

## ***About Kismet Rock Foundation***



*"The view from the mountains was clear and beautiful. When I was on top of the mountain I was very nervous. I cried. You gave me the opportunity to experience a sport that I probably would never have tried in my lifetime...I will never forget it." -Kendra*

### **Mission statement and goals:**

Kismet Rock Foundation (Kismet) enhances the physical, intellectual and emotional development of well-functioning but economically disadvantaged children by providing access to the immense value of a comprehensive and multi-dimensional education in technical rock climbing. Kismet students are in danger of deteriorating as a result of economic and cultural circumstance, and limited opportunity. Kismet scholarships are offered to children from the ages of 12 through 16, as they enter their critical teen years. By developing students' potential, Kismet prepares students to positively contribute to their communities and their culture throughout their lives.

*"This week I learned to rock climb, to trust my partner and to be confident in myself." -Drew*

### **Brief history:**

Kismet Rock Foundation emerged out of a desire of the director, Mike Jewell, to offer the same climbing instruction to economically disadvantaged children as he had given to many children with greater resources throughout his guiding career. He thus arranged for four children from southern New Jersey to travel to New Hampshire during the summer of 1999 for one week of technical climbing instruction. The project received media attention and as a result, Mike was approached by community members to start a nonprofit organization. Because there is not necessarily a direct relationship between quantity and quality, program growth has been carefully measured. Kismet's seven, one-week programs of instruction now offer the immense value of a climbing education to approximately 60 children each summer. Kismet continues to expand on a solid foundation built with unrelenting dedication, patience, and humility.

*"We woke up every morning and saw the beautiful mountains. I don't get to see those in Brooklyn. Learning about the equipment was fun also. We used ropes, a helmet, climbing shoes that had rubber on the bottom and a friend which sticks into the rocks. When you rock climb, everyone looks out for everyone else. That made me feel safe." -Alexandria*

## **Current programs:**

Kismet's week-long educational rock climbing programs take place in our White Mountains, New Hampshire classroom. Rock climbing is the basis of Kismet's educational program because it demands all aspects of a participant's potential.

Course content reflects a natural development from a complete dependence on teachers to the possibility of acquiring independence in the mountains. Appropriate students are thus invited back for up to four years to complete Kismet's extensive curriculum.

All instruction is "hands-on" and is accomplished with a very high teacher/student ratio (approx. 4/7).

First-year students learn all of the most basic skills such as knot-tying, belaying, rappelling and climbing technique. They become familiar with considerations relating to site safety, communication, respect for the environment, and respect for other climbers. In the ensuing years, they learn to approach the cliff, set up top-ropes, rappel to the ground, and to manage all aspects of climbing routes that they have set up. The ultimate goal is to develop a thorough and specific understanding of top-roping, and to become comfortable on multi-pitch climbs, including anchor transitions and multi-pitch descents.

Kismet has served one hundred students an average of three years each and graduated thirty students from the refined course curriculum. The program boasts an 80%+ return rate of students, confirming the success of a highly developed student selection process.

*"Thank you all for having me. Thank you for keeping me safe and sound. Thanks for teaching me to rock climb and to be respectful to others." -Brian*

## **Our students:**

Kismet accepts students from a broad range of geographic, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Thus, its students have an extraordinary opportunity to develop friendships with, and learn from, children whose experience is very different from their own.

Kismet's twelve- to seventeen-year-old students are basically functioning well but have little opportunity to develop their potential. They are in danger of faltering merely because of financial circumstance. Some students' families are first generation immigrants with parents who do not speak English. Others come from single-parent households or from families with members challenged by the broad range of emotional and/or behavioral problems typically associated with stress created by poverty.

Kismet currently serves students from Bartlett, Gorham and Manchester, NH, Portland, ME and Boston, MA. The specific schools with which Kismet works are located in the most financially depressed neighborhoods of each locale, so have limited resources to provide extracurricular and summer programming. Therefore, unless a student is in need of therapy or rehabilitation, they may never be targeted for enrichment through extraordinary educational or recreational activities outside of school.

Kismet scholarships are offered through a careful process of both self-selection by students and individual interviews.

*“[Going to Kismet] keeps me out of trouble. It strengthens my body. It helps me stop my bad habits.” –Josh*

### **Why Climbing?:**

Kismet students develop athleticism, analytic skill, good judgment, focus, intuitive awareness, team awareness, relationship skills, patience, compassion, honesty, humility, and ethical behavior.

An education in climbing helps verify for children that they have effect and that they belong in this world. Kismet children gain skill and knowledge required to contribute positively to others and thus gain increased access to a resulting sense of meaning and purpose. These are the ingredients of what is often called “self esteem.”

The vast beauty of the mountains is in itself, transformative—especially for children whose experience is otherwise limited to urban environments.

Because of the personal character of climbing relationships, students of various backgrounds quickly learn to reach across the boundaries of age, race, and differing social experience. The compassion and empathy required to sustain a stable climbing partnership offers Kismet students an opportunity to gain greater understanding of the lives of others. At the same time they are pressed to develop the humility and honesty required to allow others access to themselves.

*"I learned how to make new friends, how to belay, climb rocks and rappel." -Justin*

### **How we define and measure success:**

The value of education received at Kismet and the relative success of programs is measured primarily by student/parent testimonials and instructor/counselor/volunteer feedback.

Success is currently defined by:

- **Student retention.** Students begin their Kismet education at age 12. Thus they enter the program with hearts open to the rich context of new environmental and new cultural relationships and stimuli. Plus, at age 12 they are able to handle the complexities of the curriculum. That nearly all students gladly return throughout their critical early teen years is a testament to the program’s success.
- The **program curriculum** is designed to consistently test student skills. Students leave Kismet with an essential mastery of all measurable aspects of the thorough multi-year curriculum. Subjective aspects of personal development such as problem solving, judgment, communication, and compassion for others are “measured” by present and future testimonials from parents and students.

Typically, the subtle foundational effects of extraordinary—or even seemingly ordinary—childhood experiences cannot be understood until people can look back from within a mature context. In addition, the effect of childhood experience increases exponentially. Therefore, Kismet tracks graduates with the goal of accumulating a body of testimonials which will become increasingly thorough, accurate, and articulate as students age.

*"The good things were I did a lot of rock climbing and had a lot of opportunities and the bad thing is that I got blisters on my feet. The climbing felt good. Sometimes it was easy but often it was hard but I didn't mind the extra work because I was having more fun than anything." – Quesie*

### **Our capacity and sustainability efforts:**

Kismet has expanded progressively since its inception, staffed on a largely volunteer basis and funded by a small, committed group of donors. The number of students served has not been a focus; the priority has been to refine the intricacies of program logistics, curriculum and evaluation procedures in order to serve the most fitting students with the best program possible.

With these pieces now in place, Kismet is expanding programs and serving additional students. Steps in this 'capacity building' process have included revisiting Kismet's long term strategic goals, fundraising for program growth, initiating an Advisory Board and expanding the marketing and publicity reach. The program expansion has included adding additional program weeks; expanding the volunteer program; building relationships with new sending schools (regionally and eventually nationally); and initiating an intern program for graduated students.



## KISMET ROCK FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS & KEY PERSONNEL

### Board of Directors:

**Sarah Garlick**, Chair, Intervale, NH

Sarah Garlick is a science writer and educator based in North Conway, New Hampshire. Sarah's writing can be found in *Rock and Ice*, *Alpinist*, *Urban Climber*, *Climbing*, and *Patagonia*, and her first book, *Flakes, Jugs & Splitters: A Rock Climber's Guide to Geology* was the recipient of the 2009 Banff Mountain Book Award for mountain exposition. Sarah is the founder and director of GeoReach, a company dedicated to improving earth science education and public outreach, and she serves as an editor for the Wyoming State Geological Survey and for the scientific journal *Rocky Mountain Geology*. She has been an avid rock climber for over ten years.

**Ken Lydecker**, Treasurer, North Conway, NH

Ken is a resort consultant/manager with more than 30 years experience. He has operated resorts, restaurants, conference facilities, and ski areas (in Maine, New Hampshire and on Cape Cod). Ken has contributed his talents to many local organizations and served on many boards, including acting as the president of the Mt. Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce. He lives with his family in North Conway and enjoys hiking, biking, skiing, and playing tennis.

**Sasha Eisele**, Secretary, Albany, NH

Sasha Eisele comes to Kismet with a passion for young people and the outdoors. A graduate of Maine College of Art, she followed her interest in creative problem solving and community development to the non-profit sector. After five years of helping kids from Maine discover the magic of sea-kayaking on Casco Bay, it was time for a new challenge and a move to the mountains. Sasha is a non profit consultant with professional strengths in creating innovative fundraising, marketing, organizational development strategies for growing non-profits She is thrilled to have the opportunity to put her skills to work for Kismet. When she isn't dreaming of new ways to generate adventure opportunities for kids you can find her rocking climbing, searching for fresh powder and exploring the roads not traveled with her husband Erik.

**Chris Graham**, North Conway, NH

Chris grew up in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire where he busied himself in all aspects of outdoor life. After graduating from Tilton School in 1984, he spent a year at Massachusetts Maritime Academy where he played football and lacrosse and studied marine transportation and engineering. His love for the mountains eventually won out his love for the sea and he transferred to Saint Michael's College where he played three seasons of lacrosse and earned his BFA in Studio Art with a concentration in secondary education. Chris has spent the past 20 years in education teaching Art at Hebron Academy, Tilton School, and The Brunswick School and is currently teaching Art at

Gorham Middle High School in Gorham, NH. He also served as Outdoor Director at Hebron Academy and Tilton School and currently teaches an Adventure Arts course which introduces students to the art of rock climbing.

Chris lives in North Conway with his wife Kerin, his son Bo, and daughters Emma and Elizabeth. He is an avid rock and ice climber, loves to sail, hike, telemark ski and mountain bike, tinker with his vintage motorcycle, and can't believe how fortunate he is to live in such a beautiful part of the country.

**Brian Irwin, DO, Madison, NH**

A local family physician, Brian has been committed to underserved communities since his early medical training. Working in urban Philadelphia areas early in his training, running an international medical relief project in the Andes during mid-training and working in very underserved, rural parts of Maine while finishing his training at the Maine-Dartmouth Family Practice Residency, Brian was drawn to the Mt. Washington Valley for its sense of community and outdoor opportunities. He is an active member of two local technical search and rescue teams and is a patroller and the medical director of Cranmore Mountain Ski Area. He has volunteered on the Mt. Washington Backcountry Ski Patrol for years and is a frequent author for Couloir, an internationally distributed ski magazine. He writes a weekly health column, is the medical director of a local nursing home and frequently publishes in medical journals. Brian is an active climber having climbed in South America, Europe, Alaska, Canada and extensively in the lower US. His favorite activities are skiing, paddling and biking with his wife, sons and dog here in the Mt. Washington Valley.

**Richard Katzman, MD, Waterbury, VT**

Dr. Richard Katzman, from Waterbury Vermont, has been practicing general and family medicine since 1972, and teaching as a clinical assistant professor at the University of Vermont. Before graduating from Yale Medical School, he began climbing with work boots, swami belt and hemp rope, and has made a little progress over the years in the Northeast, the West, the Andes and Nepal. His love of climbing, teaching and the outdoors has led to his work as a board member of Vermont's Climbers' Resource Access Group, the America Nepal Medical Foundation and Kismet, a passion he shares with his grown children and growing number of grandchildren.

**Donna McCluskey, Boston, MA**

Donna is an accountant and graduate of Northeastern University (BS in Business Management). She has 20 years of experience in business, accounting, and being a volunteer treasurer. Donna's entire family climbs and she volunteers her skills as a Kismet instructor.

**Brian Post, Jackson, NH**

Brian has been involved with Kismet for several years in areas such as programs, event planning, and website development. He especially enjoys spending time with the students and documenting their program week with a camera. Brian concentrated on the sciences in college (BA in Geology 1997 – Colby), but has switched his focus to photography in

recent years. He currently lives in Jackson, NH and enjoys the rock, ice, and snow of the White Mountains.

**Jessica Soroka, Esq.,** North Conway, NH

Jess is an attorney with Albrecht & Weegar, PLLC in Conway, NH. She graduated with a B.S. in Plant Biology from the University of New Hampshire and earned a J.D. from New England School of Law in Boston, MA. Jess is originally from Conway and is very excited to be living in the Valley again. She likes to spend as much of her free time as possible outside climbing, skiing, bicycling, and swimming.

**Jack Tracy,** Jackson, NH

Jack has had over 30 years of business experience. Most recently, he has been a Managing Director with Morgan Stanley based in London, since 1996. Now, semi-retired, he has just permanently relocated to NH. Jack has four daughters. It was through his daughters that he discovered the joy and benefits of rock climbing. Three daughters have been British Champions. He was an active contributor to “Youth Climbing” under the auspices of the British Mountaineering Council. He believes passionately that climbing empowers kids with an enormous range of skill sets, a sense of achievement, responsibility, and trust.

**Ted Wroblewski,** Past President, Kearsarge, NH

Ted is a graduate of Suffolk University (MBA) and can be best described as an entrepreneur. He is cofounder of White Mountain Puzzles, a publisher of educational and entertaining resort and historic fact puzzles. Ted was a partner in creating Big Bear’s Place and The Whittier House restaurants in N.H. He is the past owner of the Bernerhof Inn and created The Taste of the Mountains Cooking School. Ted is also past director of the Berlin City Bank, MWV Chamber of Commerce, Ham Arena, and World News Crews.

## **Key Personnel**

**Michael Jewell,** Founder, President and Program Director

Contact: [mike@kismetrockfoundation.org](mailto:mike@kismetrockfoundation.org), 603.356.7738

Michael, founder and Executive Director of Kismet, is also a full-time technical climbing guide (28 years). He is a graduate of the University of Maine (BS in Wildlife Management) and attended Naropa University, a Buddhist university for the study of the arts. Michael is also a professional pianist performing classic, jazz, rock, and fusion. He has worked clubs and restaurants in New Hampshire, Arizona, and California. He has climbed/guided throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Michael is a certified Wilderness First Responder and member of the Mt. Washington Valley Mountain Rescue Service.

**Janet Bergman,** Executive Director (contracted)

Contact: [janet@kismetrockfoundation.org](mailto:janet@kismetrockfoundation.org), 603.986.9457

Janet has been involved in nearly every area of the organization in the past five years, from instructing students to helping with fund-raising, outreach and organizational

capacity building. She has over ten years of experience as a consultant to nonprofit businesses, specializing in board development and strategic planning. Janet is also a board member of the Mountain Rescue Service, and an avid climber. She and her fiance Freddie Wilkinson live in nearby Madison, where they are slowly 'bringing back' an old farm with a view of the White Mountains.

**[www.kismetrockfoundation.org](http://www.kismetrockfoundation.org)**



Dear Mr. Jewell,

I realize it's been a few months since my son, Jordan, was at camp with you and your assistants. However, I wanted to thank you once again for the fantastic and profound impression rock climbing has had on my son. From the time he departed the condo to come home, throughout his youth football season to present day, he has talked constantly about how much he enjoyed being at Kismet and the feelings he experienced when climbing. More importantly, the feeling he had when he reached the top. To put it in his words, "Dad, it was awesome!!"

In the past Jordan had never been an overly confident or outgoing child even though I know he is more than capable of accomplishing great things. I just couldn't figure out how to get him to reach inside himself to harness his own ability to do anything he wanted. Last year climbing camp had a positive effect on him, and combined with football and constant family support, he began to evolve into a little more of an outgoing child. However, since coming home this past year, he carried his new-found confidence into his football season with a much more positive experience than last year. The profound effect Kismet has had on him was noticeable on the field, and more importantly, in the classroom. His grades are better this year than they've been the past three years, and I've noticed his interaction with other kids is more assertive, in a good way. I'm sure part of it is just my son growing up. But the difference in the way he carried himself and behaved toward his peers and teammates when he got home was immediately apparent. I don't see Jordan back away from a personal challenge like he used to do. He isn't the loner he used to be. He's still somewhat introverted though, but the difference from last year to this year is unbelievable.

Jordan is a good kid. He's sensitive and compassionate towards others, maybe to a fault. But one thing I'm thankful I don't see in him is a need to humiliate others to make himself feel important or superior. He doesn't derive joy from another's misery. Maybe because he's seen a few things at his young age that no child should have to witness. Regardless, Jordan's past has made him the kid he has become today, and the young man he is rapidly turning into. As his father, I'm extremely proud of him and what he's accomplished, and I thank you for providing him the opportunity to do something he might not otherwise have had the chance to do. What you do for all the children who have the opportunity to attend your camp is amazing and transformational, and I'm eternally grateful to you for the positive impact Kismet has had on Jordan. If he never climbed another rock, what he learned at Kismet, both about climbing and about himself, will be with him the rest of his life. At 12 years old, he's learned he has a grit and determination within himself that took me 40 years to discover in myself. I can't think of anything negative about a lesson like that. If there were one thing I would change about Kismet if it were in my power and financial means to do so, it would be to provide the same opportunity to more children.

Again, I can't thank you enough for everything you've done for my son. I hope Kismet continues the positive influence it has on every child who attends and may you continue to operate the camp for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Mr. Carmen Petro  
Manchester NH