

# Annual Report, 2025

## Habele Outer Island Education Fund



## ABOUT HABELE

The Habele Outer Island Education Fund is a U.S.-based, IRS-recognized nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding educational access and opportunity across Micronesia. Founded in 2006 by three former Peace Corps Volunteers who lived and taught in the islands, Habele is guided by a simple belief: every island child, no matter how remote, deserves a fair chance to reach his or her full potential.

In a rapidly changing world that stretches far beyond the shores of Micronesia's islands and atolls, students there remain true underdogs. Habele exists to help ensure geography does not determine destiny.

## MICRONESIA

Micronesia refers to the thousands of small islands scattered across the western Pacific Ocean, lying west of Polynesia and north of Melanesia. The term also encompasses the independent nations of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. The Caroline Islands—home to Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae States—form the geographic heart of the FSM, along with dozens of more remote Outer or “Neighboring” Islands.

These culturally and linguistically diverse islands occupy a strategically vital crossroads of the Pacific. Yet their dramatic role in global history often obscures enduring challenges of isolation, dispersion, and limited resources.

Once part of a United Nations-sanctioned U.S. Trust Territory, these Freely Associated States today maintain Compacts of Free Association with the United States. While these agreements open pathways—such as eligibility for U.S. federal education assistance—many Micronesian students remain underprepared to take advantage of them. Habele's work is rooted in addressing that gap.



## THE STUDENTS

Too often, ambitious Micronesian students are unable to fully access higher education opportunities because they lack the academic preparation or early educational support required to succeed. Habele was created to help students reach both their academic and personal potential.

Habele's programs prepare children to thrive both within their communities and beyond the reef. Books nurture early literacy and a love of learning. Scholarships expand access to high-quality schooling for students from the lowest-income and most remote households. Traditional skills mentorships strengthen cultural grounding and belonging. STEM initiatives develop creative, confident problem-solvers.

## HABELE'S APPROACH

Habele pursues only projects that are explicitly requested by local partners or that clearly respond to needs articulated by the communities themselves. Rather than importing models that may have worked elsewhere, Habele prioritizes listening, relationships, and long-term local ownership.

Parents tell Habele they want their children prepared for college opportunities in the United States, yet many families cannot afford tuition at the independent schools with the strongest outcomes. Community leaders express concern about cultural erosion among youth. Habele responds with targeted, complementary programs—tuition scholarships, book distribution, STEM, and traditional skills mentorships—delivered in ways that reinforce local initiative and accountability.

Success is measured not by money spent, but by outcomes achieved and relationships strengthened.



## TUITION SCHOLARSHIPS

Habele's K-12 Tuition Scholarship program provides access to Micronesia's highest-performing independent schools—stitutions that consistently demonstrate graduation rates, test scores, and college placement outcomes far exceeding those of public schools.

In 2025, Habele awarded 151 tuition scholarships, prioritizing students from remote outer islands, rural villages, and low-income households, with particular attention to supporting girls. Grants are structured to maintain family investment in student achievement while easing financial barriers, typically covering 50–75% of tuition and fees. Students must maintain strong academic performance and reapply annually.

In 2025, Habele also announced new and continuing Memorial Scholarships, including the Ichiro Robert Memorial Scholarship, honoring educators and community leaders whose lives reflected deep commitment to Micronesian education and the U.S.–Micronesian relationship.

Since its founding, Habele has supported more than 300 students through tuition assistance, beginning with a single scholar in 2006.

## LIBRARIES & LITERACY

Habele's literacy initiatives spark a lifelong love of reading by placing high-quality, relevant books into the hands of Micronesian children and educators.

### Books for Schools and Libraries

Working with local teachers, Habele equips schools and community libraries with appropriate materials spanning early childhood centers through high schools. In 2025, Habele shipped 23 boxes of books and school supplies directly to schools across Micronesia. On remote islands, school libraries often serve entire communities.



## Young Island Readers

Through the Young Island Readers program, children receive one new, age-appropriate book each month until their fifth birthday. In 2025 alone, 9,597 books were delivered directly to young children throughout the islands.

During the year, the program reached a significant public milestone when the 15,000th book was mailed to a child on Yap, reflecting both the scale and durability of the initiative. Local reporting also highlighted that hundreds of families across Yap State are now enrolled, with many children receiving books addressed directly to them for the first time.

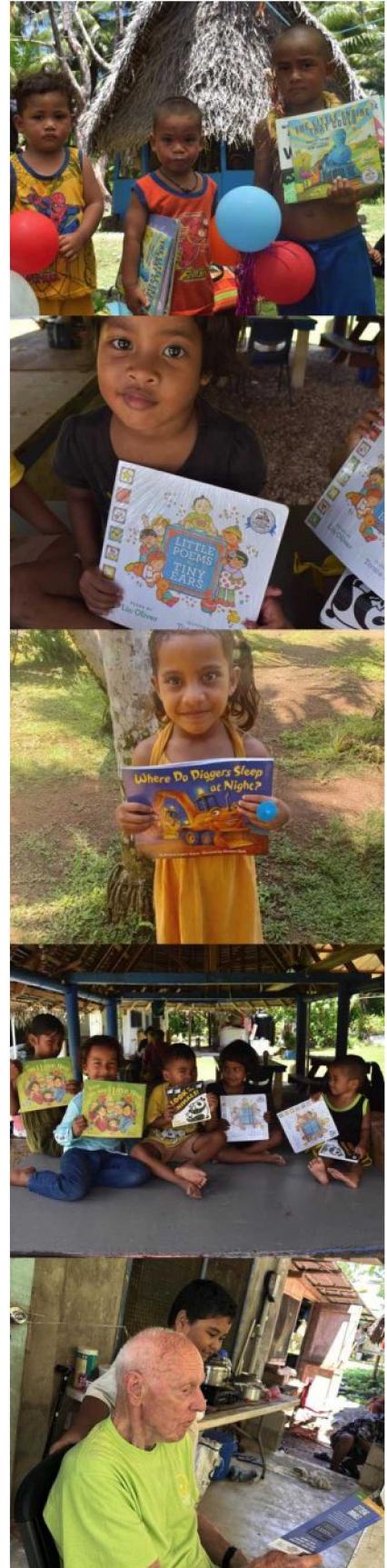
Young Island Readers is delivered in partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and is grounded in research showing that access to books in the home before kindergarten is the strongest predictor of later reading success.

## MICRONESIAN SEMINAR & HABELE INSTITUTE

Micronesian Seminar (MicSem), founded in 1972, has played a singular role in documenting and interpreting Micronesia's social, cultural, and political history. Its internationally recognized library—now housed at Yap Catholic High School—contains tens of thousands of books, photographs, audio recordings, and videos.

In 2025, Habele continued targeted support for MicSem through direct pass-through funding, helping advance preservation, staffing, digitization, and public access efforts. These investments allow MicSem to focus on curating and sharing Micronesia's living history rather than diverting limited resources to fundraising.

In 2025, MicSem's library was formally reopened to the public on Yap, marked by a community celebration that underscored the collection's role as a living, accessible resource for Micronesians, educators, and researchers.



Complementing this work, HabeleInstitute.org provides free online access to the History of Micronesia source volumes and original reference materials. The site also hosts a growing Publications Guide—an annotated bibliography of more than 2,400 books, articles, reports, and primary sources—and Backgrounders & Analysis, comprising more than 2,000 Institute-authored reference pages and analytical articles on places, people, organizations, events, and policy-relevant issues across Micronesia.

Together, these resources form a public, living reference library that bridges deep historical scholarship with practical, accessible context.

### TRADITIONAL SKILLS MENTORSHIPS

Habele supports mentorship-based transmission of traditional skills that anchor cultural identity and community cohesion.

In 2025, 23 boxes of materials were provided to support traditional carvers, weavers, and navigators. These resources—including specialized tools and supplies—were delivered directly to master craftsmen and locally organized groups such as the Yap Traditional Navigation Society (TNS).

Press coverage during the year highlighted the active restoration and preservation of historically significant Yapese canoes, including documentation, repair, and preparation for renewed teaching and voyaging—work supported in part through Habele’s tool donations, direct assistance, and long-term commitment.

To ensure this work endures beyond any single year, Habele has established a dedicated fund within its endowment for the ongoing support of TNS and Outer Island carvers, providing predictable, long-term backing for traditional navigation, canoe carving, and related skills while freeing local experts to focus on mentoring rather than fundraising.



## STEM

Launched in 2012, Habele's STEM initiatives have introduced hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning to students in remote Micronesian schools. After more than a decade of growth across all four FSM states, Habele's original high school robotics programs transitioned to full local ownership.

In 2025, Habele continued to provide limited, on-demand support—primarily equipment and materials—while students, teachers, and administrators led robotics programs independently. During the year, Habele also supported the robotics team from Pohnpei Island Central High Schools (PICS) as they represented Micronesia at the FIRST Global International Robotics Competition in Panama, providing in-kind equipment donations as well as funding for travel.

Expanding beyond robotics, 2025 also marked the launch of a new applied STEM initiative: the design and construction of a remote weather monitoring station for the atoll of Woleai (Yap State). Developed in partnership with Neighboring Island Central High School on Falalop Island, the project integrates hands-on learning with real-world environmental monitoring while generating locally relevant climate and weather data.

## FINANCES

In 2025, Habele delivered tangible educational impact across Micronesia at scale: 151 tuition scholarships were awarded to students attending independent schools; 9,597 books were delivered directly to young children through the Young Island Readers program; 23 boxes of books and school supplies were shipped to schools; and 23 boxes of materials supporting traditional skills were provided to local carvers, weavers, and navigators. These efforts reflect Habele's focus on placing resources directly in the hands of students, educators, and community leaders, while strengthening both academic opportunity and cultural continuity.



Behind this work, Habele invested approximately \$414,000 during the 2025 calendar year, with nearly four-fifths of all spending concentrated in its three largest initiatives—K-12 tuition scholarships, libraries, and Young Island Readers—ensuring that the overwhelming majority of resources flowed directly to end-user programs. Administrative and compliance costs totaled just about 5% of total spending, well below sector norms. All \$48,800 in current-year donations were fully directed to program delivery, while the organization's endowment intentionally covered core personnel, infrastructure, and administrative costs; excluding tuition scholarships, more than \$120,000 was provided as direct pass-through support to schools and local organizations, including Micronesian Seminar and traditional navigation groups, freeing them to focus on education and cultural preservation rather than fundraising. Supported by 48 individual, family, and corporate donors and managed by a one-FTE team, Habele ended 2025 financially stable, with sufficient reserves and long-term resources in place to sustain and grow its work.

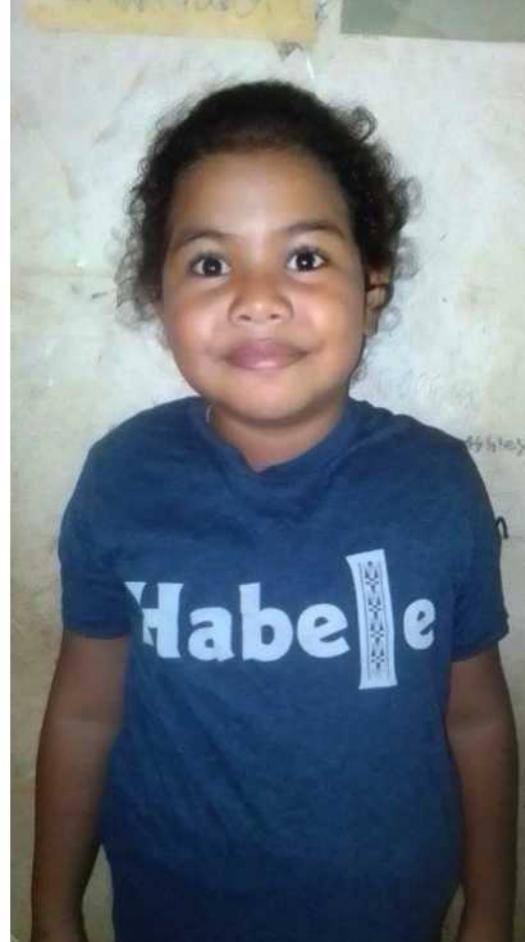
## FINAL THOUGHTS

Nearly two decades have passed since three Peace Corps Volunteers pooled their modest stipends to support Habele's first scholar. In 2025, that original vision translated into thousands of books delivered, more than a hundred students supported in school, restored canoes teaching new generations, and living archives reopened to the public.

What has not changed is the spirit of partnership at the heart of the work. Habele exists because of people who believe that careful listening, patience, and trust can change lives across Micronesia. Thank you for being part of that story.

Neil Mellen  
Founder, and Executive Director  
Habele Outer Island Education Fund  
701 Gervais Street, Suite 150-244, Columbia, SC 29201  
[contact@habele.org](mailto:contact@habele.org)





Habele Fund  
701 Gervais Street  
Suite 150-244  
Columbia, SC 29201

[www.habele.org](http://www.habele.org)



Thank you habele  
Scholarship for your  
help, if it weren't  
for this scholarship  
I wouldn't be  
in school.

Thank you!!  
Clara