GLOPALS.ORG

Project Summary

OMC-J plans to build an internet pen-pal platform, GloPals, which will provide an initial 10 classrooms with an innovative way of connecting kids in rural regions of the country of Georgia and those in the US state of Georgia. Volunteer translators and moderators will overcome the language barrier. With plans of expending globally, students will be able to bridge the social and cultural gap between developing and developed countries at a very young age. GloPals open-source platform will be built by OMC-J's IT Squad in Tbilisi, Georgia, and schools will be identified and trained by our local and American partners.

Project Need and Beneficiaries

Georgia is one of many isolated corners of the world, cut off by geography, politics, and economics. The 2008 war between Georgia and Russia drew attention to the incredible ethnic and linguistic variation which is prevalent in the region, underscoring the human divisions among these lines and the need for increased opportunities for contact in a wider scope. For a kid growing up in a place like this, the world is small, often going little beyond the village or the region. Where once Georgian kids learned Russian, now many learn nothing but their own language, further inhibiting their ability to interact with the outside world. GloPals will change that, creating the opportunity for kids to connect and talk without lingual barriers, broadening horizons and encouraging learning. Having a friend to share everyday stories with via a secure and moderated platform eliminates the language and geographic barriers that are deciding factors for limited communication between the developed and developing worlds.

By helping GloPal, you will be helping 400 Georgian kids (ages 7-12), from the most remote villages and rural areas of the country, make friends, learn about and share different cultural experiences, and practice a foreign language right from their own classroom. The plaform is planned to go global in approximately a year within its launch.

Following the initial release of GloPals, growth is nearly free - free for any child or class to join and use and a pittance to maintain and add new languages.

What?

GloPal is built to connect students from around the world. What separates GloPal from typical penpal systems is that 1) it's entirely digital, taking advantage of the continually growing internet accessibility around the world and 2) students do not need to share a common language, because messages will be translated and moderated by trusted volunteers each donating a small amount of time each month.

Who?

The target beneficiaries of this program are students worldwide between the ages of 7 and 12. Teachers of a class will be able to sign up their entire class to participate in the program. Students will then, either as a class or individually, choose a region of the world that they are interested in learning more about, and they will be paired with classrooms or individual students from that region to take part in the penpal program.

Students will send letters to each other directly through the system or via email. Between the students will be micro-volunteering translators, who will be asked to translate a certain quota of messages each month to remain part of the GloPal community. Teachers will also have the opportunity to moderate messages to ensure that rules are being followed.

Where?

Initially Georgia and the USA, then gradually opened up to other countries and other languages.

When?

The system will be built prior to January 2010 and piloted in the Spring semester with pre-determined classrooms. It will also be open to further participation by other classrooms.

Why?

To build connections between young people around the world and provide a medium for students to learn about different cultures and perspectives, while circumventing the largest complication, that most global students of this age do not share a common language.

Funding

Initial pilot funding will be pursued through Global Giving, to build the base system and engage a certain number of classrooms and students in the Republic of Georgia and the state of Georgia in the United States. Donations can also be made on the website to support the program, where parents of participating students or independent donors will be able to make donations.

System

GloPal will be a website where teachers can sign up their classrooms to participate in the program. Once signed up, students will be paired with a penpal and can begin communicating. Messages will be delivered both in the original language and in the translated version. Teachers will be able to monitor their students work and messaging. In order to make the letter-writing experience as "real world" as possible, students will be able to send messages both directly through the website, or through email accounts if they so desire.

Marketing

Videos will be created in relevant languages explaining how it works and how easy it is. A student speaking each language will star in the video for his/her lingual group, so that it will be kids explaining to kids.

Additional materials for how to use the system and how to make this part of a class will be made available online and where required, on paper.

Pilot schools will be selected and trained on the system prior to use.

Timeline

October-December 2010	System is built by OMC-J IT Squad
	Participating Classrooms are chosen in Georgia and Georgia
January 2011	Teachers are trained in how to use the system
	Volunteer Translators are selected and trained
February-June 2011	Program is piloted in selected classrooms
	System is opened up slowly to other interested participants
	System is translated into several more languages
	Further participating schools are selected in Armenia and Azerbaijan
August 2011	System is opened worldwide
	Site translations are contributed by worldwide participants