

MACARTHUR FOUNDATION RECOGNIZES ALUM'S "COMPASSIONATE CAPITALISM"

Winning a MacArthur award can be a revelation, says **David Green**, MPH '82, who found out last September that he was a 2004 recipient of the prestigious prize. "Now I know I'm a lot smarter than I ever was," he laughs. "And my wife knows for sure that I'm a genius, whereas before she didn't."

Joking aside, Green says the \$500,000 award will enable him to undertake new projects aimed at improving people's health in some of the poorest regions of the world. In the past two decades, he's helped restore sight to hundreds of thousands of individuals in countries like India, Nepal, Egypt, Tibet, El Salvador, Tanzania, and Kenya, and he's now working to restore hearing to similar numbers of people. Next on the agenda, Green hopes to find new ways to make antiretroviral drugs available to AIDS patients—especially children—who can't otherwise afford treatment.

Green, who lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife and young son, Tavi, calls what he does "compassionate capitalism," and he makes it sound simple.

"I think that each one of us can, in our daily lives, examine our behaviors and our actions and figure out, OK, is this something that I'm doing just for

myself, or is there something that I can do for others that will be helpful? The more you do for others, the more joy and happiness you experience," he says.

It's what led him into public health 25 years ago. A native of Ypsilanti, Michigan, Green was a carpenter when he applied to the master's program in health behavior and health education at the School of Public Health in 1980. "It's one of the reasons they almost didn't let me in," he remembers. But

ultimately his carpenter's training proved useful.

One day in epidemiology class, Green heard a lecture by SPH alumnus Larry Brilliant, chair of the Seva Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to finding skillful means of relieving suffering worldwide. Green

promptly volunteered for the foundation and after graduation joined its staff. Through Seva, he became involved in global efforts to make cataract surgery available at low cost to patients in India and Nepal.

Initially, Seva relied on donations from producers of intraocular lenses. But Green came up with a more sustainable idea. "I went around and visited all the companies that had been donating, and I said, 'How do you make these gosh-darn-little things?'"

Green was a carpenter when he applied to the master's program in health behavior and health education at the School of Public Health in 1980. Ultimately his carpenter's training proved useful.

Thanks in part to his carpentry skills, Green figured out how to lower the cost of manufacturing the lenses so that Seva could help establish Aurolab, a nonprofit manufacturer of medical products in India. Aurolab produces products such as intraocular lenses and pharmaceuticals at prices that are affordable to the economies of developing countries—without infringing on intellectual property rights.

Aurolab's customers, who are for the most part programs serving the poor, are then able to offer medical products at graduated prices to people in need. The poorest recipients pay nothing, those who can afford the products pay part of the cost, and the rich pay well above cost.

Through his own nonprofit, the Berkeley-based Project Impact, which he founded in 2000, Green has used the same formula to make high-tech hearing aids available at low cost to people throughout the world. Project Impact is dedicated to making medical technology and health care services accessible to everyone, especially to those living mostly in developing countries. The organization's underlying principle, Green explains, is that "if we can bring down the cost of key medical technologies, then these programs can become market-driven. It's a public health mentality—leveraging small efforts into big effects."

His method is straightforward. "The key is not seeing that which is extraneous," he says. "When you look at a medical device and the manufacturing process, the raw material, the regulatory process, everything is hidden, because that's how business works. And so you

In the past two decades, low-cost intraocular lenses made possible by Green's work on affordable manufacturing processes have helped restore sight to hundreds of thousands of individuals in India, Nepal, Egypt, Tibet, El Salvador, Tanzania, and Kenya.

think everything is elaborate and complex, but if you can see the essence of something in terms of its cost structure or what's required to make it, then you can create a pathway."

Seva chair Larry Brilliant recalls that during Green's tenure at Seva, "David combined entrepreneurship and social service in such a unique, alchemical



Thanks to his MacArthur earnings, Green will get some respite from the fundraising burdens he's had to undertake to keep Project Impact running. But he's sanguine enough to know he can't escape the "nose of financing" forever.

More importantly, though, the award will allow Green to further his efforts to improve lives around the world. He'd like to operate at "more of a policy level" by getting medical-device and pharmaceutical companies to use their core competencies and assets to create products that developing countries can afford. "If I can do it on a shoestring budget, what about the big corporations?" he asks. "Can they make their products more available in a way that doesn't jeopardize profitability?"

In many ways, he admits, it's more challenging to be a social entrepreneur than it is to be either a commercial businessman or a nonprofit-based charity. "It's more difficult for a social entrepreneur because we choose to feed many mouths."

But feeding many mouths is what David Green is all about. "Life is short, and there's only so much time that we have, and so the question is how do we choose to

use that time, knowing that when we die we don't take it with us," he says. "The only thing that follows us is our good thoughts, our good words, our good actions or deeds." In Green's case, those deeds are many. ■