Charitable Claire SKIP's to Graduation Success

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A University of Birmingham student who set up an international charity while also finding time to study for her Medical degree will graduate on July 14th (1.45 pm).

Claire Thomas set up the first official branch of SKIP (Students for Kids International Projects) charity, at the University of Birmingham with the help of other nursing and medical students. SKIP gives medical, dental and nursing students across the UK the chance to work on public health projects with children in countries from Zambia to Belarus.

In five years the charity has grown from one group based in Birmingham to a project involving 14 University branches with more than 500 volunteers. Many of the students who have helped to develop SKIP have come from The University of Birmingham, including Claire and fellow medical student Stacey Mearns, who is also graduating this year.

Claire comments: “Studying medicine I wanted to find ways to use some of things we were learning in a practical way. We set up SKIP to give students an opportunity to do voluntary work and to develop projects that attempted to listen to local communities and particularly the needs of children.

I really didn’t anticipate how popular SKIP would prove and how much time I would end up devoting to fundraising, and organising. Five years on it’s tremendously exciting to see students organising their own projects across the world.”

The first project in 2003 took Birmingham students to Zambia, working on setting up two schools, developing sanitation and health education programmes. Students have been back to Zambia to work on the same project every year since.

The success of the Birmingham project has led to more Universities becoming involved in SKIP. The charity now has branches in Universities including Glasgow, Cardiff and Oxford sending students to countries including, Malawi, Sri-Lanka and India.

Our aim is that all the branches follow projects over a long period of time to maximise their impact on local communities. Our project in Zambia is now in its fifth year and we have built up many links with the area. At times it can be hard and we have met many challenges, but perseverance and dedication have seen us through in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

For me and hopefully for the other students who have given up their time to work on SKIP projects, getting to apply some of the skills we learn in classes and to see the health problems of the countries we work in, is a great experience. Most importantly, we hope that we can make a difference, however small, to the children and communities that we work with.”

After graduation Claire intends to continue working in running SKIP and to pursue a career that allows her to work in developing healthcare in the developing world.

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Notes to Editors

Photographers are welcome to take pictures of Claire’s graduation – at around 3.30pm (Great Hall – University of Birmingham). Contact the press office for more information.

Images of students taking part in SKIP projects in Zambia are also available on request.

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