

Planned Actions of Kindness: A Service Trip to South Africa

BY STUDENT COLUMNIST
NEHA SHABEER

Like most of you, all I used to know about South Africa was that it is an exotic land with a picturesque landscape, Shakira sang about at the World Cup, and it was the home of Nelson Mandela. This all changed on December 15, 2015, when a group of South African students from Elkanah House, a private school in Cape Town, visited Ashland High School on their "Bite the Big Apple" trip run by the non-profit, Hammer & Chisel. That day, I met a tall, intimidating South African man, who I would soon learn was Pete Le Roux, the Biology teacher at Elkanah House and CEO of Hammer & Chisel. He made an eloquent speech about high schoolers having the power to make an immediate change, living below poverty line, and effects of apartheid on South African racial sentiments. I left school that day truly empowered to make a difference in the community and world, while also confronting my own racial identity. It was truly one of those pivotal days in my life.

Fast forward one year and seven months later, I was standing in the Cape Town International Airport, after over 23 hours of flight, ready to begin my one-month service internship working in impoverished Cape Town communities with Hammer & Chisel. Now, I was officially a Strike Intern for Hammer & Chisel. During my stay, I realized that in the midst of abundant natural beauty, post-apartheid Cape Town holds many complexities between its wealthy first-world and poverty-ridden third-world aspects. Countless necessities we take for granted, such as food, water, education, and clothing, are, unfortunately, luxuries for so many Africans. There is such a severe water shortage in Cape Town; people need to collect shower water to flush their toilets. It is so easy to forget the privileges we have in the USA, because poverty does not surround us, and it

is awakening to view how different life is for people across the world.

During my four weeks there, I personally planned and executed five service projects with a team of 90 high schoolers from Elkanah House's Social Outreach team. One of my favorite projects was IGNITE, a mobile academic enhancement workshop, at two public primary schools. We taught grades 4 through 7 quality lessons in English, Science, and Math that their teachers typically didn't have the materials, technology, or time to plan. Seeing the eyes of students filled with excitement and hope in cramped classrooms of 40 students (or more) made me realize that they were not any different from how I was at that age: filled with curiosity. Sadly, they weren't blessed with same opportunities I had to fulfill that potential. While that was heart-wrenching to know, I knew that being there and showing these kids that someone outside of the four walls of their schoolhouse cared for them made all the difference. I was living by the Elkanah Social Outreach team motto of "Planned Actions of Kindness," and it felt so fulfilling.

My time in South Africa re-



energized me and helped me recognize the need hidden within our own MetroWest community. This newfound perspective gave me the drive to address these issues by collaborating my club at Ashland High, Breaking the Barriers, and Hammer & Chisel's Strike Action Network. The Strike Action Network harnesses students' passion for service after they go on the service trip and makes philanthropy a sustainable way of life. I am currently working on a project, with Arlington High School students, collecting unused food from restaurants and delivering it to homeless shelters to address our country's enormous food waste problem while feeding the hungry.

I encourage other Ashland

high schoolers to take part in "planned actions of kindness" and go on service trips. Service trips broaden perspectives, challenge comfort zones, and help you experience new cultures. If Ashland High's population of over 800 students and faculty came together every year to conduct a community service project like that, the impact would be insurmountable. We have assemblies on diversity, love, inclusion, and trust- but now we should put that into action with more emphasis on philanthropy.

A service trip is a powerful way to begin your journey of philanthropy and global humanitarianism. Breaking the Barriers is hoping to run a service trip (open to all AHS students) to Cape Town through Hammer & Chisel during April vacation 2018. For more information, visit hammerchisel.org or email Neha Shabeer (shabeerneh@ashland.k12.ma.us).

For more about the world through my eyes, keep reading my monthly column.

TUSCANY BUILDERS

Quality Home Remodeling

Additions

Renovations

Kitchens

Basements

Handyman Services



Contact us for your next home project!

508-887-2269

www.TuscanyBuilt.com

Good Times. Good Friends.
Great Care!




Call us
TODAY

*Live a life of learning,
culture, ease and fun at our
luxurious new senior community!*



Independent &
Assisted Living
Reflections Memory Care

369 Pond St, Ashland, MA
508-532-3197 | www.residencevalleyfarm.com