

Ubuntu Projects Abroad™



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Celebrating Women's Day!



The 9th of August is known in South Africa as a public holiday, celebrating women in South Africa and the large role they played in the fight to freedom and democracy in this country. The date comes from the historic anti-pass march that nearly 20,000 women participated in, petitioning the pass laws that had been put in place years earlier. Pass laws required all “non-European” people to carry a pass book, which stated their racial categorization, which determined his or her curfew laws and travel restrictions. The crowd of strong women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to deliver their protests singing a freedom song,

“Wathint' abafazi,, wathint' imbokodo ,uza kufa!”

Translated in English means “[When] you strike the women you strike a rock you will be crushed!”

Today, the 9th of August commemorates and celebrates the women of South Africa as that rock that will not be struck! Happy Women's Day!

HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE UPDATE

Written by Journalism and Human Rights Volunteer, Micol Catton

“As I have said, the first thing is to be honest with yourself, You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself... Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, but humility.”

Nelson Mandela

At some point, somebody will ask you, “What do you want to do in your life? What are your plans for the future?” Few years ago I would have answered in this way: “I would like to make a difference. I dream of a World where people are considered all equal and free individuals able to have the same opportunities, able to be themselves and to express their ideas. I want to live in a World where people do not fear the unknown but embrace diversity. I want to make it possible!”

When you are young you feel you are the strongest person on Earth; you think nobody will be able to stop you in pursuing your projects; you believe *you* can even change the World.

Then you grow up and ideally you start travelling, you meet new people and you face diverse realities.

No matter how honourable your project is and regardless of the fact that you truly believe in those same ideals of justice and peace, you suddenly realise that your expectations are slightly too high. Some might call it disillusionment; others might say such a process reflects nothing but an inevitable stage of life. Surely, you get to know your capacities and you become aware of your limits. You discover a new self, sometimes even more than one. You then acknowledge the fact that you are just one among million, one little spark in the whole universe. How could *one* ever expect to change the World? A drop does not make the ocean! Only once you learn this lesson you will be ready to go ahead. Knowledge is power and one of the best ways to learn is travelling.



Working as a volunteer for Projects Abroad Human Rights Office in South Africa has given me the chance to learn how changes can be achieved. I embraced a more mature attitude towards expectations which is based on faith, determination, collaboration and action.

In joining our programme, you will get the opportunity to work in varied fields that deal with the protection of human rights, such as women’s rights, children’s rights and prevention of abuses, prisoners’ rights and refugee and asylum seekers’ rights. You will comprehend the beauty and the controversies of the African culture and its people.

Perpetual racial conflicts and discrimination throughout history have made South Africa a country with one of the highest concentration of human rights violation in the world. Unfortunately many people in South Africa do not know they are legitimately entitled to basic rights and freedoms; namely rights of life, liberty and freedom of expression. We witnessed few cases where women who were abused did not even know they had the right to report the violence to the police. What is even more upsetting is that most people outside Africa do not have any sort of knowledge about these facts. Sadly, episodes like the one we reported are not rare; on the contrary they reflect a daily reality in South Africa.

Moreover, intolerance and racism towards outsiders and African immigrant have dramatically increased over the last twenty years. According to the majority of South Africans immigration constitutes a threat for their country as far as jobs, crimes and society are concerned.

Such prejudices resulted in phenomenon such as xenophobia, which has become one of the major concerns to human rights.

Every human being, regardless race, origin, religion and gender, is entitled to basic rights and freedom. Therefore, as human rights activists we have the responsibility to develop awareness of human rights issues in South Africa and in the World. Our mission is to notify the global community about violation of human rights and in particular to inform the victims about their rights and responsibilities



The first time I went to the Youngsfield Refugee Camp it was raining heavily and it was very cold. Tents were flooded and kids were playing in the mud. Basic needs such as mattresses and blankets the government was supposed to provide, were damaged and there were not enough for everybody.

Sanitation and health conditions were under international standards: over 700 hundreds refugees had access only to ten showers which were not separated by gender and infringed the right to privacy. Only four taps of water were available to supply the whole population at the camp.



As far as food was concerned, refugees were entitled to two “meals” a day which were based on a couple of slices of bread with jam for lunch and rice with some sort of meat for dinner. These conditions are certainly causes of diseases, malnutrition and psychological crisis such as depression and identity issues. Therefore, in order to face such problems a medical tent has been established...



Because of their status as “refugees”, these people are constantly subjected to human rights violations and discrimination. They do not receive any kind of information and consultation from Department of Home Affairs which is supposed to deal with refugees and asylum seekers’ necessities. In South Africa being a refugee signifies losing dignity and being marginalised. Immigrants are called “aliens” and become an easy target for intolerant South Africans.

Youngsfield refugees’ camp does represent a site of human rights violation!

In order to assist refugees in their daily difficulties and developing awareness about their conditions we decided to promote a campaign and raise some funds. Thanks to our initiative we have been able to collect a considerable sum of money we used to improve sanitary conditions and primary needs. Regardless our initial expectations due to the limited preparation, the campaign was successful and effective! We even approached a local student who was keen to volunteer for our office!

I was working with team of enthusiastic volunteers coming from all over the world, I had the fortune to meet our managers Theodore Kamwimbi, and Leo McAuley, whose passion and devotion for human rights issues soon became source of inspiration and knowledge for me. There are no text books or newspapers able to reveal “the real history” as they did.

My experience would not have been the same without their guidance. Volunteering for Projects Abroad Human Rights Office has proved that combining our energies and initiatives in pursuing our humanitarian missions is the way forward for changes!



EXCITING WORK IS HAPPENING AT THE NEW PROJECTS ABROAD HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

Written by Journalism and Human Rights Volunteer, Fiona Peterson

Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHRO) Manager Theo with his side kick Leo have been steering interns at the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office into a number of exciting fields since opening on 19th May this year. We currently have 14 interns with more arriving all the time.

REFUGEE RIGHTS PROJECT

Projects Abroad's work in *Youngsfield* Refugee Camp and smaller refugee shelters was kick-started by the xenophobic violence that Danielle wrote about in the last newsletter. Since then 21,000 refugees have been displaced in Cape Town.

Despite the high numbers of migrants, there were only ten bathrooms and four water taps. Refugees slept 400 to a tent.

Alex, a Canadian volunteer focusing on refugee rights was shocked by the conditions in the Western Cape's only refugee camp sited on a military base;

"It's absolutely atrocious and inhumane. I can never be unhappy again," she says.

Going to the camp is an eye-opening experience, as American intern Angel experienced when meeting the Somali community leader:

"When we entered Mr. Gauri's tent, he placed sleeping blankets on the ground for us to sit, and apologized for not having any seats. Coming from an individual who has lost everything, offering a precious resource, such as blankets, was a tremendous gesture of hospitality" she says.

Interns play a vital role monitoring conditions in the camp on behalf of the Human Rights Commission. It is an exciting opportunity for volunteers to interact with refugees and listen to their experiences.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROJECT

Women's rights interns have been very busy thanks to their enthusiasm and initiative. Their self-designed programme in St. Anne's Women's Shelter was so successful that they embarked on a new program last week. French volunteer Pauline explains how they got involved after a visit to the shelter with a social worker as part of their work with Women's Legal Aid.

"She was overwhelmed with work so when we heard her idea for women's rights training sessions, we asked if we could take it on instead. She was really excited and so were we."

New assistant manager Leo is impressed with their work, which has sparked similar involvement with Bonnytown Child Rehabilitation Centre, where the office is acting as legal advisor.

PRISONERS RIGHTS

Freddy and I had the opportunity to go to Pollsmoor Prison last week with the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons. Exciting changes are being made in the governance of South African prisons, so it was interesting to be a fly-on-the-wall in the meeting where prisoner's complaints are voiced and discussed.

South African prisons are currently running at 45% over-capacity, with 165 987 inmates in accommodation capable of holding 114 559. This overcrowding exacerbates gang culture and sexual violence.

In my visit to the maximum security men's section, I spoke to inmates in a crammed cell supposed to hold 28 inmates. Instead, 70 men shared one toilet and the 28 thin metal bunk beds, many without sheets or blankets. One makeshift bed had been precariously erected above the toilet.

Volunteer Freddy Hookway comments on the gang culture in Pollsmoor Juvenile Prison.

"The challenge is to stop gangs being able to recruit new members, which requires extensive rehabilitation and correctional services. No formal education system means these young men come out of prison with very few options making re-offending all the more inevitable."

Yet despite all these amazing experiences, interns still say their best experience has been meeting the office's enthusiastic and knowledgeable director Theo.

JOURNALISM DAILY VOICE



Our new Journalism placement at the Daily Voice in Cape Town is a very exciting! The Daily Voice is a highly popular independent newspaper, sometimes referred to as having a tabloid layout, though covering real events. The Daily Voice is one of the most widely read papers in the Cape Town region by the populations in Cape Town. Under the previous government of apartheid, most of these people were not properly educated thereby not able to read and write proficiently, particularly in the form of mass media. The Daily Voice executive editor Karl Brophy claims, “We provide a service to the socio-economic classes who have not previously been franchised by South Africa's newspapers. Our readers are mostly blue-collar workers who have tough lives but make ends meet and have a good sense of humour”.

A journalism volunteer would have the chance to get involved with various aspects of the Daily Voice, including shadowing real life journalists and photographers and visiting township areas throughout Cape Town, reporting news and carrying out interviews with eye witnesses. With extra hard work and motivation, volunteers will be have the chance to get their stories published! One previous volunteer, Craig Ferriman, was published numerous times and got a front story cover page! Well Done Craig! If you are looking for a hands-on, fast paced work environment and the opportunity to explore less frequented areas of Cape Town, this placement is for you!



SPCA

Speaking, Protecting, Caring for Animals



This past month, SPCA staff welcomed our first volunteers, Katie Bacewicz and Victoria Poon to the team! Victoria and Katie are currently studying and are applying for veterinary school, and the SPCA was a great introduction to veterinary work as well as animal rescuing. Both volunteers were able to get directly involved with many different aspects of the SPCA and able to work with many different animals. Katie and Victoria were able to get inside the surgery room and observe during neutering surgeries, Victoria was even able to suture up a cat after it was spayed!

They were introduced to a sad reality of the mistreatment of pets in Cape Town, particularly in the township areas, where people often don't have the resources or background knowledge on how to care properly for their animals, whether it be feeding, cleaning, discipline or exercise. The SPCA's Inspectorate Division's role in these situations is to identify homes where animals are being mistreated and rescue them in order to get them adopted into more suitable, loving homes. Both Katie and Victoria were able to go out with the Inspectorate Division to help with animal rescues.

Coincidentally, the Animal Planet TV show, 'Animal Cops' was filming the series in Cape Town with the SPCA thus Katie and Victoria may have an appearance on television!

The SPCA is really doing a tremendous job of Speaking, Protecting and Caring for Animals here in Cape Town, and we look forward to having Projects Abroad volunteers assisting them for years to come!



One Year Anniversary Celebration!!



It has been officially one year since Projects Abroad launched Cape Town as a destination for volunteers and we decided to celebrate with everyone who has worked so hard to make it work! We invited all of our current volunteers, project and community leaders as well as all of our host families. So many people in Cape Town have contributed to making Projects Abroad run smoothly here, so this celebration is for everyone! We decided to have a traditional South African braai, or barbeque and a potjie stew, for everyone to share and enjoy. We had many different types of eaters, including our Muslim guests, for whom we cooked halaal food for and also vegetarians: no one was left out! We again want to thank everyone for helping so much this past year, giving our volunteers the true South African experience, changing lives and in every small way, whether it be being a role model to children, giving refugees human rights education or rescuing abused animals, making this country a better place one step at a time!



Weekend Trip to Hermanus



This month, our weekend social was a trip to Hermanus, a small coastal town well known for its whale watching and Great White Shark diving! Hermanus is known as one of the best land based whale watching location in the world, where Southern Right whales come to Walker Bay to breed. A couple of our volunteers chose to get wet and kayak, and with luck they were able to see some whales up close and personal! Just south of Hermanus is the tiny town of Gaansbaai, which happens to be the home of Great White Sharks! Many of our volunteers were courageous enough to get into a cage in the water with some of these killer beasts! There were no casualties, besides the few green faces after a day on a rocking boat! The weekend was a blast and we will definitely be frequenting Hermanus in the future!

Volunteers of the Month

Kimberley Dixon and Tiffany Wesley

This month we had to choose two volunteers of the month, and they happened to be roommates and also happened to be both working together at the Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN)



Tiffani Wesley and Kimberley Dixon are awarded the Volunteer of the Month, as not only were they dedicated to their project at RAPCAN, but they took it upon themselves to get involved in more outside of their daily work.

Tiffani happened to be a well trained hip hop dancer and instructor, and committed herself to teaching a hip hop class to 40 girls aged 11-15 in Lavender Hill. Hip hop in Lavender Hill is a way of life and one of the most popular activities for both boys and girls in this community. However, often male dancers outnumber female, so teaching hip hop to the young women and girls of the community is highly empowering for them. Tiffani was an instant celebrity with the young girls, who were surprisingly able to keep up with Tiff's moves; they just wished she would stay in Cape Town instead of having to go back to the United States for Law School.

Kimberley Dixon is our other volunteer of the month. The New World Foundation in Lavender Hill had a blanket and food drive for the foreign nationals who were displaced by the xenophobic attacks that occurred in May. Cape Town winters last from May to August, so these foreign nationals were deeply affected by the cold weather and rain, as they live in informal settlements. Kimberley was moved by this and decided to take it upon herself to raise money from her church and family back home to donate blankets and food to these families. With her donation, we were able to buy 150 blankets, fit them all into a tiny VW Chico, along with *both* Tiffani and Kimberley and myself driving and distribute them throughout Lavender Hill!



Well Done Kimberley and Tiffani, you truly have made a difference in the Lavender Hill community!

DONATIONS

We would also like to thank and acknowledge the donations from the following volunteers:

Ann Sheridan - Fairview Primary School

Sofia Tacchella - Seawinds Educare

Sarah Waldie - Seawinds Educare

Denise Goede - Parkwood Primary School (Music donation)

Conservation Update



Written by: Dave Pugh, Conservation Assistant Manager

Legodimo Nature Reserve. The name Legodimo comes from the local language of Tswana, it means paradise or God's place.

This last month has been full of surprises and it seems that when anyone comes to visit here they are rarely disappointed. Before coming to Legodimo and Botswana I had spent nearly a year in reserves around South Africa. I loved every minute of it and thought that this was what Africa and living in the bush was all about. However, there was always something about my time in South African reserves which didn't quite feel right and I could never put my finger on it that is until I crossed into Botswana and first laid eyes on what I can only describe as the real, untamed wild.

South Africa is an amazing country but the problem there is they keep their animals behind fences, even the great Kruger National Park, which I have been to twice, has a fence around its borders and this was the problem, it made everything seem a little plastic and a little controlled. Botswana doesn't fence anything and the animals are free to do as they please and go where ever they wish. Is this not how it was always supposed to be?

Legodimo, situated along the banks of the Limpopo River is a remarkable place. The great thing about it is you never know what each day will bring, what animals we are going to encounter and indeed what animals are going to visit us at camp. It began with the big guns – Elephants! They came to us and four straight days and nights they surrounded the camp busy eating, trumpeting and generally creating havoc as they love to do. Lying in bed at night with an elephant rubbing his rear end on my front door was quite an experience and not one I shall forget in a hurry. They broke into Gerrit's front garden and decided to use one of his precious young fever trees as a toilet. Fortunately the tree is fine and, I guess, well fertilized!

Then it was the Leopards turn; they seemed to be everywhere and more than happy to show themselves to us. Leopards are notoriously secretive animals and well known for being on the hardest to see in the wild. Not at Legodimo. In less than week we had seen leopards on six different occasions. Twice we were even more fortunate to see two leopards together. Not bad for shy secretive, elusive and very solitary animal.

Legodimo Nature Reserve really deserves it's name. It is truly a piece of paradise.

Volunteer Stories

Volunteer Stories are a way for our volunteers to write about their experiences in South Africa, whether it be a funny happening, cultural misunderstanding, travel and leisure, anything! Living in a new place, far from home, there is bound to be comical encounters and interesting insights gained from learning about new cultures and ways of thinking. Also, upcoming volunteers are encouraged to introduce themselves and tell a little bit about what you expect out of your time here in South Africa!

Written by Sarah Waldie, Care Volunteer at Seawinds Educare

My first impressions of Cape Town were that it was a beautiful city with a fantastic mountainous backdrop and sunny beaches. I arrived after a two month placement in Ghana and therefore being in a well developed city felt incredible. I was taken to my placement at a creche in Retreat which was where I spent most of my time in the two and half months I called Cape Town my home. Although the children had more than many African children, within hours of meeting them I realised that what they did not have was innocence. As time went by I became so attached to the children and learnt a lot about the background of each of them, many coming from areas notorious for gun crime and drugs. It was shocking how much they knew about drugs and some of them were already talking about petty crime or idolising family members, who are tik addicts, a cheap and seriously harmful drug common in the Cape Flats. What was incredible was that each child was so happy and many family members were really making an effort to make a good life for them. It was a fantastic feeling being trusted by my boss, Rita, to look after a class of 40 2-3 year olds on my own and I loved every minute. I would travel into work convinced that I would not have enough energy to get through the day but the children's enthusiasm always gave me the extra boost.

I spent my day teaching the children songs and the basics like numbers and colours. I tried to establish a routine in which the children would get a mixture of learning and games. Anything with paint was a guaranteed success. Every lunch time while the children napped I would try and think of different ways to teach in order to make the day fun for the children, failing that I would simply curl up on a mat next to them and sleep. Reading to the children was the most fulfilling activity as many never had stories read to them and it was so encouraging when they then began to bring books in to school for me to read. My boss and the other aunts at the creche were so welcoming, they always had food and cakes in the fridge in order to fatten me up and they were always laughing and making jokes. One of my best memories was when Rita covered me with water which ended in a full blown water fight that all 100 or so children at the creche joined in. I was able to help out with an outing to the aquarium with some of the children which was so exciting for them and manic for us.

I got along so well with Rita and she even invited me to her wedding which I was able to help her prepare for. We went out on many occasions and through her I really got a sense of what Capetonians were like. One night we went to Guguletu for a braai and I met some of the friendliest people of my trip. Her friends were always eager to meet me and they showed me how to make a potjkie, a hot pot full of vegetables which can take up to 6 hours to cook. This sums up the relaxed attitudes of the community. On my last day at work I organised a party at the creche and Rita's family helped by making enough cup cakes to last a year. At the creche it was left up to me how much or little I wanted to work but it was so fun I ended up working at every opportunity.

I learnt so much from my placement in South Africa and realised how lucky I am to live in a country where guns and crime are not a constant threat. I realised quickly that most houses in affluent areas are surrounded by barbed wire and high rise walls. There is a sense of fear and the differences between the rich and the poor add to the growing tensions. It seems such a shame that some of the most welcoming people I have met live in areas where they fear being robbed, mugged or killed for the sake of a few possessions. It is a country where the wounds of Apartheid are still visible and hopefully in time it will heal.

My children made my experience unforgettable and their enthusiasm for everything definitely made me stay positive throughout even when faced with the knowledge that many of them are growing up in harmful environments. Now I am home I am certain I want to work with children and that is down to my time in Cape Town.

Volunteer Stories Continued...

Written by: Victoria Poon, Animal Care Volunteer at SPCA

My decision to come and volunteer in South Africa was a spur of the moment decision and it was the best spontaneous decision I've ever made. I threw myself into it without doing much research about the country or what I'd be doing while I was down there. The first thing I realized once I started working at the SPCA was that one month is not nearly enough time to see and do everything that is offered to you as a volunteer of the SPCA. The same applies outside of work; there is so much to see and do in South Africa and I regret not staying at least two months. Nevertheless I had an amazing time and South Africa has had such an effect on me that I am already in the midst of planning another visit!

I lived with the Valley family, Naziema is the best host mother anybody could ask for. She is so caring and always looks out for you. By the end of my month there, it really started to feel as if she were my real mother (saying goodbye to her was the hardest part of this trip!). It was also such a pleasure to get to know her 4 daughters, all of whom still live at home. The location of the house also could not have been any better the minibus stops right in front of the house and the SPCA is a quick 5-minute walk away.

After I met Juan (the volunteer supervisor) and he gave me a little talk about what the SPCA is all about, I knew I would love working there. I was exposed to many different aspects of the organization. In one day I could start off my morning working with cats and then after lunch I could be out in the mobile clinic or out with the inspectorates.

Everybody there is very willing to teach you, don't hesitate to ask questions. I came to South Africa with no real prior experience working with animals and by the end of the trip I had been given the opportunity to give vaccinations and even suture up a cat after being spayed! (I was nervous and my hands were shaking but Dr. Miles was so wonderful in walking me through it)

Be prepared to get dirty though! Working with the dogs in the kennels is very interesting and fun but these dogs are so excited to get any attention that they will jump on you and splatter whatever goodies they may have had on their feet onto your clothes!

I had decided that I wanted to become a veterinarian just a few months before I came to Cape Town and right before I left home, I was warned that after working at the SPCA I may not want to become vet anymore. I am glad to say that after my experience, my motivation is now stronger than ever. I wasn't given the censored version of what goes on in the SPCA although you are constantly reminded of why the SPCA is here and why it is such an important organization. I saw animals in the hospital that were terribly mistreated by their owners (one dog was badly burned with boiling water in order to stop a fight it had gotten into with another dog), I saw a cat that was diagnosed with an almost certain death in the operating room/theatre because its condition was so bad it couldn't be treated, and on my last day as I was saying goodbye to my favorite dog I discovered that it was being put to sleep the next day. Despite all of that, there are so many positive things you get to see at the SPCA. The most rewarding thing is seeing an animal being adopted into a loving family and knowing that all the hard work that you and the staff put in has paid off.

My experience in South Africa was one I won't soon forget. The country is beautiful and distinct in so many ways. I would not hesitate to recommend anybody who has a passion for animals to go and volunteer at the SPCA. You won't regret it!