Student development scholarship: My time in Kenya

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The University offers several scholarships and funding opportunities for students to undertake placements all over the world. Here, Hannah Ewens (BSc Sport and Exercise Sciences 2012) reflects on her time in volunteering in Kenya and how being awarded an alumni travel scholarship allowed her to do this.

I expected and hoped my trip to Kenya would be an incredible experience that I would never forget. I was not disappointed.

We were given a few days to settle in to our apartment and get used to our surroundings. On the first Monday we headed to the office to meet the members of staff involved with the Little Sports Organisation (LSO), and learn more about the organisation. We found out more about the underlying programme that is run which is called 'Learn Without Fear'. It is a method of controlling behaviour (red and yellow card system) to discourage corporal punishment. This is a great initiative, as many schools in Africa still oppress children in this way, and seem resistant to change. Furthermore, the afternoon sport sessions that LSO run involve a social work session, which highlights a theme each week (e.g. fair play, gender equality, peace, anti-bullying and non-violence). It was exciting to know that the coaching that we were doing could benefit the lives of children in many different ways.

Due to a rapid growth in the organisation, LSO has been able to spread throughout Kenya. We decided to focus more of our attention on just two of these schools: Gatina and Satellite. We joined a team of eight Kenyan coaches to deliver a range of physical education and activities. For the younger children, we played multi skills games, whereas for the older children, we concentrated on developing their sports such as netball, football and rugby. This was an area that the organisation said was lacking, as many of the coaches had limited knowledge and access to materials that we have in England. Alex and Scott decided to take on the football; Laura and I, the netball.

Although, our initial focus was the sports training, we soon realised that there were other areas that could also be improved, in order to allow the children to reach their potential. On a catch up meeting after a week of coaching, we raised our concerns with Mike (CEO of the organisation). It was decided that we would hold a workshop for the group of coaches we were working for. This was a great challenge, which we were nervous and excited about undertaking. We restructured and organised the sessions, which immediately reduced their chaotic nature. We also discussed improving the social work sessions, by encouraging the children to think for themselves, rather than simply be told what is wrong and right. We suggested using techniques such as role play, singing and dancing. Following the workshop, we were incredibly satisfied to see a noticeable improvement in the sessions!

As well as coaching the children, I got the opportunity to work with the special needs unit in Gatina school. This was very interesting as it's a particular passion of mine. The children had varied needs, and had minimal resources and equipment. Despite this, these children were always happy, which I found incredibly infectious!

The many experiences that I went through on this trip, confirms a passion for teaching that will most likely shape my future. I will therefore be eternally grateful to the alumni who awarded me the student development scholarship. I am currently applying to do a PGCE course in primary, and I have no doubt that my Kenyan experience will inspire me during this time.

To find out more about the different funding opportunities the University has to offer please visit **http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/funding/alternative.aspx (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/undergraduate/funding/alternative.aspx)**

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