

Teacher in a Box program thinks outside the box

An innovative idea from a Queensland club sees laptops loaded with educational programs donated to remote areas of developing countries.

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Poet Robert Frost once said, "I am not a teacher, but an awakener". Likewise, a paraphrased quote from Plutarch says, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire".

These eloquent quotes are all very well for people in developed countries with access to many educational resources, but how do we educate, awaken, or light a burning desire to learn for people in remote areas of developing countries such as Papua New Guinea and Africa?

As part of its commitment to basic education, one of Rotary's six *Areas of Focus*, District 9600 is providing the Teacher in a Box program to people in remote areas.

PICTURED:
Charging an iPhone in the Western Province of PNG.
(Photo: Russ Stephenson)



“BY CONNECTING THE TIB LAPTOP WITH A PROJECTOR AND SPEAKERS, A TEACHER CAN PROVIDE COMPLETE LESSONS TO CLASSROOMS.”

No, they are not packaging teachers in boxes and sending them to developing countries, whereupon they spring forth to work their magic. The program is thinking outside the box, as well as inside, to achieve its aims.

Teacher in a Box (TIB) uses re-purposed laptops providing offline access to more than 10,000 educational and vocational videos stored in the system. By connecting the TIB laptop with a projector and speakers, a teacher can provide complete lessons to classrooms. A mini router, which comes with the TIB kit, means it can also be accessed by any wi-fi enabled device for self-paced learning.

TIB is the brainchild of Jeanette Johnstone, of the Rotary Club of Paddington, Qld, who recognised the need for cheap, reliable educational resources that didn't depend on the internet. Jeanette met Patrick Hackett, a Computers 4 Learning volunteer, another Rotary project, which comes under the Donations in Kind program. Together, they stripped and cleaned donated laptops, uploaded thousands of educational videos, lessons, books and accompanying resources, and connected the laptop to a small router. This can then be shared to 100 other devices.

The project continues to grow and has been invaluable to schools in

Liberia, Tanzania, Kenya, Cambodia, PNG and the Philippines.

TIB is now using Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning (RACHEL) as a content provider for the TIB units. A list of RACHEL modules can be found at racheloffline.org.

The Rotary Club of Bribie Island has received district grants to purchase TIB laptops and provide them to clubs in PNG, Nauru and the Solomons. Incoming presidents from these clubs visit Bribie Island, are given a kit, and receive training for their presidential year.

The kits can be charged via solar panel, with one man spotted charging

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Committee and district Rotarians and friends were shocked and saddened to hear that Janet Lawrence, wife of TIB chairman John Lawrence, died suddenly from heart failure at 8am on December 24, 2019. Janet had been a Rotarian for many years and had worked with the TIB project since its inception. Vale Janet.

his iPhone while walking to the next village. Satellite charging is also available to remote areas, and solar panels are being placed on roofs of schools.

In our part of the world, we take internet access and readily available electricity for granted. This is an inspiring innovation for rural villages and countries where there is limited or no internet access. TIB is making a huge and positive impact where there are few classroom resources and teachers with little training.

Parallels can again be drawn to Robert Frost and his famous poem *The Road Not Taken* – or to many, *The Road Less Travelled*. The Teacher in a Box program is perhaps indicative of Frost’s poem, where many people, never given the chance before, are being given an opportunity to take that road. A road to success and happiness – the one less travelled. And, that can make all the difference! •



ABOVE: Jeanette Johnstone demonstrates TIB to eager teachers at Arusha Secondary School in Northern Tanzania. (Photo: Louise North)