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Joseph Lee – Good Work Foundation (GWF), South Africa - July 16th to August 3rd, 2018

Placement Dates and Project

I was placed on the Good Work Foundation project in Hazyview, South Africa for 4 weeks, from July 16th, 2018 to August 3rd, 2018.

Pre-Departure Preparation

In order to prepare for the project, I did a bit of reading on the historical context of South Africa and its past. Additionally, I spoke to Catriona, a previous volunteer, and Dianne from people and places to get some insight on the project.

Orientation and Preparation

I was received extremely well in Hazyview. The campus manager at the Hazyview Digital Learning Center (HDLC) walked me through the entire campus and explained their programs in depth. The staff at HDLC were incredibly hospitable and were eager to take me through their verticals and have me join in on their activities. Additionally, I was able to work closely with Gogo Mo, so she was able to explain GWF's inner workings throughout the course of the first week.

P&P Strengths

I think that people and places has such an incredible depth of opportunities with which volunteers can get involved. Having worked with Good Work Foundation, it's pretty obvious that people and places genuinely cares about responsible volunteering that effectively utilizes both money and volunteers. I've heard of "voluntourism" where volunteer matching agencies have profit as the foremost goal, and I was extremely wary when I was doing research but luckily I stumbled upon your website. I was also talking to Kate (CEO of GWF) about voluntourism and she mentioned that people and places sends prospective volunteers' resumes and life stories to the NGOs for screening purposes. If anything, that's the clearest indicator that volunteers are actually being put to good use for the NGO's benefit, not just to make the volunteers do grunt work. I really think that people and places is doing such an amazing job helping people find truly impactful opportunities.

Experience and Work

You can't go to South Africa and not have an incredible time, especially with such a warm and welcoming people. More specifically, Good Work Foundation is filled with good people that made my experience so much better. They were hospitable, cooking me food, asking me to join them in activities, asking how I did every day, and chatting with me whenever we ran into each other. From an American's perspective, it was such a huge and jarring culture shock, but in a purely positive way.

At Good Work Foundation, I primarily worked on building the budding career programming, spearheaded by Gogo Mo and Mercyful. I built upon the existing Career Interest Profile program by developing and presenting follow-up material that would get the students further into their career interests. Additionally, I

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helped in a few smaller roles like building a financial model for a staff member's prospective start-up, traveling to a primary school with the Conversation vertical, helping a staff member learn Excel, and sitting in on various workshops. I left behind all of the PowerPoints and Excel documents for the career program follow-ups with Mercyful. Additionally, I left behind the financial model with Teaman and Crispin.

Any changes needed in preparation information?

No, the information was accurate and set proper expectations for the engagement.

Recommendations for Future Input

Career programs often fail because they only help students with one step of the extremely complicated career search process. I built a few follow-ups to expand on the existing CIP, but I think that it could use even more work. It would be helpful to have a volunteer with existing career mentorship experience to understand the perspective of rural South Africans and help them build upon their strengths. Ideally, the volunteer would spend time working closely with students in all of the career search phases, from finding a study institution to finding a job. There are so many obstacles that are in the way of rural South Africans, so it's essential that the volunteer understands the situation and builds effective, sustainable, and scalable material that can be used by GWF as the NGO expands.

I would also recommend that future volunteers spend time with existing GWF programs to assess effectiveness and ideate potential improvements. One of my biggest concerns during my time in Hazyview was that students were not performing well despite their enthusiasm and ambition. For example, the ITC academy had an extremely low computer pass rate despite the time invested by the academy heads and cost to put students through the test. This underperformance can be attributed to a variety of factors, and they must be addressed so GWF's valuable resources are not wasted. It would be extremely helpful to have a volunteer with extensive education experience in low income areas.

Note from people and places: all of Joseph's suggestions and recommendations have been shared with GWF to help the programme move forward. Any changes and additions to the overall programme are incorporated in the project's support plan

Highlight

The highlight was getting immersed in a wildly different culture and having genuine conversations with rural South Africans. It is a rare opportunity to live in a rural area and talk to locals while traveling. I loved talking to the people, young and old, rich and poor, and asking them about their complex lives. It's mind-blowing knowing that people on the opposite side of the world have similar experiences as you and that their lives are just as deep as yours; they have passions and struggles with which you can empathize because you experienced the same. It shows you that people are all equal despite socio-economic status or skin color and that the world has much to learn.

Leisure Time and Accommodation

Mpumalanga is incredibly beautiful, so I tried to travel and enjoy the surrounding location as much as possible. Over the weekends, I travelled to God's Window and other points of interest with Witness, spent time with Kate Groch's family (who are wonderful by the way), went to a wedding, and hung out with some of the staff members.

The accommodation was very nice, but it got lonely at times since I was the only volunteer during my stay. Additionally, Hazyview got dark early in the day and I did not have a car to travel around the area. In the future, I would highly recommend that volunteers have someone else with them to keep them sane and hire a car if they can afford it.

Note from people and places: we explain to our Hazyview volunteers that renting a car would be a good idea, when it's affordable

Final Thoughts

Traveling is one thing, but volunteering in another country is something different.

I believe that volunteering can make both the volunteer and the people whom they are helping vulnerable. The act of giving is something that is so pure and untouched that you open yourself to another and give them all that you can give.

It fills your heart with joy, knowing that a small gift of your time and energy can radically change another's life for the better. You, a common citizen, one in eight billion people, have the power to change the future of a human being that is as complex, thoughtful, conscious, and alive as you. When you experience that power, you want to give and give and give.

I define love as wanting another to be genuinely happy despite the personal burden that you undertake. When you are volunteering, this genuine love surfaces, sometimes in the first encounter, and your sole goal becomes the quest to make another as happy as possible. I recommend volunteering because it teaches you how to love another.

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