

*Sarah Evans, Tanzania 2019- Final Lumos Report*

10 days after I graduated from college in May of 2019, I left for my Lumos project teaching English as a Second Language in Arusha, Tanzania, a bustling city nestled in between Mount Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti. From the day my feet met the red dirt roads of Tanzania, I knew that my Lumos experience was going to be met with uncertainty, a major lack of control, and a whole lot of joy. Looking back on that incredible day, I am met with an incomprehensible amount of gratitude for my experience as a Lumos Scholar. Although when I embarked for Tanzania, I was planning on spending my time as an English teacher to young children, I quickly learned that my time at the Sasa Foundation was going to be about so much more than just teaching. As my project grew and changed, I was able to expand who I was as a person and learn invaluable lessons about empathy, culture, and what it means to truly be a global citizen.

In the first few weeks of my teaching experience, I was placed in a one room schoolhouse teaching a small group of 10-15 children under the age of 6. We would be working through a lesson driven through drawing pictures and learning songs and I would finally feel like I was getting through to them when someone would come up to me holding a pencil and proudly proclaim “this is a ball”. Head in my hands, I knew that I had to rework my methodology if I wanted to make a dent in their English speaking by the time that I left in late July. I approached the director of the school and asked for some tips and she decided that the whole school needed to be learning the same thing as this would give them the ability to practice with one another. In my mind this meant that the other teacher and I would get together and plan our lessons to coordinate, however, they had a different idea. When I arrived at school the following Monday, I was told that I would be working in a different (and much larger) classroom from then on. I was confused as to why this was happening but excited to have a window in my class! However, it

wasn't until everyone was present and accounted for that I realized why I was moved into a new space, the founder of the school had decided that for the remainder of my time at Sasa, I would be the only teacher to all 42 students at the school. This change was a big adjustment, but one that ended up being incredibly successful. Over the next two months, the children learned about expressing their emotions and needs, how to tell time, how to read sight words, and how to greet others. It was a long road but watching the joy and wonder on their faces when they finally understood a new concept made every frustrating moment overwhelmingly worth it.



My original classroom



A group of excited students after lesson

About 3 weeks into the classroom change, I had one young girl come up to me and express her excitement at the upcoming lesson. She shared with me that she has been taking what she learned at school home to her mother and she has been trying to teach her English as well. This gave me an idea, and I spoke with the founder of the school about starting a women's education group. She was thrilled with this idea and once a week, we began working after school with the parents of the children and the school staff who did not speak English. To my dismay,

teaching adults a second language is much harder than teaching a new language to young children, however, their perseverance and excitement to learn something new made me even more motivated to do everything that I could to help them. Upon leaving Tanzania, I was told that the women's group would remain and eventually be expanded into a group for community members that are not affiliated with the school.



A Member of our women's group

In mid-June, my host mother overheard me talking with some friends about my passion for environmental issues and how I want to work to be better for the planet. Unknown to me, the Sasa Foundation is a member of the East African Climate Council, an intercountry organization dedicated to promoting environmental wellbeing across Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. My host mother approached me about this and shared with me that in early July she would be attending a council meeting and would love for me to join her. I was ecstatic at the potential of this and eagerly joined her about a week later. During the meeting I was able to listen to council members, politicians, and community members talk about how difficult it is for Africans to make lasting change for themselves while Western nations use fossil fuels and single use items without

abandon. Before this, I had not really thought about the impact on developing nations that we may have when it comes to the planet. Although in early May of 2019 Tanzania banned all single use plastic bags, they felt like they could never do enough to help the planet if their counterparts in Western nations did not make the same commitment. Long before attending this event, I have liked to consider myself an environmentalist. I use zero waste products; I shop sustainably, and I strive to help clean up my community whenever I get the chance. However, being able to do these things is an act of privilege. I have the finances to change the way that I choose products to purchase, and as an American, I can enact change that someone living in a developing nation may not have the chance to do. Being able to sit in on this meeting helped me recognize this, and I truly believe that I am better for it. Being able to learn about this truly opened my eyes to the fact that as global citizens, it is our job to look past the things that may be right in front of us, and to be open to new and different experiences in order to better serve our communities.

Since arriving back in the states, my life has been different. Not necessarily better or worse, just different. I view things through a different lens now, a lens of privilege, gratitude, and understanding that I did not have before. Don't get me wrong, I am so happy to be back with my family and friends during such a difficult time. I am so happy to have the privilege to be present for those I love, to go to work in a field that I love, and to shower with decent water pressure. Yet, I can't shake the feeling that I now have two homes. Tanzania will always hold a special place in my heart. I long for the smells, sounds, and people that once felt so foreign and scary to me. However, I have brought with me a plethora of lessons that I work to employ in my daily life now. I am extending myself grace in a way that I never have before, I am allowing myself to employ the art of "pole pole" in a place that has NEVER heard of it. People keep telling me that I did the children I was working with such an incredible service. That I changed

their lives. But I don't see it that way at all. My students and my sweet Arusha changed me more than I could have ever changed them. They taught me more about love, grace, peace, and overwhelming joy than I could have ever imagined, and I will never be able to express enough gratitude for that. However, when it came to my trip (and apparently my arrival back home) nothing, and I mean nothing, happened the way that I expected it to. But I guess this just became another opportunity for me to grow. Another opportunity for me to get out of the boat and trust in something much greater than myself. My heart longs for Africa, but I will be present here. I will love my people a little bit harder than I did before, and I will hopefully be able to start planning my return to the land I love so dearly as soon as possible.

My time in Arusha has forever changed me. Looking back, I am incredibly thankful for every single moment that I got to spend leaning into the unknown, the discomfort and the uncertainty of being somewhere that I was truly out of place because it is in this that I have grown into the person that I am right now. I will spend the rest of my life in gratitude to Belmont and the Lumos committee for giving me the opportunity to be a Lumos scholar as well as my ways than they will ever know.

