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## Shoreham teen, teacher help kids in Kenya

Sunday July 10, 2011 12:48 PM By Erin Geismar



Meghan Spillane, who turns 18 this month, wonders how many of her peers at Shoreham-Wading River High School returned textbooks at the end of each year without ever having opened them.

Then she thinks about Meru, a small eastern village in Kenya where she spent winter break this February helping deliver used textbooks to schools that had never owned any.

"Grateful, is the word I'd use," said the 2011 Shoreham-Wading River graduate. "The head of the schools were so happy to have us. I felt really spoiled and sheltered. I'd never seen anything like it before."

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Spillane, of Shoreham, went to Kenya three times throughout her high school career as an active member of the Global Awareness Club, an extracurricular club advised by high school social studies teacher Kevin Mann.

Mann is the vice president of the [Hope Children's Fund](#), a nonprofit based out of Port Jefferson that works directly with the village of Meru. HCF was founded in 2002 by Larry Hohler, of Port Jefferson.

In 2005, HCF built an orphanage in Meru and opened its doors to 18 homeless children. Today, the orphanage supports 75 children and HCF is also building a technical training school, which provides an opportunity for students who can't afford to go to secondary school, the cost-equivalent of American colleges, Mann said.

The Global Awareness Club at Shoreham-Wading River High School helps support HCF through a series of fundraisers, including Crafts for Kenya, a recurring craft sale that sells Kenyan-made goods at fair prices in the United States and returns the profits to Kenya; the annual bi-continental 5K run, which takes place at the same time every April at Shoreham-Wading River High School and at the HCF orphanage in Meru; wine-tasting benefits at the Port Jefferson Village Center and Martha Clara Vineyards.

In 2008, Mann said the club purchased a large trailer, which is parked in the high school parking lot, and began collecting books along with medical and school supplies to donate to the village. By the following year, they had collected about 40,000 pounds of supplies, which cost the club \$14,000 to ship to Kenya.

"A small fortune," Mann said.

But the supplies were much needed in Meru so the Global club set out to do it again. The trailer is about ¾ full of supplies, Mann said, and the club has raised another \$8,000 to ship them. Mann said other school districts around Long Island, including Farmingdale, have also donated money to ship the container and the club won \$1,000 as an honorable mention in this year's MSG Varsity Charity Champions competition.

Mann said though school is out for the summer, the members of the club are still seeking donations through the HCF and hoping to ship the container in September. Donors can obtain information at <http://hopechildrensfund.org/help.html>

Spillane, who spent \$2,500 of her own money each time she went to Kenya, said it was all worth it to see firsthand how the items they'd donated would help the children.

"It was not a classic American high school experience," she said. "But I wouldn't change it for the world."

Photo: Meghan Spillane, of Shoreham, at Meru, a Kenyan village that she has helped send school supplies to.

**Tags:** [Global Awareness Club at Shoreham-Wading River High School](#), [Hope Children's Fund](#)

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