

Nonprofit Creates a New Club at USC

April 8, 2011 by Hannah Madans

James Owens, assistant professor of clinical management communication at USC, began writing *The World Is Just A Book Away*, but instead of finishing the book, Owens chose to create a non-profit organization of the same name to give kids in Indonesia books and libraries.

The World is Just a Book Away was founded by Owens in 2008. Since then, it has built 47 libraries in Indonesia and provided 25,000 children with 45,000 books. Discussion about creating a USC club began at the beginning of the semester.

The nonprofit's mission to give children in Indonesia books was met with enthusiasm from students. Students in response have recently founded a The World Is Just A Book Away Club USC chapter to work with the nonprofit organization.

Owens founded the organization after visiting more than 50 countries. Upon seeing the devastated communities, he decided it would be helpful to provide books to children.

"I've seen children who have access to no books and few resources and I know that books provide a whole world of dreams and adventure and hope to children," Owens said. "So I thought, let me build a library for kids."

The nonprofit quickly garnered support from USC faculty and alumni, many of whom sit on the organization's board.

"James has an innate ability to mobilize people quickly, and I share his vision in believing that all children, regardless of where they live and what their socioeconomic situation is, should have access to books and education," said Jonathan Schwartz, a board member for The World Is Just A Book Away and USC alumni.

Billy Buffington, a junior majoring in business administration and human performance, and Alex Schaffhausen, a senior majoring in economics and biological sciences, founded the club after learning about the organization in Owens' class.

Schaffhausen said he became involved with the organization because he saw other children were not given the same opportunities he was and wanted to change that.

"My parents have always taught me the importance of education ... I've traveled to third world countries and I realized that a lot of kids don't have the same opportunities to go to school," Schaffhausen said. "I want to do my part in helping other children have the same opportunities I have."

The club, which now has 12 members, hopes to have 30 by the end of the year, according to Buffington. Buffington said any USC student can join.

To raise money and increase awareness about the club, the group will be holding a 5K run Sunday, April 10. Every dollar donated is the equivalent of one book for the kids in Indonesia.

The club spent two months finding sponsors, making signs, sending out emails and meeting with university officials to get the course for the 5K approved.

"Most sources I found recommend anywhere from three to six months for preparation," Buffington said. "Neither Alex nor I had ever run a 5K, let alone organize one, so we pretty much started from scratch. We did a lot of research online and contacted a lot of runners."

The club hopes to build a library in Padang, Indonesia with the money raised from the run. The library, which will be called The World Is Just A Book Away 5K 2011 Library in honor of the event, will be in Padang because the city has been severely ravaged with mudslides and earthquakes over the last few years, according to Buffington.

The area is in severe poverty, and Buffington said it is the belief of the organization that education is the key to ending that poverty. Books and libraries are necessary for the children in Indonesia to get an education.

Buffington said the most difficult task of putting together the 5K was convincing people to run.

"We were unsure how much interest the student body would have," Buffington said. "Professor James Owens was instrumental in helping us get a large number of participants. Through the goodwill of students and non-students, and a bit of nagging, we now have 115 participants signed up."

The World Is Just A Book Away Club at USC is the first club at a university to work with The World Is Just A Book Away organization.

"We have the opportunity to go to a great school and I think it's a good thing to share our opportunities with others and to benefit and make the world a better place," Schaffhausen said. "Education is one of the key ingredients for success and I think it's great that USC students can share their opportunities with others."

Buffington and Schaffhausen both hope the club will spread to other universities.

"The long term goal is to eventually have more of these clubs at universities around the state, around the country and that one day having a The World Is Just A Book Away Club is common place at most universities," Buffington said.

Though Buffington and Schaffhausen do not yet know how they will spread the club to other schools, they hope that by reaching out to friends and other advocacy groups, students will want to create a club to benefit The World Is Just A Book Away.