



THE WORLD IS JUST A BOOK AWAY

The Rapid Growth of The World Is Just a Book Away Propels Education Program to the Next Level

June 16, 2011 by Birger Stamperdahl and Dena Fischer

We like success stories at Give2Asia. The truth is that many of the donors we work with choose to partner with Give2Asia because we help them fill a gap – either permanently or temporarily – on their path to achieving a social mission. In some cases, their partnership with Give2Asia is so successful that they eventually outgrow us. We're proud to share one such story with you, and show how their move away from Give2Asia ultimately demonstrates the strength of our donor partnerships.

In 2008, James Owens turned his lifelong passion for books and reading into a way to help the children of Indonesia. A professor at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, he had a deep affinity for Indonesia having visited several times and seen firsthand the extreme poverty that afflicts many communities as well as the effects of natural disasters that are common on many of Indonesia's islands. And he saw a way to help: children were in severe need of books – a key to educating young people and helping them out of poverty.

Professor Owens enlisted the help of colleagues and friends to launch The World Is Just a Book Away (WIJABA), a project to establish libraries and books to impoverished communities in Indonesia. Owens and his team felt they could be more effective and sustainable by focusing resources in one country and chose three areas in Indonesia: Java, Sumatra and Bali. Their plan was to establish regional hubs and serve the surrounding communities by helping to develop school and mobile libraries.



Owens learned quickly that establishing 501(c)3 nonprofit status in the U.S. would take time and money. Navigating all the logistics on their own would mean WIJABA wouldn't be getting books to kids as fast as they hoped. On the advice of an attorney, Owens looked into advised funds. After researching, he decided to look more carefully into Give2Asia as a partner to launch WIJABA. A partnership with Give2Asia offered him an opportunity to direct funds to the local groups in Indonesia WIJABA wished to support, while also giving donors the benefit of a tax deduction and professional stewardship for their charitable contribution.

"Their experience with legal matters, accounting, government compliance, fiduciary responsibility, financial logistics and more absolutely fast-tracked us; without Give2Asia, we never could have achieved such incredible growth and success in our first three years of operation," said Owens.

WIJABA has helped to launch 53 libraries – 22 in its first year alone – and two mobile branches, serving more than 25,000 children- quite an impressive feat for a three-year-old program.

WIJABA has now reached a point where they are ready to attain independent nonprofit status. "We're excited to go to the next level," Owens stated. "The tight control an umbrella fund provides was necessary as we were ramping up, but now we need the discretion and control of funds that 501(c)3 status provides."

Much of WIJABA's success comes from its efforts to invest in the communities in which it works. Local partners in Indonesia help decide what books to stock and contribute 10% of the costs associated with each project through contributions of time, labor and/or money. Plans are in the works for more school libraries as well as adult libraries so that parents who walk their children miles to school will be able to read and learn while they wait for the school day to end.

"Education and books provide hope," Owens said, "in this next phase we'll be able to bring the miracle of books to even more of Indonesia's children."

Give2Asia is thrilled to have been part of WIJABA's early-stage growth, and we will continue to support their success in whatever way makes sense moving forward. All of us at Give2Asia are grateful for the opportunity to assist in their mission of getting books to children in need.