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LGO Alums Inspire Youth to Become Tomorrow's Heroes

By Lois Slavin, Communications Director, MIT LGO-SDM

I'm continually impressed by the ways that LGOs apply their learning in engineering and management – not just in the world of business but also in the world-at-large.

Case in point: the work of LGO '97s Sue Nagle, Elizabeth Kao, and Cynthia Closkey, who are collaborating on a non-profit start-up called SheHeroes. Headquartered in Boulder, Colorado, the organization's mission is to provide positive role models to 'tween aged girls of all socio-economic backgrounds via an on-demand video series and social networking sites. SheHeroes' goal is to show 'tweens positive role models with whom they can identify and ultimately to help them develop rewarding careers. The organization will also reach out to families and educators with discussion materials so that they can support the girls as they evolve.

Sue Nagle, SheHeroes Founder and CEO, believes in the importance of showing young girls what they have in common with great people – especially those who are not necessarily well-known. "We showcase models that we ought to see in the media, but don't," she says.

Needless to say, you won't necessarily see any rock stars on the SheHeroes website, but you can find a video about Marion Downs – the "Mother of Audiology". This pilot video explains how Downs discovered that addressing infant hearing problems early is critical to their language development for their entire lives. Also posted are questions for parents and teachers to discuss with the kids after watching the video.

Nagle was inspired to create SheHeroes three years ago, when her daughter was just four. "I looked at the ways that women are portrayed in the media and realized that there are plenty of role models who ought to do be there but aren't," she says.

Together with MIT alumnae Sophia Yen, MD, BS, Biology, MIT '92, and fellow LGO alum Cynthia Closkey, founder and president of Big Big Design,



*Sue Nagle, LGO '97, Founder and CEO, SheHeroes
Photos courtesy of SheHeroes*



*Elizabeth Kao, LGO '97, Resource Development
Director, SheHeroes
Photos courtesy of SheHeroes*

Sue formally founded SheHeroes. She then turned to another LGO alumnae from the class of 1997: Elizabeth Kao.

All three LGO women have extensive – and successful – backgrounds in manufacturing and operations. Nagle worked in marketing, product development, and operations management at HP, Intel and Pitney Bowes, and also has 10 years experience in management consulting. Kao, who has two young children spent 10 years at Ford Motor Company, working in strategy, manufacturing, and product development and Closkey worked for over nine years in industry at companies that included Oracle, NeXT, and Nortel.

Not surprisingly, the LGO influence is embedded in the experience of each of them. Closkey, who lives near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, notes that her involvement with SheHeroes was facilitated through the LGO alumni network. "Sue knew that I was involved in social media and video production and called to discuss that," says Closkey, who put together a quick site for fundraising. As technical director for SheHeroes, she is now engaged in creating a website that simultaneously delivers information and builds community.

Closkey, who lives in Butler, PA, adds that when she works as part of a team, she employs the LGO norm of checking in at the beginning of meetings and using a common language to develop a shared understanding within the group to align efforts moving forward. She adds that she applies the tools she learned in economics and accounting as well, noting that they are "critical for grounding."

Kao and her sister, Penelope Kopf, both work as SheHeroes' resource development directors through a job sharing arrangement. Kao, who lives in Northville, Michigan, says she uses the Voice of the Customer tools that she learned as an LGO student to help with focus groups designed to help improve SheHeroes videos and other offerings.

That said, the LGO connection doesn't stop there. Another LGO '97 alum, Scott Jacobson, recently signed on to help with the Voice of the Customer work after learning about SheHeroes at an LGO alumni networking event. Moreover, MIT students Eddie Lei, Mechanical Engineering/Management, '09, Hassani Lynn Turner MBA, '10, Sreya Sengupta BS, Economics, '10, and Gloria Yang, Math/Management '11 have been engaged too.

"Sharing the LGO tools and language with others in SheHeroes is powerful," says Kao.



Cynthia Closkey, LGO '97, Technical Director, SheHeroes

Photos courtesy of SheHeroes



Caption: In addition to its other services, SheHeroes works with 'tweens to develop their video production skills so that they can produce and shoot the videos themselves. Multi-cultural dance legend Cleo Parker Robinson was recently interviewed by Girl Scouts Nicole Conklin and Carly Fabian for an upcoming SheHeroes video. The girls took turns both interviewing Cleo and running the camera.

Credit: Photo by Stephanie May, courtesy of SheHeroes