
Community Service Learning: Feelings And Activities

World Quest Dorothy children's home was founded by Elias Mbaabu on the 18th of August 2009. Elias lived in the United States of America with his wife. On one of his visits to Nairobi with his wife, he came across street kids, his immediate instinct was to help them however he only had a thousand shillings in his pocket. On his next return to the city after the last one, with twelve children he came up with Dorothy children's home. The foundation was named after Elias's wife's niece Dorothy, who was murdered by her husband.

Celebrating their 10th anniversary in August, WQDCH can boast that they currently shelter twenty-three girls, with a four-year-old being their youngest. Eight are in house, two from Meru, two from Nakuru, two from Machokos and two from Roasters Marurui. Dorothy children's home has a school within the premises, classes up to class 4, then they follow up their studies in Marurui.

The children sheltered by the foundation, are gotten from children's offices, government or families who are unable to provide the necessary resources for their children. The mission of Dorothy children's home is "Our passion is to give a home, love and hope to orphaned and destitute children in Kenya, Africa".

Feelings

Prior to registering for the community service course, it had always been a mission of mine to help the less privileged in any way that I could, whether it was donating or taking time out to volunteer my services. So, my initial feelings about beginning community service were; excitement, enthusiasm, and so much curiosity. I had a lot of questions, mostly about language barrier, being that I do not speak Swahili, it made me feel like I was disadvantaged on that part which worried me a lot on how effective my work would be on the site in general, how well I would enjoy experience or how it could affect it as well. I was also banking on getting the children to help me improve my Swahili, through communication and interactions, and learn more about the Kenyan culture than what you can find online or in brochures.

When I first started volunteering at Dorothy Children's Home, I felt very excluded, I was the only one at first coming taking the 8 am shift, so I was usually given tasks by myself. The only times I would interact with anyone was when I would teach the children. For the first two to three weeks I was either with the children in class or folding clothes in the house by myself. I left everyday wondering how much longer I had left because I did not have any sense of belonging within the site, among my colleagues and the workers at the home. There was also a lot of fear, which most came from being around so many animals. Growing up in the city, I was not exposed to a lot of farms or farm animals.

By the end of the fifth week I had met my colleagues, mastered all the names of the children in class (Briton, Njeri, Emmanuel, Ochieng, Freddy, Desire, Fortune, Ambrose, and Bivon). Those kids made every day I worked there magical, when I would come in feeling sick or feeling low, their happiness, smiles and enthusiasm for life always inspired me, that is why every day till my last day I would make sure that my last hour was spent bonding and playing with them. I would

push Desire and Ochieng on the swings, make sure Njeri finished her tea because she did not like to finish her food and then Freddy would teach me some Swahili. My colleges on the other hand understood my struggles with the language and made it a mission for them to help. During this period, I felt unity, valued and comfortable, I continue to build relationships with individuals at the site and my feelings of exclusion started to fade. By my last week at Dorothy's, I started to feel overwhelmed of feelings of sadness and guilt because I did not want to leave the children and I felt as though I was a member of the Dorothy Children's home family.

My ten-week experience at Dorothy children's home taught me so many things and I gained so much knowledge. Well asides from gaining new cooking recipes on meals such as githeri, and different ways maize can be cooked to make Kenya's signature meals.

One of the major things that this volunteer experience has taught me is the ability to see the world in a different way. I get the chance to see all aspects of the community and help as much as I can. There is nothing more rewarding than helping people in their time of need out of the goodness of my heart. Another thing I've learned through my experience is the ability to face real world problems, which also helps my decision-making skills. I have the opportunity to see the effects of people's poor decisions first-hand, such as mothers and fathers abandoning their children because of several reason like, their addiction problems, or no ability to cater for the child or children in question. This helped me learn that as human beings the decisions we make can hunt us to the end of the world and we should also think before we act. My experience has also helped me to learn to work as a team, a lot of the tasks handed to me were completed as a group such washing the windows, picking cereals, and making sure we all completed our daily tasks to our best ability.

Furthermore, my experience with community service has taught me compassion and understanding. I see what problems the children face on a daily like Ambrose fracturing his wrist and his mother couldn't afford to take him to the hospital for proper treatment. This helps teach me to be an understanding person because you never know what people are truly going through. Lastly, I have learned selflessness and caring about others. It helped me to understand that I do not have to do things in life just to get something back for my own benefit alone. Just knowing that I am helping people in their time of need is rewarding enough. Community service is important not only to benefit the community, but also to teach the individual valuable life lessons.

Activities

The activities carried out varied from day to day. I started on the 13th of May 2019, arriving at the home at 7.50 am sharp, my first task the first week was to teach the children because their regular teacher was not in. We recited names of animals, alphabets and did a lot of drawings.

By the second week, On the 20th of May I was assigned to picking cereals, which was when I had my first contact with ndegu beans which helped me differentiate ndegu beans and kidney beans and the different meals that they can be cooked with.

June 4th, I had my first encounter with the farm side of the home, which honestly will forever be one of my most memorable experiences during my undergraduate program. My first task was to clean the hen house, and pack the dirt outside through the second gate, as simple as that

seems it was super challenging because of my phobia for anything that has wings or that can fly. I am mostly grateful to that experience because with the help of the site supervisor, Doreen, I was able to face my odd fear.

From that week on I was mostly assigned to either washing windows outside, or the utensils used to process the milk after milking the cows, I also swept the compound from time to time.

Incidences

My first encounter was with the cows, I was assigned to sweep the unused elephant grass on the floor and take the dirt to the space outside where the dirt is usually burned after a while. Mr. Murithi who takes care of the cows, asked me to pass the broom to him to enhance his sweeping, in the process of that I fell with my back down. I remember falling on cow's excrement, and because I had an hour left before my shift ended, I had to stay at the site till my shift ended, covered in cow feces, it would probably be my most embarrassing moment in my whole adult life.

There was another situation which was more of culture shock, my task for that day was to wash the utensils that were used to process the milk after extracting it from the cows. I washed them with hot water for about thirty minutes, but apparently it wasn't well washed according to one of the staffs who milks the cows. So, on this day, being my fourth or fifth time assigned to the washing duty, after washing he just took the utensils to the tap and started washing them again even more thoroughly than I did. This affected my morale, because according to my culture when someone does that it is a sign of disrespect and complete rudeness and the fact that he is from Tanzania, I did not know how to act or react.

My third incidence was less embarrassing, I was asked to cut the weeds outside the gate, as my task for that day. This was a major encounter because I have never held a hatchet in my life, so I was clueless on how to hold much more on how to cut with it. I was too ashamed to ask for help, I ended up cutting my finger and holding the hatchet with both hands for hours till I managed to clear the area to my best ability.

Academic Analysis (UN human rights documents, Vision 2030, MDG's, Kenya Constitution etc.).

Human rights play an essential position in attaining sustainable development as their realization contributes to social and political stability and potential for innovation. Improving human rights is both an intention of development and a potential of attaining it. The key human rights thought is that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights (A, J, & J, 2012).

According to the Kenyan Constitution, the Children Act (Cap.586, Laws of Kenya); "This is an Act of Parliament that provides for the rights of children and seeks to enhance the welfare of children in Kenya."

Under this Act, the following

1. Safeguards for the rights and welfare of children- Right to health care which states that every child has a right to health and medical care of which parents and the Government

shall have the responsibility of providing for. Dorothy Children's home provides for health care by budgeting for the girls' sanitary pads, and making sure a physician or health specialist (nurse or doctor) visits after a regular period. As well as 'Right to Education' where every child is entitled to free and compulsory primary education, which the home provides home schooling with employed teacher and also sponsors the girls to school in Maruri. Lastly, Rights to religious education, parents have the responsibility of providing children with appropriate guidance in religious education. Dorothy's home is a Christian home, that teaches the girls to practice as Christians, in and outside the home. (General, 2014)

2. The Child's Opinion; Dorothy children's home sponsors the girls' education up to high school and then allows them the free will to decide what their future plans or goals are. In which they decide if they want to venture into a business, get a job or further their education.
3. The Basic Nutrition and Shelter; they are provided with a home, daily meals and even pocket money to school. The home is sponsored with a lot of food by institutions, and individuals from various parts of Kenya, this helps in the day to day running of Dorothy children's home.

Recommendation and Conclusion.

My experiences at Dorothy children's home has been life changing. As it opened my eyes to the unspoken aspects of life, thanks to the course being offered by USIU (community service learning) however there are some aspects that could be improved, which include;

1. Areas in which community service-learning program can be improved

- i. By allowing the option of choosing project for full time students, this is because it is more beneficial for the homes to have more food and resources provided for them. It is more efficient to allow students identify needs and problems in these sites and fund them. For example, in Dorothy's home there is an urgent need for a new solar panel and also a new hole to be dug for increase in water flow. As a hands-on student I believe I impacted the home but only in helping run the day to day activities, even though project student spends less time in the homes or sites. There is a shoe rack that was bought by USIU students, in year 2009 that is still useful for them at the home.
- ii. A reduction in the minimum weeks required, this is because it reduces the enthusiasm and genuity in students' work ethic. After week seven, most students are just looking forward to completing their hours and leaving. In most cases the site supervisor and even the children at the home end up noticing the transition.
- iii. USIU should encourage students to volunteer in animal shelters too, because the essence of helping one's community is to help preserve life of both people and animals. Animals, most especially dogs are known to improve social interaction, it helps break the cycle of pet over population which is a current issue in Nairobi, where the streets are flooded with stray cats and dogs. The major benefit of working at animal shelters is that they help stop cruelty in mass breeding facilities.

2. Areas in which Dorothy children's Home could improve include

- i. Employing more staff; there is an overdependency on hands n students. This because

there is a guaranteed number of at least ten students every semester, so the organization sees no need in employing labor which increases the work load for students and encourages laziness among the staff. At my site for instance because most of us were put on farm duty, he would assign us to do his daily tasks while he texts on his phone the whole day.

- ii. Be more creative with tasks assigned; after volunteering for six weeks and above, the tasks become a repeated routine which discourages students. There should adopt a culture of allowing the students find areas in the home that they consider requires improvement and work on it. Like an on site project, for example a student who has great artistic skills can decide to help them repaint a room or change the furniture arrangement.

References

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2. General. (2014, January 22). Kenyan Laws Providing For The Child Rights and Child Protection. CK Advocates LLP, pp. 1-6.