

[www.giveshoes.org](http://www.giveshoes.org)



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**Changing the World One Pair at a Time™**  
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**Q & A with Wayne Elsey**  
**CEO and Founder of Soles4Souls™ Inc.**

***Describe the mission of Soles4Souls.***

Soles4Souls is a non-profit organization with a simple mission....we get shoes and give them away.

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia, I felt compelled to do something. Like many of us, I did not know what to do.

I was at home one night, watching TV and I saw a picture of a single shoe washing up on the beach. That triggered a few calls to some other executives in the footwear industry and the subsequent donation of a quarter of a million shoes to victims in the devastated countries.

Within a year when Katrina hit, I called the same group of friends, and they sent three-quarters of a million pairs down to the gulf coast communities affected by the hurricane. In all honesty, I admit that we did not expect such an immediate and successful turnout. This left me wondering, why not start a non-profit and do this all the time?

One year later, Soles4Souls was formally created. It has been that simple. Changing the World One Pair at a Time.™

***Why was the organization founded?***

We started this organization to provide free footwear to people in desperate need. These people include: victims of disasters (such as Hurricane Katrina), people living in abject poverty (such as refugee camps in Uganda) and people in need of a fresh start (e.g., women escaping domestic violence situations who need professional shoes for interviews).

***In addition to the Asian Tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita what other causes has Soles 4 Souls contributed to?***

The organization has recently sent 85,000 pairs of shoes to areas affected by Hurricanes Gustav. Other resources have been spent on the earthquakes in Peru, Hurricane Dean in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, the tornado victims in the southern part of the United States, and the California fire victims. Today, almost 50% of our OUTREACH is here in the United States and the balance is in 60 other countries

***Do you have a “shoe bank” for natural disasters?***

Yes, Soles4Souls’ World Outreach Center is located in Alabama and we have two satellite warehouses in Nashville and Las Vegas, Nevada. They receive and process the shoes from footwear companies, churches and civic groups as well as individual donors.

***How do you go about distributing these shoes in times of crisis?***

Soles4Souls has hundreds of partners worldwide who we collaborate with to distribute the shoes. In addition, we partner with several independent relief agencies in Guatemala, Uganda, Romania, Thailand and many others around the world.

***How have companies responded in support of Soles4Souls?***

Companies such as Red Wing, Shoe Carnival, See Kai Run, Hush Puppy, Keen, Cole Haan, Brighton Collectibles, 24 Fitness and Finish Line are to only name a few who have donated shoes and/or sponsored national trade-in programs.

These trade-in programs are essential to keeping shoes out of landfills. Most Americans are unaware of the large number of shoes lying dormant in their closets. It has been estimated that there are 1.5 billion pairs of shoes in American homes that are destined for our landfills instead of being put to use the way they were intended: on people's feet.

***What company has been your largest donor?***

They have all been huge supporters of our mission.

***How is Soles4Souls active within local communities?***

We donate shoes to local non-profits such as shelters and missions.

***How can an individual get involved or contribute to Soles4Souls?***

Visit our website at [www.giveshoes.org](http://www.giveshoes.org) for complete information.

***How do you believe giving someone a pair of shoes truly helps them?***

This is the primary thing we do. You never know when life will hit you hard or where a disaster will hit. One day you have everything you need, the next day you may only have your life. A pair of shoes can help people begin the rebuilding process. Shoes not only bring hope but in millions of cases they can save lives.

Diseases such as hookworms can be fatal. When children are continuously infected by many worms, the loss of iron and protein can retard growth and mental development, sometimes irreversibly. Hookworm infections occur mostly in the tropical and subtropical climates such as sub-Saharan Africa followed by Southeast Asia, India and the Americas and infect about 600 million people – about one-fifth of the world’s population.

***As CEO and Founder what does your position entail?***

I oversee all of the Operations, strategic planning, marketing, PR and procurement and distribution of shoes, which is the most important. We call it OUTREACH.

***What do you hope to accomplish long term for your organization?***

I don't want us to stop until every man, women and child has a pair of shoes.

***What made you want to be a part of this organization?***

To change people lives with the gift of shoes.

***What did you do previously before joining the Soles4Souls team?***

I was, until recently, the President of Kodiak-Terra USA.

***What has surprised you the most about running a non-profit?***

I have learned that to be successful on the non-profit world, you need to run it like a for-profit business with the same disciplines, best practices and cash management.

***Where do you see yourself going within this organization?***

The growth of this organization has been rapid and I am excited to be involved on a daily basis now so that I can devote more time to a cause that makes a difference in people's lives.

***What is the most gratifying part of this organization for you?***

Letters from kids like this one: If I Were a Gift by Joseph Wells.

*If I found a magic wand and was able to turn myself into any Christmas gift I wanted, I know exactly what I would be. I would be a pair of shoes that would always fit. I know it sounds crazy, but there are people all over the world who can't afford a pair of shoes. I would give myself to a child in a country called Haiti. The people in this country are so poor that they can't even afford a pair of shoes and they cannot go to school if they aren't wearing shoes.*

*The child would be so happy when they opened me because he or she would finally be able to walk on the dirt roads without hurting their feet and they would be able to go to school because they had shoes. Who knows, maybe years from now, he or she will be one of the smartest people in the world because they got me for Christmas.*