Maggie Grout of Thinking Huts on Increasing Access to Education

Justin Sablich

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Education Healthy society



The founder of the Thinking Huts non-profit on how sustainable and humanitarian-driven technology can help solve our global education crisis.

How can we expand access to education? A 3D printer could help.

That's the idea behind Thinking Huts, a non-profit that is currently in the planning stages for its first 3D-printed school. The future educational hub will be located on the university campus of Madagascar's Ecole de management et d'Innovation Technologique, and will serve both primary and secondary school students.

Printed in partnership with Studio Martazavi, the schools are built with concrete from an architectural scale printer. Shaped to fit together as development occurs, the goal is to create schools with individual spaces for a library, an art studio, a music room and physical education. Each structure contains vertical gardens on the outside walls and solar panels on the roof.

Thinking Huts is the brainchild of Maggie Grout, a student at the University of Colorado Boulder. "I hope that by finding a way to increase access to education, it will create more opportunities for students around the world to pursue their dreams," Grout told Springwise. Keep reading for her story and how she thinks sustainable and humanitarian-driven technology can help solve our global education crisis.

— Justin Sablich

1. Where did the original idea for Thinking Huts come from?

I first had the idea to build 3D-printed schools almost six years ago. I was a sophomore in high school at the time and remember discussing with my dad where we thought the future of technology was heading. That day sparked my interest in how we can apply this burgeoning technology to solve a global problem — the need for schools.

2. What was your background prior to this, and how did that shape your work with Thinking Huts?

It's been a long journey envisioning our pilot project. I am currently a university student at CU Boulder — set to

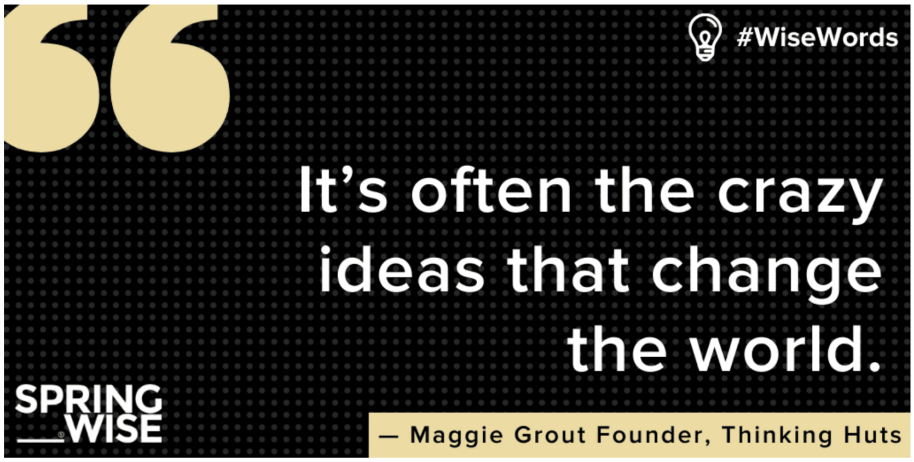
graduate this Spring. My origin story largely shapes my work. Having been adopted from China, I know that my life could have followed a very different timeline. I am grateful for the opportunities I've obtained through education and wish that others had the same opportunities. I consider Thinking Huts to be my core life's purpose. I hope that by finding a way to increase access to education, it will create more opportunities for students around the world to pursue their dreams.

3. What change does Thinking Huts want to facilitate?

Thinking Huts seeks to bring about humanitarian-driven technology solutions that catalyze innovation. We believe that education is paramount in tackling the many challenges that the world faces. It begins with access to opportunity. We seek to turn the traditional humanitarian aid model on its head. Working alongside communities, we aim to be a solution that empowers — teaching rather than giving.

4. Through your work so far, are you seeing a genuine paradigm shift in how sustainable technology is being used to help solve education infrastructure challenges?

I am seeing a shift in open-mindedness where more interest seems to be raised in supporting sustainable technology applications. I think that the pandemic has shed light on the severity of the global education crisis. I hope this will ignite actionable solutions that think of people, profit, and planet.



5. What advice would you give to community leaders and companies who are trying to address gaps in education accessibility?

Embrace innovation. By thinking of novel ways to address these gaps in education accessibility, we can accelerate change. It's often the crazy ideas that change the world. We must start somewhere in order to solve the big problems.

6. What keeps you motivated during times of frustration?

I often think about the potential impact to be made. Let's be real, we are all human and frustration is a frequent, relatable feeling. Looking forward helps me put things into perspective and avoid dwelling on what may be straying from the initial timeline.

7. What has been your proudest moment thus far?

When I first saw the renders for our 3D-printed schools I felt overwhelmingly proud. In that moment, I thought to myself: "The vision is turning into a reality." Though, I would say reading a particularly moving message from a person in Madagascar has been my proudest moment. They told me: "Ce que vous faites pour Madagascar est immense. Merci." I will remember those words for life.

8. What is one book you've recently read that has inspired you and that you might recommend?

I recently read Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell. It opened my eyes to the various factors and phenomena that shape a person into who they are today, as well as enable them to be mavericks of their generation.

9. Who or what inspires you personally?

Feedback

I am inspired by people who stand up for what they believe in. Of course, Malala Yousafzai is a huge inspiration for me, I'd love to meet her one day. Emma Watson's HeForShe United Nations speech from 2014 always inspires me. The quote that resonated the most with me was: "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

10. Do you have any other thoughts or wise words for aspiring purpose-driven entrepreneurs or activists?

I would say: Believe in yourself and keep going. The journey may be long, but it is worth it. The future is built by the ones who envision what it could be. We have a massive opportunity to come together and use our talents for something greater than ourselves. Imagine the impact we could create together if we built a brighter world with humanitarian-driven solutions at the centre!

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