

## RIVER VALE

# Foundation works to 'unlock' the door of possibility

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Correspondent

Trying to do his part to alleviate poverty in Africa, River Vale native and Pascack Valley High School graduate Scott Karrell founded the Unlock Foundation, which celebrated its official opening in February.

Karrell's involvement in projects in Africa started with a volunteer travel program in Ghana in 2005. "I was a young naïve high school kid knowing nothing of the outside world," he said. "It was a major shock for me to see how half the world is living. It opened my eyes."

Karrell and his group opened a school in Ghana that's still running today. "Helping to build a school and seeing something like that at 16 really changed my life," he said.

Karrell studied international relations at Boston University. He returned to Africa during his sophomore year to work at a care point with younger children. "Something draws you back," he said. "[Afterwards] I didn't know what I wanted to do, but knew I wanted to keep with this goal of seeing real change."

Following graduation, Karrell joined Harvard's World Teach program. He was placed in a village called Divundu in Namibia, Africa. Divundu is also the first community to partner with the Unlock Foundation.

The Unlock Foundation "seeks to address critical education gaps in rural African schools," said Karrell, the executive director of the foundation. "The idea came about for a foundation with me being involved as the American figure head and them figuring out what's necessary to get schools moving and students to learn." Unlock registered as a New Jersey non-profit in 2011 and became a 501(c)3 in 2012.

The name of the foundation is a reference to education's potential. "The reason why the name is 'Unlock' is we know what works and that education unlocks the doors to all possibilities for children. It unlocks opportunity and dreams," Karrell said. "We always say education is the key to opening the doors to alleviating global poverty."

Unlock coordinates with community and school members to host projects that provide improvements needed, such as painting the walls or new furniture. "There's so much work to be done in some of these places that it can be really overwhelming. If you start with a small project, it can have enormous impact," Karrell said. "Our main goal is to see primary school children succeed in the classroom."

In January Unlock assembled 177 mosquito nets for students to reduce the contraction of malaria. "Just because of that, kids won't have to worry about getting a mosquito bite and going to the hospital," Karrell said.

Karrell notes that Africa has evolved significantly over the past five years. "Projects and initiatives in education are working. Things are changing, mostly due to what Africans are doing for themselves," he said. "That's where we come in, helping them help themselves."

Unlock's current project is to gather desks for schools. Unlock will supply new and repaired desks so that students don't need to share desk space. "It's the combined effort of people in Namibia and people in the United States who can really make this succeed," Karrell said.

People can support this program by donating to the foundation. Money donated to the Unlock Foundation goes directly to their causes. Photos of students receiving their new desks as well as other projects can be found on Unlock's website.

Unlock already has another school lined up in Namibia to partner with next. "We really hope to help more schools and the community slowly but surely. We made a promise to the school that we'll see projects through and we're keeping to that," Karrell said. "We're aware of the obstacles but we're ready to work school by school."

*For more info on the Unlock Foundation, visit [unlockfoundation.org](http://unlockfoundation.org) or contact [info@unlockfoundation.org](mailto:info@unlockfoundation.org). Unlock is also on Twitter: @UnlockFndn and Facebook: [facebook.com/UnlockFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/UnlockFoundation).*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT KARRELL

Scott Karrell and students from the lower primary at Divundu Combined School enjoy their lunch hour after a long day of classes



After announcing the partnership with Unlock Foundation and Divundu Combined School in Namibia, four third-grade students show their support for the organization.

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