

# Andrea Rees: Focused volunteer

ASTRID  
VAN DEN BROEK  
For Metro

Andrea Rees knew herself. She knew that when she headed to Africa last December for a personal travelling trip that she couldn't just be a bystander tourist.

"I'm one of those people who when I see something, I'm going to figure out a way to help," says the Toronto mom and local photographer.

She soon found what she realized what she was looking for in South Africa. The company Uthando South Africa led her into a local township, offering a variety of projects working to improve people's lives.

Fast-forward a year later and Rees is embarking on launching the Heart Of A Woman project, an initiative in which she will teach unemployed mothers in developing communities and

countries about mobile photography to not only help empower them, but provide them with a skill from which they can create a business.

"It's just in my nature, and it's long been a dream of mine to give back in photography and I didn't know exactly how," she said. "It's something I've been waiting to do."

"Andrea has been exceptional in her persistent initiative, extensive networking and steadfast commitment to addressing the root causes of women's economic inequality," said Tom Harding, the director of the Altadena, Calif.-based Art Aids Art, who is working with Rees in the launch of the project.

"She's incorporated a vision for long-term sustainable change with her passion for digital photography."

While Rees humbly says she hasn't participated in a lot of formal volunteering,

her informal history is long and shows some serious dedication.

When she was 10 years old, she volunteered with the Reena Foundation, a society focused on integrating those with physical disabilities into mainstream society. At 15, she volunteered at Branson Hospital in Toronto. She has also worked as a volunteer mentor at the Toronto School of Business and participated in a number of walkathons and bikeathons.

"I also collected toys for toy drives at my photography studio and put on an event to fundraise for breast cancer at the studio in which I donated a portion of my session fees," she said.

So what moves her to be so involved on a volunteer level?

"Once I believe in something, I'm pretty determined," she said.

"It's a wonderful feeling to be able to give back."



Andrea Rees is combining her love of photography and her love of helping others. CONTRIBUTED

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