



## ***CASE Presents Enterprising Social Innovation Award to VisionSpring***

By Sangeeta Ballal



The Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) and the Salesforce.com Foundation presented Dr. Jordan Kassalow, Founder and CEO of VisionSpring, with the 2010 Award for Enterprising Social Innovation (ESI). The award recognizes outstanding individuals, organizations, or companies whose innovations blend methods from the worlds of business and philanthropy to create sustainable social value that has the potential for large-scale impact.

VisionSpring received this highly selective award for its tireless work to improve vision and economic opportunity in the developing world. VisionSpring reduces poverty and generates opportunity by educating and empowering “vision entrepreneurs” and equipping them with the tools needed to market and sell eyeglasses at affordable prices. VisionSpring has achieved significant impact – bringing dramatically improved vision to over 400,000 individuals at the base of the economic pyramid and leading to improvements in health, income, and productivity in the world's poorest communities. In sum, VisionSpring is an outstanding example of enterprising social innovation.

At the award ceremony, Dr. Kassalow gave a compassionate and insightful lecture, which included a story about his inspiration for VisionSpring. He described his personal journey from believing that there were limits to how much an individual could change the world to his experience volunteering at the Aravind Eye Hospital in India, where he realized the power he had to make a significant social impact.

As Brian Alvo (Duke MBA '11) noted, “Dr. Kassalow accomplished exactly what I hoped he would in his lecture: he inspired. He covered his beginnings as a mountaineer, his transition to the social entrepreneurship space, and his continuing growth as a person and a businessman literally changing lives in the world. Even more impressive than his accomplishments through VisionSpring was his candor – his genuineness – his transparent nature and his willingness to share that VisionSpring, in addition to all of its success, is still evolving.”

Dr. Kassalow also discussed VisionSpring’s strategy and the continuing evolution of their business model. VisionSpring “1.0” trained women to start up businesses with a “business in a bag,” selling eyeglasses within their communities. This model was successful – employing approximately 150 women and selling 70,000 eyeglasses - but proved difficult to sustain sales and expensive to manage a direct sales force.

In the second model, VisionSpring “2.0” works through several partner organizations, using their sales forces to reach customers and incorporating VisionSpring eyeglasses in to a diversified basket of products so that entrepreneurs did not have to rely solely on eyeglass sales for sustainability. This model has allowed VisionSpring to grow substantially, working with 6,000 women entrepreneurs and seeing sales increase rapidly (200,000 eyeglasses

sold last year, 400,000 projected this year). One of the major challenges of this model, however, was that by partnering and diversifying, VisionSpring lost some leverage and control over the sales process.

Finally, VisionSpring is piloting model 3.0, a “hub and spoke” strategy. VisionSpring had learned that their vision entrepreneurs were limited to helping customers who needed simple reading glasses, while there were many others that needed more advanced care. To address this issue, VisionSpring hired ophthalmologists (“hubs”) and trained vision entrepreneurs (“spokes”) to refer people who needed more advanced care (and ultimately may buy higher margin products) to these ophthalmologists. This last model is more sustainable, allows for cross-subsidization, and helps VisionSpring impact more people, more directly. VisionSpring is now dealing with the challenges of this more complex business model, including finding skilled staff, quality control, and managing relationships with existing local eye care practitioners.

Reflecting on VisionSpring’s journey, Dr. Kassalow noted that each model held valuable lessons learned and helped the organization better scale its business and impact. Professor J. Gregory Dees, CASE founder and Professor of the Practice of Social Entrepreneurship, commented, “In CASE’s ongoing research, we have found that successful social entrepreneurs often change their business models, continually tweaking their strategy and learning valuable lessons along the way. VisionSpring is an excellent example of this – finding new ways to scale their impact and creating a more sustainable strategy to help those in need. CASE is proud to count Jordan and VisionSpring amongst our award recipients and we look forward to their continued success.”

The students, faculty, and community members who attended the award ceremony and lecture can easily attest to why Dr. Kassalow and VisionSpring are worthy of the annual CASE Award for Enterprising Social Innovation.

*View Dr. Kassalow’s Enterprising Social Innovation Award lecture in its entirety at [www.CASEatDuke.org/events/ESIAward/2010Winner.html](http://www.CASEatDuke.org/events/ESIAward/2010Winner.html)*

#### **About CASE**

*Based at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship ([CASE](http://www.CASEatDuke.org)) is a research and education center that promotes the entrepreneurial pursuit of social impact through the thoughtful adaptation of business expertise. For more information, visit [www.CASEatDuke.org](http://www.CASEatDuke.org). The Award for Enterprising Social Innovation (ESI) recognizes outstanding individuals, organizations, or companies whose innovations blend methods from the worlds of business and philanthropy to create sustainable social value that has the potential for large-scale impact. CASE accepts nominations from the public annually - nominations for 2011 are now open at <http://www.caseatduke.org/events/ESIAward/index.html>.*

#### **About the Salesforce.com Foundation**

*The Salesforce.com Foundation is the global leader in integrating philanthropy and business through its 1/1/1 integrated philanthropy model (<http://www.sharethemodel.org>). The 1/1/1 model harnesses the power of salesforce.com’s people and technology through 1% Time, 1% Equity and 1% Product to increase the effectiveness of nonprofits in pursuing their social missions. Since the Foundation’s inception in 1999, employees have given more than 190,000 hours of their time; more than 8,500 nonprofits in 70 countries are using donated and discounted Salesforce CRM licenses as part of the Foundation’s 1% Product Donation Program (<http://www.salesforcefoundation.org/product>); and numerous organizations are benefiting from technology-related grants. For more information on the Salesforce.com Foundation, please visit <http://www.salesforcefoundation.org>.*