

BOOK LOVER'S STORE IS HER GIFT TO THE WORLD

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LONGWOOD - In May, while other people worried about losing their jobs, Besa Kosova decided to quit hers and use her savings to start a charitable bookstore to help poor children around the world learn to read.

She knew it sounded crazy. At 32, Kosova was a single mother of two juggling a full-time job as an apartment leasing agent with class work toward a second bachelor's degree, in creative writing, at the [University of Central Florida](#).

But what is a life without dreams?

By last fall, unfulfilled in her day job and unable to sell her own novel, Kosova realized that she could still empower others with books — even if they weren't her own. She began collecting donated books, through postings on the Web site [Craigslist](#) and by word of mouth, and then selling them on [Amazon.com](#) with the goal of using the proceeds to build schools in impoverished countries.

"I had a revelation: Anybody can give a book. You don't have to be rich; you don't have to be high-status or donate money. Anyone can participate in literacy," said Kosova, who moved to the U.S. from Kosovo when she was 17. "When you give a child a book, they can change the future. They can change the universe."

When the Longwood store opened June 18, Kosova had already sold enough books online to raise \$3,500 — half the cost of building a school for 300 rural children in [India](#), which has a third of the world's illiterate population. Child Literacy Inc., a New York nonprofit, matched her contribution and allowed her to operate under its nonprofit status while she applies for her own.

"In the rural parts of India, things are very cheap, and the state of infrastructure for education is really bad," said Anupam Satyasheel, a New York banker and a founder of Child Literacy. "You could have a population of 50,000 or 100,000 children who would like to go to school but don't have a school in the neighborhood. We already had the land, so it was very feasible to build a school that could educate 300 children" with \$7,000.

For her next project, Kosova is raising about \$10,000 to build a school with a library and housing for girls in another rural part of India. In addition to books, she is collecting backpacks and school supplies for low-income families close to home.

The My One School store, on South [Ronald Reagan](#) Boulevard near State Road 434,

offers new and used books, some movies and small gift items. Prices range from a couple of hundred dollars for new textbooks to whatever a customer wants to pay for review copies from publishers.

Kosova spent \$20,000 of her own money to renovate the small concrete building into a homey store with a dining table for meetings, a children's alcove, free wireless Internet access, and complimentary coffee and tea. She decorated the store with reading-related artwork that she collected through the years at yard sales and discount stores, such as a painting in the bathroom of Santa Claus reading a newspaper. The walls of the children's section carry her own handprints in bright colors and a collage of pages from damaged children's books.

Kosova wants to use the space for children's reading hours, book clubs and local-author nights, as a way to involve the community in her cause.

The Goodwill business model — selling donated items to fund a charity — has proved successful, Satyasheel said. Kosova is keeping her overhead costs low by not collecting a salary and relying on friends, such as fellow book lover Terri Avellone, to staff the store as volunteers. Satyasheel envisions Kosova managing several stores and establishing a warehouse to store more books.

Kosova estimates her savings will last two years. In the meantime, she hopes to sell her novel.

"I have to give my dream a chance," Kosova said. "The economy is bad, but what if I'm not here tomorrow? Maybe this is my purpose."

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<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/orl-loclongwood-bookstore-charity-0070409jul04,0,831378.story>