

## What's He Up To?!? Philanthropist, Shimmy Mehta

At one point or another, we've all probably thought about doing something meaningful that will help others. Then something more "important" comes along and we end up pushing that thought aside. Luckily for all of us, some are actually able to follow through. One of those people is Shimmy Mehta.



Shimmy is the founder of [@angelwish.org](http://angelwish.org), a non-profit site where people can grant wishes to children affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS. @angelwish works with hospitals and HIV/AIDS centers around the country to help make things a little nicer for the children.

We were lucky enough to ask Shimmy a few questions about how @angelwish came to be and where it will go.

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### How did you come up with the idea for @angelwish?

The concept came to me while I was following up with a charity event that I started back in college at Rutgers University - Newark, NJ. The event was called the TKE Challenge For Pediatric AIDS and was a 3-day 300-mile cycling event to raise money and awareness for the Pediatric HIV/AIDS care center that was across the street from our Fraternity house. I went back to some of the care centers we had worked with to see how I could help them out. Instead of saying they needed me to raise \$20,000 for a new piece of equipment, they identified a number of inexpensive "wishes" for the kids they treated, like a Pokemon watch or a basketball; things we certainly don't envision as "wishes". They also indicated that they needed these items not just for the children who were infected with HIV or AIDS, but for the siblings and other children who were affected by the disease having infected someone in their family.

As I spoke with more care center directors, it was clear that there was a large population of children who were living with HIV/AIDS who had very simple wishes and desires. Wishes that probably mean more to them than anything we could imagine. Wishes that many of my busy friends and I could easily grant with a few emails and a little social networking through a concept we would call Digital Philanthropy.

There are really two groups here that benefit from @angelwish. The children and families who are living with HIV/AIDS are the most direct recipients of our work. But indirectly, we are grooming the next generation of philanthropists, by demonstrating that giving back does not have to take away from their work or their personal life in terms of hours or a blank check. @angelwish offers a simple and rewarding opportunity to give back to a particular child living with HIV/AIDS in a particular city in just a matter of minutes. We used to stay at work 24 hours a day because it was fun - there was a foosball table there. Nowadays, we stay at work 24 hours a day because our careers depend on it. @angelwish helps to maximize your

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time and your ability to make a difference.

### What went into putting it together?

This has been the greatest learning experience of my life. In the past two and a half years, I've taken major crash-course lessons in web development, non-profit tax issues, social work, public relations, marketing, accounting, time management, and diplomacy. I realized that for this to work, it really shouldn't be just a hobby. We would have to run this as an Internet start-up.

I saw the potential for this to become very big, so I approached a few partners at PricewaterhouseCoopers for some assistance in setting up the legal entity as a registered non-profit organization. Once that was done, we went about the task of developing the Angelwish.org website. Initially, we received a quote of \$55,000 to have the site developed. With no money to work with, we put it out to bid through our friends at the New Jersey Small Business Development Center. Through them, we were approached by CSC Consulting to meet and discuss the project; at which time, they offered to develop the website for us *pro bono*. Their rationale was that they believed it was a very unique charitable e-commerce concept and it also would serve as an excellent training tool for the staff who would be volunteering their time to develop it.

### How do you balance running the organization and your full-time position?

That has probably been one of the biggest struggles, but one that I love to juggle, as both have been so rewarding. I am a Senior Associate for PricewaterhouseCoopers in their Global Risk Management Services group, providing business advisory services to clients. As cheesy as it sounds, I love helping people. With PwC, I get to go into a number of business situations and help a company improve their processes to become more efficient. With @angelwish, I am able to put my business experience and networking skills to use for a good cause. At the end of the day, we are making children smile. If that's not worth the balancing act, I don't know what is.



Truthfully, things have gotten very busy for both "jobs". Most of my PwC and @angelwish associates have noticed that my emails usually carry a time stamp of about 2 or 3 in the morning as I find myself working on @angelwish late into the evening. I tend to get my best work done around that time, and it pretty much ensures that my emails are the first ones in a person's inbox.

### What does @angelwish consider its greatest accomplishment so far?

Receiving the 1809th Point of Light Award from President George W. Bush and the Points of Light Foundation. The New Jersey Office Managing Partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers nominated @angelwish for the Point of Light because of our creative approach to enabling others to help children living with HIV/AIDS.

We were awarded the honor on January 9th, 2001. It was a great boost to our new organization's credibility and positive confirmation of our unique approach to addressing the tremendous issue of children living with HIV/AIDS.

### What has been the biggest obstacle?

Trying to raise awareness for this large population of children who are affected by HIV/

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AIDS. There are currently several commercials indicating how cancer or another disease affects the entire family. The negative stigma attached to HIV/AIDS and general lack of information regarding HIV/AIDS makes it very difficult to market the need for programs like ours in the communities who need it most. Most of the time, for their own protection, children who we assist do not even know that they are sick or that someone in their family has HIV/AIDS.

The sooner we are able to get some mainstream awareness generated, the sooner we can ensure that these children, many of whom will most likely become orphans thanks to AIDS, have the same positive childhood that you and I had.

### What is your ultimate goal for @ngelwish?

To provide a connection for individuals, organizations, and companies to creatively embrace their local area's population of children living with HIV/AIDS, ensuring they have a bright future. In addition to donations, are there other ways for people to get involved with Angelwish? The key to @ngelwish is creativity. My contribution to the mix has been developing the online wish granting function that allows a visitor to grant a wish in a matter of minutes (seconds with Amazon.com's one click purchasing) to a child living with HIV/AIDS anywhere in the country.

We encourage everyone to tap into their creativity to do something to benefit these children. Recently, one of my advisors got married and instead of giving out wedding favors, he and his wife gave out "karma" by making a donation to @ngelwish in all the guests' names. Schools have done toy and penny drives to benefit the children of a local area care center.

We are launching a new program soon called the @ngelwish Advisory Boards, which encourage the public to participate in the future of @ngelwish by "adopting" a care center anywhere in the country and working with other like minded individuals to support the needs of that care center through physical events, fundraisers, and social networking.

### How have the events of September 11th affected @ngelwish?

@ngelwish will be impacted tremendously this year. We have over 3,000 NYC children in the @ngelwish program who are not only living with HIV/AIDS, but have also been affected by the WTC tragedy hitting them in their hometown. It was a hard enough to rally support for children like these who tended to fall between the cracks. Now more than ever, their needs are getting bypassed.

With emotions running high, almost every person in America has contributed to the relief effort, typically by making a contribution to the Red Cross or the United Way. Smaller charities like @ngelwish are seeing a huge drop in giving as many people have given their donations, along with the shirts off their back to the disaster recovery funds of 9.11.01. Fortunately, some companies, including Goldman, Sachs, & Co. and PricewaterhouseCoopers have made the decision to support @ngelwish in various ways. Individuals are also realizing that they can make a very personal difference in the life of a child living with HIV/AIDS as well as with the effects of the WTC tragedy by granting a wish online.

If anyone would like to find out more, they can email Shimmy Mehta at [shimmy@angelwish.org](mailto:shimmy@angelwish.org) or give him a call toll free at 1-866-264-3594.

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