

November 2025

Dear Friends of ***Sara's Wish Foundation***,

While it is still a bit beyond our comprehension, next March will mark thirty years since Sara was killed in a motorcoach accident in India. Our comfort comes from knowing that, with your generous support, ***Sara's Wish Foundation*** has and will continue to make truly substantive differences in Sara's name across the global community. Our initiatives to **promote seatbelt usage on motorcoaches** continue to make progress; we've increased our **funding support for certification programs for study abroad professionals**; and we've increased our **SWF Travel Fund at UMass/Amherst**. We once again provided **substantial financial assistance to a remarkable woman, documentary filmmaker, Alina Simone – all in Sara's name**. Our commitment to making the world a safer place for us all has never wavered. Here are 2025 highlights:

- Our seatbelt usage research collaboration with our partners in the UMass Transportation Center is making headway. As you may recall from past **SWF** newsletters, findings from our National Safety Council Road to Zero grant work in 2019-21 showed that having a state law promoted a 25% increase in passengers buckling up while on motorcoaches. As of now, only California and New York have enacted such laws. In January 2025, our State Representative Mindy Domb and State Senator Jo Comerford sponsored a bill to mandate fastening seatbelts on motorcoaches in Massachusetts. This would put Massachusetts with California and New York at the forefront of motorcoach safety. We are proud to tell you that, on behalf of **SWF**, Anne and Charlie testified before the House Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security in June and the Senate Committee on Transportation in October. These committees will render a decision on this potential legislation in order to move it to the Ways and Means Committee by the end of 2025. Meanwhile **SWF** will be lobbying state congressional members to favor the law with a vote to make seatbelt buckling mandated. With positive committee recommendations, we can expect a congressional vote in 2026. **SWF** will be saving lives and your support will have made this happen. Upon passage **SWF** plans to work with other states to pass similar laws.
- **SWF** continues its research to understand the behavior behind seatbelt usage. With a grant from the US Department of Transportation, charter motorcoach seatbelt usage is under present investigation. We are boarding charter buses and observing the incidence of seatbelt usage along with departure announcements encouraging passengers to click their seatbelts. The next phase will be implementing our messaging "Sit-Click-Ride" campaign and measuring the charter passenger "buckle up" response. More grant proposals are in the works to provide broader understanding of passenger seatbelt behavior.

- We enhanced our capacity to provide scholarship support for deserving undergraduates at UMass/Amherst by **adding \$25,000 to our endowment, The Sara's Wish Foundation Travel Award Fund, after an initial donation of \$25,000 last year.** The students we support want to pursue travel abroad experiences related to education, healthcare, public service, environmental sustainability, or a similar humanitarian/civic engagement field. We are thrilled that we are demonstrably increasing our "reach," our impact on young people who, like Sara, want to learn and grow through study abroad experiences.
- **SWF** continued its financial support for safety training for study abroad professionals through our partnership with **The Forum on Education Abroad.** Thanks to our gift of **\$15,000** this year (an increase of \$5,000 over last year's gift), The Forum will be able to sustain its high volume of health and safety learning grants, funding that enables professionals at colleges and universities with limited financial options to avail themselves of The Forum's safety training, so critical to the study abroad industry.
- The news about **SWF's** multi-year scholarship award recipient, documentary filmmaker Alina Simone, is truly spectacular! For several years, we provided financial support for **Alina's feature documentary film, *Black Snow*,** which shines light on the human cost of open pit coal mining. This year, ***Black Snow*** has been featured in **25+ documentary film festivals** around the world and has **won more than a dozen awards** including: the FACT Award for best investigative documentary (CPH:DOX); the Sustainable Future Award (Sydney International Film Festival); Best Documentary Feature at AmDocs 2025, \; and the 2025 Cinema Eye Spotlight Award. In September, **PBS aired *Black Snow* on its stations nationwide, and it continues to be streamed on PBS Passport through mid-December.**

This year, we continued to underwrite the costs of editing Alina's second film ***Fear Zone*.** **The SWF board agreed to give Alina two (final) grants totaling \$30,000** in order for Alina's editing team to reach the rough-cut stage and thus unlock the financing they need to secure finishing funds. ***Fear Zone*** will be ready for release by the summer of 2026.

Alina's superior talent and skills as a filmmaker have been acknowledged multiple times over the past year. **Alina is the recipient of a Logan Non-Fiction Fellowship, the Andrew Berends Film Fellowship, an NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellowship, the Mountainfilm Emerging Filmmaker Fellowship and the Cayton-Goldrich Family Foundation Fellowship** (awarded by Film Independent). Finally, here's the exciting ***Breaking News: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has selected Alina Simone as the recipient of the 2025 [Academy Gold Fellowship for Women](#).*** WOW!!!!

We know that Sara's positive presence is alive in all the work that you have helped us do. While we are no longer offering our Global Humanitarian Award scholarships, your donations moving forward will continue to support our motorcoach seatbelt safety initiatives and will also enhance our scholarship endowment at UMass/Amherst as well as our partnership with The Forum on Education Abroad.

Thank you! Thank you everyone!!

Wendy Kohler, Treasurer and Scholarship Chair