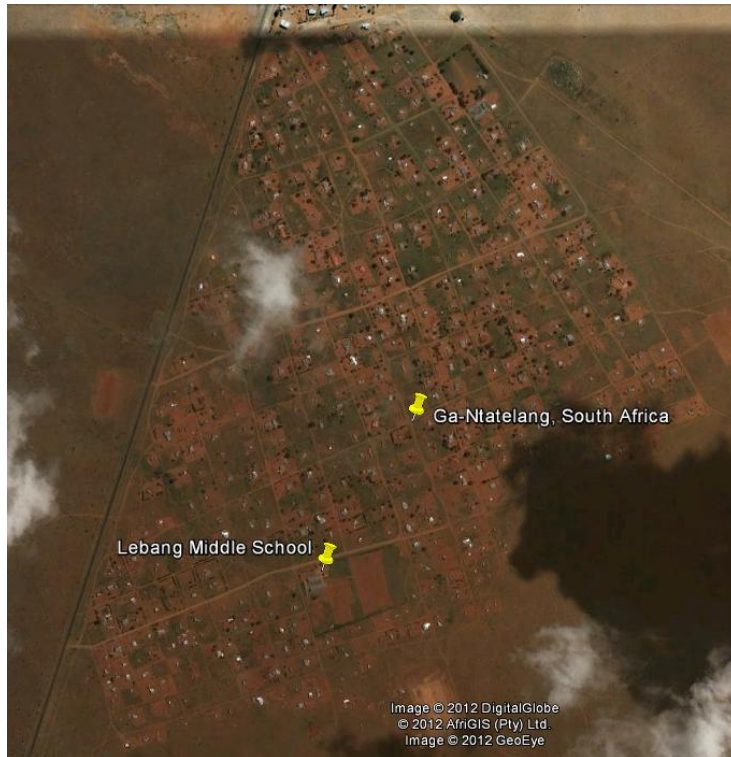


## Typing in the Kalahari: A Request For Funding

My name is Ian Burns. I am a Peace Corps Volunteer specializing in education and have been living in South Africa for the past 8 months. I'm living in a village named DiQueen (also called Ga-Ntatelang) in the Northern Cape, on the edge of the Kalahari Desert and near the town of Kuruman. I graduated from Oberlin High School and Oberlin College.



**The Village of DiQueen (Ga-Ntatelang)**

I am writing because I heard that your organization might be interested in my plans for creating a mobile typing lab to help teach computer literacy in the local villages. I thought I could tell you about the plan, and about the school and village where I live.

As a Peace Corps volunteer, my job is to work with and support the local secondary school, which serves 250 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders. DiQueen is a small village. Our school serves children who not only from DiQueen, but also from the other nearby villages of Seoding and Mathibistad. Our school is reasonably well equipped, although crowded. We have access to electricity, although not running water. I've worked at various projects during my time here, including teaching math and English. In addition, I am also planting and maintaining a school vegetable

garden, with the goal of supplementing our school lunch program. The principal has been very supportive. I think we do a good job teaching, given our limited resources.

One of my jobs has been trying to re-establish our school's computer lab. Five years ago, a South African company set up a small computer lab for the school. Unfortunately, no one at the school knew how to use the equipment and it soon fell into disrepair. Since September, I have been bringing the lab back into working order and teaching administrators, teachers, and learners basic computing skills. It was while helping the learners and that I realized a program I could begin that would



do a great deal of good. Here's where I'm asking for your help.

**Typing as a basic skill.** Looking back at my own schooling, the middle school class that probably helped me most has been typing. Being able to type fluently and smoothly is a skill I used daily. Not only has it helped me in school and made information on the internet much more accessible, at a practical level, it has allowed me to develop computing skills and helped me get a job. It is difficult to work with information or to work in an office – even in South Africa – without being comfortable with typing. For students who want to go on in their education, typing is essential.



Typing is a skill that is almost entirely nonexistent in my village - from learners to teachers. This is significant, because it means that even when people have access to computers - as they do through my school - using them is painful and laborious. Typing up a simple class assignment can take an hour. Preparing a resume or a report becomes nearly impossible because there is very limited time available to access a computer, and the tasks takes too long to accomplish.

Limited typing skills also make it difficult and expensive to access the internet. All internet access in our village is through a handful of smartphones. Most people who need to access the internet take a 'coombie' (SUV taxi/bus) to Kuruman, where they can use internet cafes. There, you pay approximately ten cents a minute to use a computer – as much as it costs for me to call home to the US. Slow typing skills effectively cut people off from economical access to the internet. This is particularly unfortunate here, because library access is very limited and the internet provides many resources that would be helpful to learners and parents. This includes accessing practical information on gardening and construction, news, educational information, as well as information on how to apply for college or get a job. South Africa's urban economy is booming. But without computer access, people in local villages are effectively excluded from the opportunity to further their education or get work.

**Typing, Computer Literacy, and Employment.** Unemployment and lack of continuing education are big problems here, and people truly want to improve their lives through jobs and education. Ironically, as South Africa develops and institutions place all their information online, opportunities are being pushed out of the reach of rural villagers.

I'm hoping to help village learners and adults by conducting classes in computer literacy after school hours. I will begin by focusing on basic skills such as typing. After learners get comfortable with typing, I will also teach Windows skills as well as common software like Word and Excel.





Right now, I'm facing two barriers. First, the school computer lab is still nonfunctional. I'm hoping to fix it, and am making slow, steady progress. This will take time, however. While we wait, the learners cannot begin to practice their typing and are falling further behind.

The second issue is logistics. I want to help people in the area, especially learners and their families. Unfortunately, learners and families can only take classes after school or on weekends, when the computer lab is inaccessible. Many of our learners travel by bus to other villages after school, and cannot afford to stay late and travel home by public transportation. I want to teach typing and computer literacy skills where the learners are and give classes when people can take them. This means having a computer lab that is portable and can be easily carried on a crowded bus or on a bicycle. A mobile lab would allow us to offer classes in flexible spaces, like churches, town halls, or front porches. It would allow us to travel to where many of our learners are: nearby villages. It would allow us to give classes when students can take them.

We think we have a solution: a 10 unit mobile typing lab that will fit in a backpack. This typing lab isn't based on fancy computers, expensive laptops, or delicate tablets. It's based on cellphones and relatively inexpensive Bluetooth keyboards. We are hoping to purchase used or donated Apple iPod Touch devices. (The iPod Touch does everything an iPhone does, but without the phone.) These devices, paired with full sized Logitech keyboards, provide an excellent platform for typing. Docs to Go, an app available for \$16, provides Microsoft Office functionality on the iTouch. Learners can be introduced to basic word processing, spreadsheet, and PowerPoint functionality before they need to learn more advanced functions in a computer lab. Skills like typing take practice. A full sized keyboard paired with a small, rugged screen will provide learners with the tools they need to do it.

The very small size of these cellphone-like devices makes it possible to carry a whole typing lab to the learners and set it up in any available space. The battery powered keyboards and usb-powered devices are also very practical in our village setting. Cell phones are tough and dust resistant. Small screens are more resistant to breakage and hard use than are laptops, tablets, or netbook computers.



In addition to being functional, this solution is also relatively inexpensive – much less expensive than equipping and housing a computer lab or buying expensive computer software. At retail prices, keyboards are available for less than \$50

each. Because iPod Touch devices have been given away with college student Apple computer purchases for several years, but have been supplanted by smartphones, we are hoping to obtain used iPod Touch devices through donations and through low-cost purchases of student devices. I am hoping to get funding to purchase keyboards and iPod Touch devices this Spring so that my family can deliver them to my village when they visit in July.

My goal is to offer classes throughout the area, perhaps 3 days a week, helping to make a tool that's essential to living in a modern society accessible and comprehensible to people who truly need the information access computers can provide. Computer literacy will also open opportunities and help people apply for jobs and get the ones they apply to.

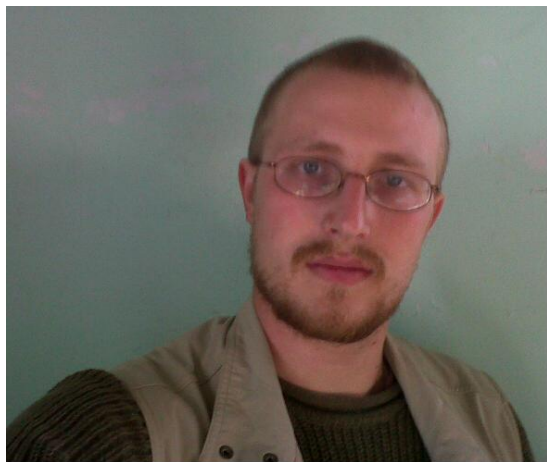
I'm very glad that you're interested in our project, and I sincerely hope you can help us make it a reality. Ideally, we are looking to get ten used iPod Touch devices that are modern enough to be compatible with Logitech Bluetooth keyboards. Any help you could give us, whether money towards purchases or donations of the iPods themselves, would be greatly appreciated. It will really make a difference in many people's lives.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Ian Burns, PCV  
irdburns@gmail.com

Local Contact:  
Nancy Darling  
nancy.darling@oberlin.edu  
94 South Cedar St.  
Oberlin OH 44074  
(440) 935-5137



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