

Kate Willis Personal Development Case Study

UK volunteer in Machakos, Kenya, cycle 1.

Placement: First month working with Masaku School for the Physically Disabled; teaching computer classes and engaging creative arts classes, taking the vocational class through real life scenario roleplays and constructing and educating the school on how to use compost bin. Second month with Red Cross, Kenya; working towards a blood donor drive, the greenhouse, and initiation of waste management project in Machakos.

Counterparts: Masaku – Kengah, Fenella and Esther. Red Cross – Tatch, Rob and Ivy.



Compost bin at Masaku.



Blood donor drive banner with the Red Cross team.

What have I learnt?

Through living and working in Machakos with ICS, I have improved both my communication and persuasion skills. Being a part of the social committee has pushed me to regularly organize events for the whole team. Due to the many differences of opinion, this often required a lot of negotiation, time and persuasion to make the whole team happy.

Mixing in and integrating with locals is one of my favourite things about travelling. It's the best way to learn about the people and culture, and for that, I'm very happy to have been living in a host home. My host mama immediately showed me how hospitable and welcoming the Kenyan people are. "Eat until you can see it" she told me one day as she piled more chapatti and cabbage onto my plate.

"Mzungu" – The first Swahili word I learnt, and definitely my least favourite. I am proud to say my vocabulary has increased a fair amount since the mzungu days. 'Hii ni pesa ngapi?', 'Nataka kulala', 'Juma pili nataka kwenda ongelea na wewe' - one or two of my more useful phrases. I am very thankful to my wonderful counterpart, Jamila. I wouldn't have learnt anything without her.

Active Citizenship Days (ACDs) have taught me a lot about both development issues and Kenyan-British cultural differences. The GCDs have covered a variety of topics including; women empowerment, child rights, climate change, crime and terrorism, youth empowerment, gender based violence and sexual reproductive health. I found it really interesting to hear the Kenyan perspectives and beliefs on these topics, and enjoyed discovering the difference in services provided in Kenya compared to the UK.

One thing that's really shocked me in Kenya is the perception of death, and how different it is from British perception. A couple of weeks into my stay in Kenya, I was visited by two young girls both under the age of 13. The elder of the two, with her chirpy voice was telling me about the exam she suspects won't take place tomorrow due to her two class mates that were hung by their uncle the previous day. The young girls then told me about the other three people they knew who'd died within the past week. I found this whole conversation pretty mind blowing. I found it hard to believe two young girls could feel so at ease with death. That it is just part of life. That they were so accustomed to dealing with it. A few weeks after this conversation, I witnessed a fatal car accident. When I discussed this with my mama, she informed me that that road only gets more dangerous towards Christmas. That while I'm in Kenya, it will only become more dangerous. When I asked for advice, how to minimize these risks, I was just advised to pray. As an atheist, I found this extremely hard to accept as a solution, and it left me feeling pretty uneasy with the situation. Looking back, it's clear to say this is a learning curve. I've learnt what huge importance religion is in Kenya. That if you pray enough for your exams, you will do well. If you pray for rain, it will come. If you pray about your problems, they will be solved.

Some of the everyday ways I have changed as a result of this programme:

- I've learnt to deal with the situations given to me. Despite the struggle, I have learnt to wash my own clothes by hand. Although I am very much looking forward to going home and having a washing machine, I feel confident that I could wash my clothes by hand anytime I may need to in the future.
- Three months in Kenya has taught me how to dance with my bum. – or at least try to. And I look forward to showing off these moves when I get back to the UK.
- I will return home with the knowledge of how to cook some Kenyan foods. I look forward to introducing chapattis into my home.
- I now appreciate the little things that I've always taken for granted. A washing machine, a hot shower, running water, a gas stove, a hover and most of all my freedom. The freedom to come and go as I please. To cook what I want, when I want. To spend my free time, as I choose.

"Education is power". After 3 months in Kenya, being surrounded by a great group of inspirational volunteers and unusual opportunities, I feel inspired to apply for university, to enhance my education and hopefully provide me with greater prospects for the future.

One memory:

I will never forget the day we made musical instruments with Standard 1 at Masaku School. We used bottle caps, wire and twigs to make shakers. The kids absolutely loved it. Kengah then taught the kids how to sing 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' while they made as much noise as possible. I have never seen a bunch of children look so excited in my life. It makes me happy to know that we could provide so much fun and entertainment for the kids.



ACD at Terry's



Creative arts class at Masaku