

## Thinking Outside the Box by Elyse Wanshel

Here is an idea that really delivers.

ZubaBox is a shipping container converted into a solar-powered internet café or classroom for people in need living in remote areas — including refugee camps.

### Inside the Lab

The interior of the box can accommodate up to 11 individuals at a time and gives people in traditionally marginalized communities a sense of inclusion while widening their opportunities.

“The ZubaBox is used to break a cycle of exclusion and gives [people] a space that they deserve to improve their learning experience and achieve their goals,” Rajeh Shaikh, marketing and PC donations manager at Computer Aid International — the nonprofit organization that created and builds the boxes — told The Huffington Post. “We also enable educators to provide valuable 21st century digital skills and ignite learning in ways that are most relevant to their [students’] aspirations and succeeding in their local economy.”

A teacher gives a lesson inside the lab.

Or if you wanted to break down its impact in an everyday way, David Barker, former chief executive of Computer Aid described it as such to BusinessGreen:

“This allows the doctor to contact specialists in the city hospital, school children to access educational material and local people to expand their businesses.”

Man using computer inside the Lab.

The name “Zubabox” refers to the way the tech hub is powered. According to Computer Aid, the word “zuba” in Nyanja — a language commonly spoken in Malawi and Zambia, and by some in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa — means “sun.” The refurbished PCs located inside of a Zubabox are powered by solar panels located on the shipping container’s roof. Solar power is not only environmentally friendly, but also acts as a natural solution to many of these communities’ lack of electricity.

Solar panels on top of the Lab.

Since 2010, 11 Zubaboxes have been placed in neighborhoods throughout Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. On May 26, Computer Aid built its 12th Zubabox — dubbed the “Dell Solar Learning Lab,” since it was sponsored by Dell — in Cazuca, a suburb of Bogota, Colombia, where many displaced people settle according to the U.N. Refugee Agency.

Cazuca.

Since the Lab arrived in the South American neighborhood, the little box has had a huge impact on the community.

Teens in Cazuca use lap tops on the Lab’s outdoor patio.

“Since the Lab arrived, the younger generation has naturally been curious and excited. But the emotion that this [Lab] has stirred in the elders has been really moving,” William Jimenez, a native to Cazucá and regional coordinator at Tiempo de Juego, a nonprofit that works to provide the youth of Colombia with more constructive uses for their free time, told The Huffington Post in a statement.

Teens in Cazuca approve of the Lab.

“The fact that someone has finally considered Cazucá a priority is not only an important technology and training [advancement], but also because of the optimism it inspires in the entire community.”

Volunteers plant flowers outside of Cazuca’s Lab.

One of Computer Aid’s most recent goals is to place another Zubabox in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya — one of the largest refugee camps in the world with a population of 150,000 people fleeing from 20 different African nations.

The group is working with a organization run by refugees within the camp called SAVIC, to deliver IT training and internet connectivity for up to 1,800 young displaced people there.

The Lab at night.

All images courtesy SIXZEROMEDIA/COMPUTER AID