

## **Soccer Players in Africa Get a Buzz**

Hi. Thanks for joining us again on "As It Is." I'm your host, Kelly Jean Kelly. Today Christopher Cruise and I are talking about young entrepreneurs ... and one of the most popular sports in the world.

"Soccer is the international language of the world. People play soccer everywhere and they get a lot of joy out of it. And it brings communities together."

That was Dave Stahl. He played soccer in college, at Chico State University in Northern California.

One of Dave's teammates was Michael Mitchell. Michael joined the Peace Corps after graduation and worked for two years in Niger, in West Africa. When Michael returned, he and Dave developed an idea. It was called "Project Play Africa." They believed that soccer could improve the lives of African children.

Dave and Michael spent 15 years organizing Project Play Africa. They raised thirty thousand dollars in donations. Then they ordered two thousand soccer balls from China.

Dave and Michael flew to Niger, rented a car, and drove into the countryside. They gave soccer balls and air pumps to the people they met.

"We're

driving down the road and going by this little village and we see about a dozen kids trying to play soccer and they were literally kicking around a sock filled with sand."

Dave and Michael say the children were very happy to get the soccer balls. But the two friends realized that they needed to focus their efforts. So in 2011, Dave and Michael started a soccer league in Libore, outside Niger's capital city of Niamey. They asked local clubs and schools to help.

"It engaged boys and girls, which is very unusual for a Muslim country, you know that the parents were letting their girls participate in an activity because usually the girls are doing housework, fetching water and wood and so on."

Dave says the tribal and political leaders of Libore supported the league. And, the village and school were proud of their teams.

Dave says one of the best parts of the trip was watching the boys' and girls' championship soccer games.

"The field was totally lined with spectators and they had a lean-to tent at the center of the field where the mayor and the chief and the dignitaries were sitting."

Dave says Project Play Africa's next challenge is to find a soccer ball that is not too expensive and easy to transport. And, one that can survive for more than a few weeks on Niger's rocky playing fields.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Two young women in New York City are also trying to bring soccer balls to Africa. But their soccer ball has a generator inside it. They call their invention the Soccket.

The Soccket collects energy when you play with it. Then, you can use the Soccket for electricity. For example, you could plug a light or a cell phone into the Soccket. The Soccket can store up to 24 hours of power.

Jessica Matthews and Julia Silverman developed the Soccket when they were college students at Harvard. Jessica's family is from Nigeria. Julia is from Chicago, but she had spent time in Africa. They both knew that the lack of energy in Africa was a problem. So, they tried to use soccer to improve energy poverty.

In 2011, Jessica and Julia started an organization to distribute the Soccket. The organization is called Uncharted Play, and it is based in New York City. Uncharted Play does not sell the Soccket directly. Instead, it partners with companies and NGOs to give the Soccket to communities that need it.

"We don't make any profit right now. Just kidding, we do."

Alison Dalton Smith is the communications director at Uncharted Play. She explains that Uncharted Play is not exactly a business...and not exactly an NGO. She calls it a "social enterprise." In other words, the organization is a business designed to solve a social problem.

Alison says starting or working for a social enterprise is increasingly common among people born in the 1980s or later.

“We want to dedicate our lives and our education to making the world a better place for everyone, not just for ourselves.”

In fact, Alison is so dedicated to making sure people in Africa get the Soccket that she worked for free. Now, she is one of seven paid staff at Uncharted Play. At 30, she is the oldest person who works there. None of the employees receives health insurance or retirement savings. But Alison says money is not as important to her right now as connecting to others.

“I know that my peers in this age group, in the millennials, we ... I notice that we have a very different engagement with the global community, and we grew up with the Internet. I think we feel much closer to each other, and we identify more as global citizens than an American, or a New Yorker, or a female, or whatever. There’s a real bond that I find amongst my peers here in the US and also from my experiences traveling and living outside of the US, where we’re driven by more than just making it. There’s something more.”

But, she adds that she is lucky. She can work in a job she loves because she already has some money saved. And, she says helping distribute the Soccket is one way she can make the world better for everyone, not just for herself.

That’s our show for today. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.