

Sasha B. Kramer '94

As an ecologist, human rights advocate and champion of dignified and safe sanitation, you have channeled your passionate devotion to ecological research into the pursuit of basic human rights for people in Haiti and around the world. As one longtime colleague puts it, “Sasha leads with her heart, and all the work that she does is based on bettering people's lives.”

During your childhood in upstate New York, when you weren't outside chasing frogs and other creatures, you paged through a book of *Life* magazine photographs and drew inspiration from the activism of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Your passion for learning led you to Exeter, where you brought your exuberant personality to Harkness discussions and field hockey practices alike. For a religion class, you kept a journal in which you pasted newspaper articles and wrote your thoughts around the moral questions posed by the stories. Looking at news events through an ethical lens helped you see the world in a new and more expansive way, as did living and learning in a racially diverse community for the first time.

At Reed College, you studied plants and biological systems, and you later pursued your doctorate in ecology at Stanford University. For a course on sustainable agriculture in Latin America, you read *Eyes of the Heart* by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president, which galvanized you to travel to Haiti as a human rights observer after a coup toppled his government in 2004. While meeting and working with community activists there, you saw the devastating impact of both widespread food insecurity and lack of access to proper sanitation.

You returned to Haiti six times while completing your dissertation on nitrogen cycling — the system whereby plant and animal waste returns crucial nitrogen to the soil, enabling the growth of new crops. You resolved to apply your research to help address the real-world problems depriving Haitians, and so many others around the world, of basic human rights.

You discovered the work of Peter Morgan, a pioneer of low-cost, practical ecological sanitation solutions in Zimbabwe. You got — by your own account — “wildly into” toilets, and in 2006, you co-founded the nonprofit organization Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods, or SOIL. You moved to northern Haiti and began building your first composting toilets, which used cane sugar byproducts and other organic material to transform human waste into agricultural-grade compost.

When a catastrophic earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, you and others loaded up a car and drove straight to the capital city of Port-au-Prince, where you stayed for the next eight years. “Sasha never shows fear,” says a close friend who worked with you during this time. “She moves through spaces of incredible devastation and pain with compassion and with love.” The global aid organization Oxfam asked SOIL to build emergency toilets for displaced residents, and your team overhauled your original design to create a lighter container-based toilet that could be emptied more regularly.

You also built your first large-scale composting site, eventually providing 200 emergency public toilets used by 20,000 people in the five years following the earthquake.

Now one of Haiti's largest waste treatment operations, SOIL supplies household toilets in dense urban areas, providing lifesaving sanitation access to thousands of people, helping prevent the spread of cholera and other diseases and creating jobs for trained sanitation workers. At the same time, your organization is treating and transforming human waste into rich compost to revitalize the soil, combat food insecurity and resist climate change.

In a world rife with challenges related to water shortages, unsafe sanitation and food insecurity, yours is a model that many people seek to emulate. SOIL has joined forces with a global network of groups working to develop sustainable alternatives to water-based sewage, and you work closely with research institutions and other scientists to encourage the development of ecological sanitation solutions as a healthier and more sustainable alternative for communities around the world.

You have said that you draw strength and inspiration from your SOIL team of nearly 70 colleagues, as well as from your family. You met your husband, Anthony, in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. As a civil engineer working in sanitation, he shares with you a devotion to this vital work, and to your son, Biko.

Sasha, with your determination to apply your academic research to the world's most pressing problems — not to mention your passion for toilets — you have created an incredible organization that is helping restore a basic right to tens of thousands of your fellow humans. For always leading with your big heart, and for adding your voice and knowledge to an ongoing global dialogue around how to harness the power of science to heal the planet and its people, we honor you with the 2022 John and Elizabeth Phillips Award.