

RiTara Williams

South Africa: Impacting communities in Cape Town and beyond



There is no way that I could have known what to expect when I packed up my suitcase and got on the plane to travel to Cape Town, South Africa. I had traveled to South Africa before on a study abroad trip with Belmont University but this was the first time I traveled outside of the United States by myself. I knew I would have the support of my family if needed it but for all intents and purposes, I was on my own. Many articles would have you believe that when you travel alone, you see the world in a different way and you almost never return home the same person that departed on the adventure. I am here to tell you that the articles are all true!

Charity Work

Working with The Happy Africa Foundation (THAF) was like working a dream job. I was able to work in and with disadvantaged communities to provide much needed solutions to everyday issues while learning the ins and outs of a Non-governmental Organization. The communities we worked with, the people I interacted with and the fulfillment I felt during my year in South Africa have truly changed my life. I was able to get the reassurance I needed to continue my education in a completely different field than what I previously studied. The projects that I worked with the majority of the time I was in South Africa were the Red Hill Health and Nutrition program, the Luntu Education program, the GAPA education program and the Sporting Chance Street Cricket Program.

The Red Hill Health and Nutrition program works to provide the children in two preschools with nutritious meals for breakfast and lunch during the weekday. This program is needed in this community because Red Hill is in a remote location making it hard for families, let alone the preschool, to get essential resources. The Health and Nutrition program not only helps the preschool purchase much needed groceries for meals, it helps the principals and teacher learn how to budget their monthly spending allowance, it feeds children that may not get nutritious meals at home and it show both teachers and students how to eat healthy, well balanced meals.



The Luntu Education project seeks to transform Luntu EduCare into a government funded preschool. There are much needed safety and security modifications to the building that need to be completed before the government will sponsor the school. The problem is that the government does not provide the tools and resources for buildings to be brought up to their standards. This is where THAF

comes in and helps to fund the much needed renovations to the building. Once the renovations are done, and up to the government's standard, the school will begin to receive government funding and THAF will no longer need to be in the picture.

GAPA stands for Grandmothers Against Poverty and Aids. Through the research of University of Cape Town students, GAPA was born from the phenomenon of Grandmother (Gogos) taking care of the new generation due to a high mortality rate of HIV/AIDS in teens and young adults in the community. Gogos get together every afternoon to provide an afterschool program to feed the children of the community and provide them with an afterschool meal. This program is essential as it provides a safe place for a vulnerable group in the community. THAF has committed to taking this group of children on two educational field trips a year to teach them about the city they live in. With Table Mountain being Cape Town's most iconic feature you would think that the Gogos and children would have ventured to see it up close and personal but the reality is that they do not have the resources to do so. With this program, The Happy Africa Foundation bridges the gap to make an unfamiliar home familiar.



The Sporting Chance Street Cricket Program was a new endeavor when I began my work with THAF. An organization called Sporting Chance approached THAF with the opportunity to sponsor a disadvantaged community in holding a street cricket tournament for the youth in the area. This being my first major project to fundraise for, I wanted to do my best but I did not know anything about cricket. Through my fundraising efforts, I gained a basic understanding and appreciation of cricket and I got my first taste of interacting with business people in South Africa. The most heart-warming scene was that of the whole tournament coming together and knowing that I had a hand in making it happen. The children that participated in the tournament gained a new skill and were provided with a productive after-school activity.

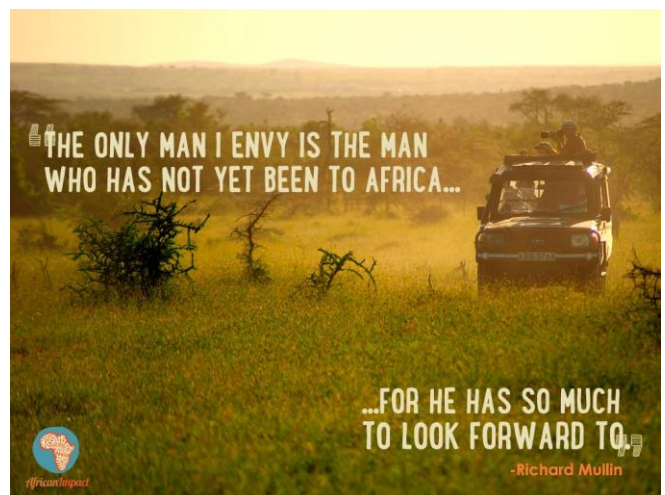
Marketing

I have to admit, I was dreading moving over to the marketing side of my internship and I did not see where it would be of any use to me. I came to South Africa to help impoverished communities and to see a long term improvement in the lives we impacted day-to-day, so I did not see how this internship would help me. To make things worse, I was completely in love with the work I was doing with THAF. When the time came to switch department I contemplated asking if I could decline the position but I reluctantly made the change when the day came. I quickly found out I was wrong to think that I did not need a marketing internship.



My marketing and social media internship turned out to be surprisingly fulfilling and developed an invaluable skill in me. First of all, I had a department supervisor who was beyond amazing as a human and with the knowledge she had in her career field. Secondly, I came to the marketing department of African Impact at a pivotal point in their corporate identity. On Mandela Day African Impact switched to a new logo and in the coming weeks they were updating their website to be more user-friendly. Through the corporate identity changes, I was able to learn about Google analytics and see how it can help an organization monitor their web traffic. With this internship I was also able to learn how to use Photoshop to create posts and ads on Facebook.

The new skills I learned proved valuable when I moved back to THAF in the New Year. The person who had been running both African Impact and THAF's social media moved to a new role in Zimbabwe so there was a big void to be filled. I helped where I was needed on the marketing side and I was put fully in charge of THAF's social media and marketing. Had I not learned what I learned in my marketing internship, I would not have been prepared for my new role. I am pleased to say that I implemented a complete reform of THAF's social media and marketing that directly influenced and increase in THAF's web presence.





I do not know what the future holds, but no matter what, South Africa has not seen the last of me. I felt a tug at my heart to go back to South Africa when I first visited in 2013 and I feel an even bigger pull now. I believe that we all have one place in this world that truly feels like home and Cape Town is that place for me!