

# 'When women cheer one another on, amazing things happen'

Carmen Gonzalez founded the Wonder Foundation charity to help young women around the world access education and opportunities.

**M**y career journey began when I left my home in Spain for university in the UK. While studying history at Queen Mary University of London, I lived in Ashwell House, a halls of residence for international female students. I lived with so many incredible women from Africa, Asia and South America. Although we came from different cultures, we shared common understandings of what is good (love, friendship, knowledge) and what is bad (disappointment, injustice).

I loved Ashwell House so much that I worked there for the next 25 years. More than simply dorm rooms, it was a nurturing organisation to support these female international students. I helped find students, and organised activities and events.

Alongside this, I worked with the friends I'd made when I lived there (most of whom had gone back to their home countries), on projects they had started to provide education for the women in their communities. Though we all lived far apart, we helped each other with fundraising and sharing skills. We quickly grew a wonderful global network of women supporting women.


In 2012, I inherited some money and decided to invest it by formalising this work as a charity: the Wonder Foundation. Our aim is to transform the lives of women and girls around the world, helping them out of poverty by offering training and opening up opportunities. We work with local partners who know their communities, supporting them with skills, funding and resources. In the UK, I have a team of six, and we're currently

working on 19 projects worldwide, from Nigeria to Guatemala to Slovenia. So far, we have supported more than 60,000 women through 37 projects. Much of our work involves offering vocational training for women to go into nursing or the hospitality industry. For many of these women, the jobs they get after these courses enable them to double or triple their family income.

Our board is made up of 90% women. Seeing the competence and passion of the women who lead these projects keeps me motivated. They are fighting against forces outside their control, like corruption or the threat of domestic violence and rape, yet they are so optimistic and generous. One woman we helped in Kenya studied hospitality and eventually studied culinary arts in the UK. She chose to go back to her community, where there are high rates of prostitution, and train other women in hospitality and culinary skills.

I also work for the Baytree Centre in Brixton where, each year, we support 700 women and girls in the UK, including refugees and immigrants, to access education and employment opportunities. Supporting women, whether in poor communities abroad,

or in my local area, is so important to me. I have eight sisters and a huge network of female friends who make me feel loved and empowered. When women cheer one another on and lift one another up, amazing things happen.

• Find out more at [wonderfoundation.org.uk](http://wonderfoundation.org.uk) 

### Quickfire

The first thing I do in the morning is... pray.

I like to relax by... going for walks.

The woman everyone should know about is... my friend Caterina. She has eight children, but sadly, two of them died. She was a refugee from Sudan and is so resilient.

We can all empower women by... being like mothers to them; mothers who always see the positive, and view their children with hope.

My biggest hope for women is... to feel they are loved, and to give that love to people around them.

The world will be a better place when... people act out of love; not fear or power.

My female friends make me feel loved and empowered

The Wonder Foundation helps women all over the world

