Volunteer Acknowledgement 2012

Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in. – unknown

Here are some volunteer experiences with Real Youth International thus far ...

“The evidence supporting sports participation for young people is overwhelming...It has the power to combat everything from racism to low self-image, to the high-school drop-out rate.” (Sue Castle, Executive Producer of PBS Sports: Get in the Game)

My name is Daniel Scherer Emunds and I am a 21-year old journalism student from Chicago, IL, entering my final semester of undergraduate study at Indiana University. While studying abroad in Cape Town during the 2012 spring semester, I had the privilege of working with the organization Real Youth International and it was an experience I will never forget. Three times a week, RYI shuttled more than a hundred high school students from the Khayelitsha township to the University of Cape Town, where we hosted afterschool basketball clinics.

During these weekly sessions, the local youth learned the fundamentals of basketball and also developed personal skills such as teamwork, self-confidence, and dedication. Other American volunteers and I worked alongside RYI founder Dumisani Wambi and his friend Lazola Mncameni every lesson. One thing that Dumisani always preached was the realization of potential and the idea that, through hard work, all of these students could achieve their dreams, despite any personal, environmental, or circumstantial obstacles. That message is an important one that kids in Cape Town’s impoverished townships do not hear nearly enough.
I grew up in a middle-class American neighborhood with, fortunately, many opportunities to participate in organized sports. My involvement in sport provided an outlet for lots of personal growth and always made me feel like I had a place where I belonged. I think that every kid in every part of the world should be able to have that same opportunity that I did. RYI provides that opportunity for kids that really need it. I wholeheartedly support the organization’s mission and hope that they continue to grow.

Dan Scherer Emunds, 21
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My name is Pierre H. Lax; I am a student pursuing my Bachelor’s degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Last year, I had the fortunate experience of travelling and studying abroad in Cape Town, South Africa. To say I had a great time is a gross understatement; I found a new home, a place in which I yearn to return.

My aspirations to live and study in South Africa were framed by my academic passion of the study of racial dynamics. Led by a personal struggle to seek a firm identity, my journey has always been one of privilege from the veneer.

My mother is a Black, French woman and my father is a White, American man. My light skin complexion consistently placed me in positions where fellow African American men were seldom seen during my childhood, unless for family holidays or reunions.

I was introduced to the game of basketball at the age of six. My older brother championed my newfound love for the game, as I always tried to trace his footsteps. Enrolling in Basketball leagues and camps all across New York City, including Asphalt Green, Police-Academic-League (PAL), Hemphill’s Hoopers, Basketball City, Eastern Invitational, just to name a few, I could never stop playing.
Since the summer of 2010, I have been a part of a project that uses Basketball as a tool to help young African American male adolescents in Philadelphia avoid the statistical rates of crime, imprisonment, unemployment, impoverishment, drugs, and even death.

My endeavors while I was in South Africa ranged, to say the least. From exploring the deep cultural and societal dynamics of race and class, to encountering the beautiful landscape and vibrant residents, to discovering more about myself and my identity, all while keeping up with an academic course load and a Varsity Basketball season at the University of Cape Town; I experienced more than I could have ever imagined.

The highlight of these experiences and my time in South Africa was working with Real Youth International. Dumisani and the Kulca Knights Basketball Club, Real Youth International, inspired both coaches and students every session. Conducting Basketball drills, team play, group activities, and teaching leadership skills were all a part of the daily lesson plan.

Although Basketball was previously seldom played, or watched by the children of Khayelitsha, they approached the game with a determined interest to improve. Their approach was met by Dumisani’s diligence and passion to teach the youth of Khayelitsha the game of Basketball, and all the values that came along in preparation for life.

Despite the obstacles of adequate clothing,—shorts and sneakers (perhaps even uniforms?!)—And suitable equipment—the children had to commute to a gymnasium inconvenient to where they lived, (perhaps construct a quality, wooden-floor Basketball court in Khayelitsha). Despite all of these pragmatic impediments, Real Youth International under Dumisani, managed to show how fun Basketball is, while forming these lasting relationships where the children can identify role models within their community. Can you imagine the potential of this mission if granted access to these fundamental necessities?

I cannot reiterate enough how much Basketball has helped to define my life. It continues to guide me and serve as a means to release stress. Through Basketball I have formed my identity and have the courage to perform on any stage of life. It was Plato, (427 B.C. –347 B.C.), who said that, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Dumisani intends on discovering the skills and talents of the youth of Khayelitsha to prepare them for later challenges in life.

Pierre H. Lax,

University of Pennsylvania, Class of 2013
My name is Isabel Stanish, and I am a student in my fourth year at the Pennsylvania State University in the United States. Last spring semester, I studied abroad at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in Cape Town, South Africa. I did this through the CIEE program, which offered a number of service opportunities for us.

One of these opportunities was Real Youth International (RYI), an after-school program for children from the township of Khayelitsha. Run by two men, Dumisani Wambi and Lazola Mncameni, RYI facilitates a basketball and photography program for interested students. One of its main focuses is to provide these youths with an alternative to the kinds of delinquent activities that run rampant in the townships.

I served as a coach for RYI, along with several other American students from CIEE. We started out by travelling to Khayelitsha to play basketball on the courts at the various participating high schools. However, due to the conditions of the courts, along with other factors, we decided that transporting the students to UCT to play on the outdoor courts there would be both a benefit to current students and a possible draw for other youths to join the program.

We met with a different high school every day of the week, both boys and girls, to teach them the basics of the sport. Though many of these children had faced long days and were still in their school uniforms, they showed an eagerness to learn and succeed at this sport, about which most of them knew very little.

Dumisani and Lazola were both skilled facilitators, who seemed to have no end of patience and passion for RYI and the students involved. They tirelessly would show up every day, a mini-busload of children in tow, ready to play basketball and share their love of the sport. I have no doubt that without these two men, many of these adolescents would turn to alternative activities that would be a dangerous deterrent to both their health and safety. Throughout the five months of the program, I saw the participants take great steps in their abilities, and was impressed by their persistence in what had to be a frustrating experience at times. Dumisani and Lazola are also part of another program called Kulca Knights Basketball Club, for older and more skilled players. They found many of their Kulca team members through RYI, and this allows for the students to stay involved and can end up being a life-changing opportunity for a lot of them.

While I was only in South Africa for a short time, being a RYI coach was a huge part of my experience. I observed a change in many of the students as they became genuinely interested in doing well, and a change in myself at having made even a small difference in the lives of these
children. While CIEE offers other volunteer opportunities, none could compare with what RYI does. It is undoubtedly an invaluable program, and any efforts to allow its existence should be highly encouraged. I thank you for your time, and if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,
Isabel Stanish
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During my time in South Africa I was fortunate enough to be a part of an organization such as Real Youth International. I came to South Africa to study abroad for a semester at the University of Cape Town.

The program that I had gone with, CIEE, gave us the opportunity to volunteer with various organizations. After hearing the experiences of the other students at differing organizations none could compare with Real Youth International.

The passion for basketball and helping Khayelitsha’s youth is extremely evident in the founders of RYI, Dumisani and Lazola. From the first day of our afterschool clinic the children knew little of the sport. Many of them had never played before but with the hard work of all the volunteers, Dumisani and Lazola the children greatly improved. The patience and dedication toward the children was truly remarkable. I know my time was limited but I hope that I made a positive impact on the children’s lives.

I felt that by providing this after school clinic Real Youth International gave children the opportunity to stay out of trouble and teach them valuable lessons such as team work and resilience. We became a family at Real Youth International and I will never forget the impact that the children had on me. If you have any questions feel free to contact me.

Pedro Alvarado

State College, Pennsylvania
My name is Dumisani Wambi, a resident of Khayelitsha and a proud African. I grew up in townships all my life, and truly count myself blessed to be here. It is difficult to ignore the amount of violence I have witnessed in my lifetime, almost becoming normal. The same applies to alcohol abuse, women and child abuse instances I have been accustomed to. Almost every issue in the townships have lately become domesticated, yet such communities are still disempowered to address these issues.

The fact remains, anyone can do little to change their community; I have grown to understand this. In 2008, I graduated at Cape Peninsula University of Technology which opened the door to finally seek employment into practice. I have always been interested in news and current issues facing our country, but a call for action to change my own street and community was overwhelming. I feel had witnessed enough social ills in my own backyard to further report it. Instead I decided to make a change where I can.

As a learner myself in a township school, I remember the enthusiasm of high school, and the unknown experiences. While I was a sport enthusiast from primary school in the small town of De Aar, high school appeared full of opportunities to showcase my passion in sport. It was not to be, high school was simply a four-wall classroom and a book. Brought up by a family encouraging book-first, I was not fully turned away, the yearn for representing my school remained in my heart until I matriculated.

On the contrary, I shared classrooms with peer less encouraged in academics, but heavily passionate in sport. These are friends I would play basketball, cricket and soccer with during lunchbreaks. Unfortunately schools like ours did not cater for them, resulting in them dropping out. Many would drop out to rob the same school kids they shared a school with.

When starting this programme, these are the experiences I have observed, so far 12 years after I was in high school. Currently Khayelitsha is infested with gansterism activities, boys and girls as young as 12 violently taking part in territorial fights, centralised in school grounds, many end up with fatalities. In my opinion, this situation is resulting from a lack of effective use of tools such as sports to engage youth to experience a pro-social environment.
In the last 4 years, I have walked by foot dropping school to school engaging principals and teachers in charge of sport to support the idea, and running coaching clinics where supported. Unfortunately, I have witnessed first-hand poor management, predominantly school staff failing/delaying to communicate opportunities to potential athlete learners as sports is not prioritised, adding to the extreme poor facilities. Many township schools still reject learners who struggle in academics with no attempt to revive their potential or encouragement through tools such as sport.

Our programme aims to first normalise sport, to get learners familiar to the fact that sport is part of their individual development curriculum. Secondly, to propel them towards their ideal passion by allowing the qualities of participation understood, and thirdly to but not last, to incubate programmes with the value of “potential” in order to believe there is always the best decision in interest of themselves and their community, and eventually their country. This programme simply aims to reach to discover potential, making available a chance our generation never had.

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“Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.” – Wilma Rudolph