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## US Charity Brings Books to Indonesian Children

By: Mike O'Sullivan



LOS ANGELES - The American-based charity **The World is Just a Book Away** is making a difference in Indonesia by building libraries for children and their families. The founder of the non-profit organization, business professor James Owens, wants to share his love of reading with communities in the developing world.

Children devour words and pictures in the newly opened library at a school in Padang, in Western Sumatra. Books are a luxury in Padang, and fifth-grade student Fiolisa Anggraini is pleased to see so many.

“What I like most from this new library is the books, good books ... They really can improve my knowledge,” Anggraini said.

The library is one of dozens The World is Just a Book Away has built in Indonesia since 2009 in Padang, Sidoarjo, and on the island of Bali. The latest opened last month.

The World is Just a Book Away's founder, James Owens, says children in Indonesia, as in other developing countries, have plenty of talent but few resources.

“They go to school, they learn and they are very smart. They do not have access to

books, history and fables and stories and science, that can really spark their imagination and let them dream,” Owens said.

Each library costs between \$5,000 and \$10,000. At the University of Southern California, where Owens teaches, students held a five-kilometer charity run in March and raised \$8,000 for the Padang library. Additional funds came from the organization's national branch. Psychology student Stephanie Wetzel belongs to the group of campus supporters.

“We take reading so for granted here, and I think that people really want the opportunity to be able to give reading literacy to other children who do not have that,” Wetzel said.

In Padang, teacher and headmaster Amril Lasmana says the library has made a difference in the lives of the children.

“The enthusiasm, interest, and motivation of our students in learning increased. The library building has been renewed. And now, it is in good and clean condition, so it motivates our students to study,” Lasmana said.

A mobile library in Padang and another in Sidoarjo extend the reach of the program to many other schools.

Fifth-grade student Lisa Andriyani Putri thinks the new library will help develop her mind and character.

“I am very happy with this new library. It makes me want to keep studying, so I can be a good person in future,” Putri said.

Back in California, The World is Just a Book Away Executive Director Robert Lucas helps connect donors with the projects the charity finances. He says funds raised in the United States go far in Indonesia.

“We can buy one book for \$1 in Indonesia. So the one-to-one ratio there is a very attractive way to get people involved in supporting the organization and what we are trying to do,” Lucas said.

Some Indonesian libraries have been named after noted supporters, including the entertainer Cher, actor Liam Neeson, naturalist Jane Goodall and South African peace activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The World is Just a Book Away has built 49 libraries for Indonesian children and 26 libraries for their parents. The organization will launch a program in Mexico this year.