

Meet Dana Rivers: The hopeful first-time donor

Dana Rivers wasn't looking to become a philanthropist. She was scrolling through Instagram when she stumbled on a video: a young girl in Kenya opening her first library book, eyes wide with wonder. The caption read, "\$20 brings books to a child who's never held one before." Dana clicked *Donate Now*.

That was March.

And then... silence.

Don't: The thank-you that wasn't

Three days after donating, Dana got a thank-you email. Technically. It started with "*Dear Donor,*" and ended with a tax receipt. The middle was a wall of jargon about "programmatic outcomes" and "fiscal stewardship." It sounded more like a legal memo than gratitude.

Dana clicked away, forgetting the organization's name within the week.

Do: The human thank-you

Now let's rewind. Imagine instead that Dana got this:

Subject: You did something beautiful today 🧡

Hi Dana,

I just wanted to say thank you—not just from me, but from every little reader who cracks open a book thanks to you. Your gift will put real pages in real hands—like Zawadi's, who just checked out her first mystery novel (and is *convinced* she'll become a detective now).

Your \$20 is a spark. We'll keep you posted on what it lights up.

With gratitude,
—Lina from OpenReads

Dana forwarded that email to a friend.

Don't: forgettable communication

Two months passed. Dana didn't hear anything else. No updates. No stories. No impact. Her \$20 felt like it vanished into a black hole.

By the time the annual giving campaign rolled around, Dana had already moved on to other causes that *talked to her*.


Do: goosebump-worthy storytelling

But let's flip the script again.

Imagine that Dana received a short monthly newsletter. The kind she actually looked forward to. The subject lines made her smile:

"Zawadi the Book Detective strikes again!"

"How your gift helped build a reading corner in a refugee shelter."

 *"You made this happen, Dana."*

Each email was short, vivid, and had a photo or quote. Dana felt *something* every time—hope, pride, purpose.

Do: recognition that feels real

Three months later, Dana opened an envelope. Inside was a handwritten postcard.

Dana—You were one of our first 100 book donors this year, and we just wanted to say... thank you. Your name is now in the corner of our new children's reading room in Nairobi (next to the beanbags). Come visit any time!

—The OpenReads Team

She stuck it on her fridge.

Real-Life Win

By the end of the year, Dana had joined the monthly donor program. And she wasn't alone. That personalized stewardship—the human emails, the emotional stories, the *real* thank-yous—helped OpenReads boost their donor retention rate from **35% to 45%**.

Dana didn't just give again. She brought three friends with her.