 720999, Dallas, TX 75372-0999.

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