

# World's First Hula Hooping Missionary is a "Light in a Dark World" | Positive Impact Magazine Stories & Solutions on how to live a Happy, Healthy Sustainable Life

<http://www.positiveimpactmagazine.com/2011/10/24/world%E2%80%99s-first-hula-hooping-missionary-is-a-%E2%80%9Clight-in-a-dark-world%E2%80%9D/>

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"A small group of thoughtful people can change this world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ~Margaret Mead

By Deborah Bostock-Kelley

The job title on Carissa Caricato's LinkedIn profile reads "full-time joy spreader" and anyone who has ever listened to the gregarious 25 year speak knows the description is a perfect fit. Carissa Caricato wears her faith and joy like a brilliant neon sign that illuminates every aspect of her life and those that surround her.



Carissa Caricato  
Projecto Vida  
in Brazil

"If you describe me without my faith, you are not telling the whole story," Carissa explained to Positive Impact Magazine.

Earlier this summer, in an economy where employment is hard to come by, she voluntarily said goodbye to her mentors, friends, and job

security as marketing and communications for the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and risked everything to pursue her passion, Hoola for Happiness.

Carissa Caricato in Haiti



Caricato formed Hoola for Happiness after taking a local hula hoop exercise class through Hoola Monsters. It was there that she discovered the "travel hoop" and decided to combine her love of hooping with her passion for missionary work. □ Just for fun, she took some travel hoops with her to her second trip to Haiti in December 2009, (12 days before the earthquake) and began documenting her experience on an online blog and



Facebook as Hoola for Happiness. As soon as people heard about her simple, yet effective plan to “help people find their joy,” doors swung open. Carissa explained she doesn’t just walk through those open doors. “It’s like I’m wearing a jet pack,” she joked.

Only a year into its birth, Hoola for Happiness has gained momentum both locally and globally and through several synergistic collaborations, including Hoopnotica who recently donated hoops.

“What’s so cool about the hulas is that they can go anywhere, with any missionary group, so we are working with a lot of different ministries,” said Caricato. “In Haiti, these kids had never seen a hula hoop. It was so much fun and just helped with the language barrier.”

Approved and only awaiting the IRS paperwork, Hoola for Happiness is becoming an official 501(c)3 non-profit. Caricato credits a random stranger for making her vision a reality. In 2010, a young girl donated \$1,500 to Hoola for Happiness.

“The night I met her, she just said ‘I just feel led to give you this money.’ I have never been blessed so much in a single moment that someone would have so much confidence in a dream that they would give to that dream,” said Caricato.

The mission statement for Hoola for Happiness is to “spread the joy of hooping to the world one hoop at a time, one life at a time.”



Carissa Caricato in Kenya

In the last two years, Caricato has “spread the joy of hooping” through missionary work in Haiti, London, Kenya, Uganda, Brazil and she has a trip to Dubai, Nepal, and India planned in mid-December and hopes to spend

Christmas back in Haiti.

Though she will voluntarily be homeless at the end of November when her lease expires, Caricato is excited to embark on a nomadic adventure as “the world’s first hula hooping missionary.”



Carissa Caricato in Kenya

“I’m selling



everything in my house, all my furniture and clothes! The less stuff I have the happier I am." Caricato explained,

"I already have lots of people willing to let me stay with them. It's like I'm living like a college student again. I don't need all this stuff weighing me down. Now if an opportunity arises, I can just go."

Though she freely admits that she overcame personal challenges in her teens, Caricato credits her faith for the positive impact on her life. "All that I am is owed to my faith. That is where I get my energy, my joy and my light."

She also attributed Janine Minge, a University of South Florida professor and mentor in Caricato's sophomore year as the person who sparked her interest in non-profits and ultimately changed her outlook on life.

"I really never had the desire to do anything non-profit-ish. I was in a college class called Women in Communication. We were charged with finding something on campus that needed fixing and fix it," she said. "Janine was such a great inspiration to think about someone other than yourself."

Caricato's group chose the campus blue light emergency phones connected to the campus police station. With a reporter in tow, the group walked the campus and tested the phones to discover that half were inoperable. "We got administration and planning involved. Local media got involved. We raised awareness about the issue of campus safety."

During the course of that year, Caricato and her group petitioned administration to fund 55 new blue light emergency phones on campus. They were installed that summer.

"We were able to see that the fruits of our labor – just as a small class project – could end up benefiting and maybe saving someone's life in the future," she said. "This project was something that helped me get my start. My mentor Janine taught me to look outside myself and make a difference in the world around me."

Caricato's group went on to turn their project into a campus organization, NITE, Necessary Improvements to Transform our Environment and adopted Take Back the Night sexual violence rally as their signature event. Both NITE and Take Back the Night are still a significant part of USF today.

Caricato became NITE's president in her senior year at USF and was awarded "Pillar of the Community." Though only a year old, NITE won "Outstanding Student Organization of the Year" and Take Back the Night, "Volunteer Community Program of the Year."

“During our second Take Back the Night event in 2008, the people at the Crisis Center wanted to meet me and that’s how I got my job there.”

Though she has had no income in the last two months since leaving the Crisis Center, Caricato said that she isn’t worried in the least. She explained that she doesn’t have a five year plan for Hoola for Happiness:



“I’m open to go to anywhere. If people have an orphanage they want us to take food to or if they have an idea, everything is on the table. Next year I am looking to starting leading group Joy Trips. Once I’ve already been to a place and established a relationship there, I’m hoping to bring people back with me, maybe to Haiti and maybe a spring break trip to Brazil. They’d be going on their own and meeting me down there to spread joy,” Caricato said.

For more information on volunteer opportunities, donations or sponsorships or to learn more about Hoola for Happiness,

<http://hoolaforhappiness.org>, [www.hoola4happiness.wordpress.com](http://www.hoola4happiness.wordpress.com) or email [hoolaforhappiness@gmail.com](mailto:hoolaforhappiness@gmail.com).

**World Hoop Day** □ **Friday, November 11, 2011** □ **FAMILY-FRIENDLY FREE EVENT** □ **10am – 10pm** □ **Downtown Tampa Park**

- Hula hoops all over park
- Part of nationwide Love Riot Flash Mob (with hula hoops) to raise awareness of human trafficking
- Event proceeds benefit Hoola for Happiness

