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CARE: Big Donations, Big Difference for Sinza Special Needs School

Nineteen year old Iris Van Loo wasn't sure what she wanted to study after graduating from high school, so she decided to use her gap year to volunteer abroad in Tanzania.

In January, she arrived in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania and was placed at a special needs school. From day one, Iris realized that there was a big difference between life in the Netherlands and the culture in Tanzania. "The school is completely different from the schools in my country. The way of teaching, the relationships with the children, the motivation of the teachers and the equipment and resources available to the schools are all very different."

A typical day for the students and the volunteers included a few hours in the classroom followed by recreational play. "We get a lot of responsibility. We play games with the kids and teach them basic skills such as the alphabet, counting, mathematics and improving their English language skills. We also take care of the smaller ones and help them go to the toilet and make sure they stay in the classroom and don't walk outside."

In addition to teaching, Iris says the most important thing she and the other volunteers gave to the students was a lot of love.

She believes she gained a great deal within her three month experience.

"I learned a lot during my volunteer work. For example I learned how to gain trust from children and the teachers and how to work with people who have a totally different culture. I also learned to be more patient and how to work with disabled people. Some of the students did not speak English or had speech handicaps but I adapted by learning how to communicate nonverbally."

Iris joined efforts with a Norwegian volunteer to raise money to improve the school. They were able to receive enough money to repair the school bus, purchase school supplies and new playground equipment and sponsor a field trip to the Dar Es Salaam Zoo for all the students and teachers.

Overall, Iris was very happy with her volunteer experience. "I love Tanzania because I think it's one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The population is friendly and I really like Dar Es Salaam because there are a lot of things you can do during weekends!"



Marie Johannessen (Norway) blogs about spending the day at the Medical Outreach

Last Thursday, Projects Abroad arranged a workshop on tropical diseases. A medical outreach took place the following day in a village nearby. This activity is meant for the volunteers working in the medical field only, but after asking very nicely for permission to join them, the staff allowed me to do so. So on Thursday, a doctor came to the PA-office to describe some diseases we were likely to find in the area we were going to. We could roughly place the most common diseases under three "headlines": respiratory infections, intestinal worms and skin infections.

The doctor taught us the writing/reading-codes he would need to know for dispensing medicine. He also taught us some useful phrases in Swahili, like how to ask for someone's name and age. That was pretty much it. The next day I found myself on my way to a small village, wearing a white coat and feeling more than a little misplaced, but also curious.

So, what is it exactly that takes place at an outreach? Projects Abroad brings volunteers with some experience from the medical field (and apparently occasionally some very curious amateurs as well), to a village where the majority of the population are poorer than average. They offer the people free counseling and dispense medication for them if necessary. Most of the patients we met that day were from the Maasai-tribe, so a lot of translation took place. Someone had to translate the native language in to Swahili for the doctor to understand, then the doctor translated it in to English so that it would make sense to us.

The first room was for registration; there we took down the patients name, age, and medical history. It turned out after a while, that all the patients had a headache, fever during the nights, problems with one of their legs and pain in their spine. The doctor that was there didn't speak very much English... After the talking-part, we took the patient's blood-pressure (it took a while, but I managed to do this after some practicing). After that the patients got in line to see another doctor in the next room.

The second room was a consultation-room. The doctor there had a better English-vocabulary than the one in the registration room. He still didn't understand words like "flu" and "cold". When the patients came in, the doctor would translate the symptoms that the patient described. He encouraged me to ask questions back to them, and asked for my opinion about their condition before he came up with his conclusion. (Of course I wasn't in any position to diagnose a patient, but the sharing-my-thoughts-part was for me getting a chance to learn something)!

In the third room, our job was to hand out the medicine prescribed by the doctors from room two. Luckily there were two doctors, and the one I didn't work with, prescribed other medicines than antibiotics.

I left the hospital with mixed emotions. The patients here get treated very differently from the way they would be treated back home, and some of them definitely didn't get the help they needed that Friday. Life ain't fair. But I felt very grateful for getting the chance be a part of this outreach. It's good to see that some of the money I've paid before coming here gets used for purposes like this. And I'm convinced that some of the patients benefited from this outreach as well. Especially the patients that needed antibiotics to get better!

MICROFINANCE



Challenges, Lessons, Success and More Jewelry

The month of March has been a whirlwind of loan disbursements. The beginning of the month consisted of finishing up the final trainings for two of the three newest groups and handing out loan applications. The Microfinance Team members held meetings to decide who would receive the loans. After also meeting with the chairperson for each group, the loan disbursements took place rapidly. As of now, the Projects Abroad Tanzanian Microfinance Project is funding 51 women from six different women's groups around Arusha.

It was decided that the Mshikamano, which is a riskier group than Projects Abroad has worked with in the past, would be given smaller loans of 50,000 Tanzanian shillings instead of 100,000 shillings. Most of these women have very small businesses that do not generate a lot of profit. This means that the small loans can help the women improve their businesses, and more women from the group were funded at once (seven instead of five). The women elected to repay these loans in two and a half months, meaning that each woman pays 5,000 shillings per weekly installment.

Now that six groups are being funded by Projects Abroad microfinance loans, the Microfinance Team looked at several new groups throughout the month of March. So far, we have visited two groups as potential loan applicants. The first (Kijoga Group, Widows) was recommended by the Human Rights Project at Projects Abroad. However, the group was located very far away and is difficult to reach, especially during the rainy season when roads are difficult to traverse. The group, for some reason, was also alerted to the Microfinance Team's ability to give loans prior to the visit, and they were unwilling to wait for the process of completing interviews and trainings prior to receiving loans. It was ultimately decided that the group was not a good fit for the microfinance project. A second group, called Tumaini, was recommended by HIMS. Upon visitation, however, it seemed that the group was in disarray and were also alerted as to our work and demanded loans immediately. Finally, the women of the CHE group, who are all connected to many other women's groups, have recommended another women's group located in a Maasai village. This group will be visited at a later date.

However, it was decided at the end of the month that instead of looking for new groups the Projects Abroad Microfinance Team would think about working more closely with individual women from each group. At this point, the team visits the groups every week and selects the businesses of several women to visit each time. The extra time in the schedule could, however, be used to work more closely with these businesses to teach the women how to use their money to improve their business, create higher levels of profit, and become more independent. The team has worried that the microfinance loans – and ability to move from one loan to a higher one – will create dependence on the loans instead of improving the businesses as they should. Additionally, the ability to the microfinance team to make a difference may be enhanced by working more closely and individually with the women to improve their businesses and overall well-being.

Jewelry Workshop

Last month, volunteers and staff from Projects Abroad had the opportunity to participate in a jewelry workshop at the Projects Abroad office. They were able to meet the women benefitting from the microfinance project, peruse various products, and even make their own jewelry if they chose to do so. It was a successful workshop because the women were able to sell quite a lot of their jewelry, interact with the volunteers and each other, and share knowledge with women from the other groups. At the end of the day, they were so happy with their success that they requested to do such a workshop again!

HUMAN RIGHTS



Marketing graduate helps promote the efforts of new human rights organization in Tanzania

Marilyn Kasparian (23) is a recent graduate in marketing and communication studies at Universite Paris 2 Pantheon Assas. She wanted to volunteer before looking for a fulltime job so she signed up for the Human Rights placement offered by Projects Abroad.

Marilyn arrived in Arusha, Tanzania in early February, where she spent one month in a care project at a special needs school and one month at a local human rights organization, called Inherit Your Rights (IYR). The NGO was formed one year ago with a mission to educate, empower and represent individuals in the developing world concerning their property and inheritance rights. IYR works primarily with low-income single, widowed, and divorced Maasai women.

“The human rights project needs volunteers because the situation of the widows is not well known. Volunteers studying law are able to research the legal situation and write booklets for the women so they understand their legal rights. Marketing and communication volunteers are valuable because the NGO is run by lawyers, who aren’t well versed in the area of publicity.”

Marilyn reported to IYR five days a week. She says that there was plenty of work for all the volunteers to do. As the communication manager, she was responsible for writing articles for the website, writing press releases and contacting local journalists, and developing proposals to plan conferences and build awareness for the NGO.

“I was never bored in this project. Since the NGO is very new, it needs publicity, fundraising for their legal fellowship program and help writing radio scripts, and making retail greeting cards with the women.” The experience taught Marilyn to be autonomous, pro-active and how to write proposals. However, there were often challenges with practicing her skill in a foreign country.

“Everything is different. The different culture meant that I had to reorganize myself and think about other ways to communicate and present ideas. For example, most people in Tanzania don’t have access to the Internet and in Europe its available everywhere. We also had to find different ways to raise money because Tanzanian people mostly donate to their close communities such as their church.”

One of the most memorable moments for Marilyn occurred on a trip to give a lecture to the women in a Maasai village.

“One of the women started to cry as we were talking about the legal rights available to them after becoming a widow. We thought she was sad because her husband had died but we finally figured out that she was crying because she was happy to know she had rights and that the situation she was in wasn’t fair. It was very emotionally intense.”

Marilyn returned to Paris to look for a job but will never forget the impact of her volunteer experience.

“Tanzania is a wonderful country. The landscape is amazing and people are friendly and welcoming. As well, there is a lot to do.”

Supporting Your Project

We often get requests from previous volunteers who would like to financially support their former project. If you would like to make a general donation to support our international work or if you want to donate to your previous placement please visit the Reconstruction Project website and earmark your donation for a specific charitable purpose. It will always reach your intended target!

<http://www.justgiving.com/reconstructionproject> . You may also send a cheque to The Reconstruction Project, c/o Projects Abroad, Aldsworth Parade, Goring, Sussex, Great Britain, BN124TX.

STAFF CORNER

A Moment of Glory for Tanzania

On Thursday, March 28, 2013 Tanzania Country Director, Glory Matoi, received the Young Achievers Award during the Tanzania Women of Achievement Awards held at the Serena Hotel in Dar Es Salaam. The Tanzania Women of Achievement Awards (TWAA) pays tribute to the most exceptional and achieving women in the country who have not only achieved success in their own respective fields but who have made a significant difference in their communities and society as a whole.

Glory took over the role as Tanzania Country Director in October 2012. She previously worked as Desk Officer and Program Coordinator after joining Projects Abroad in June 2010. The Young Achiever Award is given to women under the age of 30 who have played a remarkable role within her given field and achieved great results. Glory is passionate about introducing volunteers from all over the world to Tanzania and has demonstrated a sincere commitment to the growth of the offices in Arusha and Dar Es Salaam.

In addition to the Young Achiever Award, other categories included Woman of the Year, Agriculture, Social Welfare, Science and Technology, Sport, Public Sector, Health, Education, Information and Communication, Business Entrepreneurs, and Arts & Culture. There were three nominees in each category however, only one woman received the award. The TWAA received over 500 nominations. The Awards provide a wonderful opportunity to recognize and applaud women who are helping to reshape Tanzania for the better. The ceremony was not only inspirational but the schedule allowed time to make new contacts as well as a chance to enjoy a series of presentations to celebrate successful women. After receiving the award, Glory participated in several interviews that aired on East Africa TV, East Africa Radio, and STAR TV. Photos and articles from the event were posted on popular blogs and newspapers all over the country.

ALUMNI CORNER

We have many volunteers who enjoy their experience so much that they later return to the destination to start new projects or return to old ones. The Alumni Corner is a place to recognize the ongoing contribution of former volunteers.

Yuka Morimura(Japan) – Tanzania Care Project 2012

Yuka returned to Tanzania accompanied by two friends in March 2013 for two weeks. Last year, she volunteered with the Care Project at KibowaOrphanage. She had such a great experience with the children that she decided to come back as soon as possible.

“When I got back to Japan, people were telling me to buy new clothes and new shoes but I saved my money to come here instead. I really missed the children. My life in Tanzania and my life in Japan is totally different. When we think about life in a developed country, it seems like Japanese life is better but I felt like I was missing something. Even though I can’t do anything big or great, I feel like the children want me to be here and I want to be there for them. In Japan, I’m always busy with work or school, but I forget to make time for friends. People care about each other a lot here. I missed Tanzanian life and this was the last chance for me to come back before I start working. The staff at Projects Abroad also made me want to come back. I missed everyone. They made my experience worthwhile.”

Yuka brought gifts from Japan for the children. She purchased hand towels and asked her mom to stitch the names of the children on each one. While in Arusha, Yuka spent several nights at the orphanage with the children before traveling to Zanzibar for holiday. Yuka will graduate from university in March and begin looking for employment in April.

We invite all volunteers to participate in part-time paid work as an Alumni Representative after leaving our destination. Alumni Representatives attend promotional events and fairs in their home country and share their experience living and volunteering with Projects Abroad. If you are interested in becoming an Alumni Representative, email alumni@projects-abroad.co.uk.