

Ubuntu Projects Abroad™



Volunteers Jackie Edelman and Jake Mercer-Pontier on the Holiday Project in the Wakefield Worship Centre

Staff News Update

Visitors and New staff members in the South Africa office

Page 2

Projects Abroad Human Rights Office

Read the updates on the PAHRO

Page 3-5

Stepping Into a Realm of Change

Read Alex Urbanski's article on her experience at the PAHRO

Page 6-7

Dirty Weekend-Seawinds Educare

Volunteers rolled up their sleeves to help beautify the Seawinds Educare.

Page 8

Donations

Special thanks to donations from volunteers

Page 9

Conservation Update

Read about what is happening up north in the Legodimo Reserve

Page 10

Volunteer Stories

Volunteers tell stories about their experience in South Africa

Page 11-14

Weekend Trip

Fun weekend trip to Oudshoorn for ostrich riding and Cango Caves

Page 15

Holiday Project

Read about our holiday project. Story written by Jacob Mercer-Pontier

Page 16

Volunteer List

See who is coming and going, accomodation and more!

Page 17

Staff News Update

Welcome to Cape Town Stuart Timson and Oko Togtuun!!



It was a pleasure to host Peru Conservation Director Stuart Timson and Mongolia/Finance Director Oko Togtuun in Cape Town for a few days! Both were able to see the sights and sounds of the city, check out our projects and help with development of new ones. We hope you enjoyed your stay Stuart and Oko, come back soon!



Welcome Claartje Van Wayenburg!

I'm Claartje, I'm from Holland where I am studying Leisure Management in Rotterdam. I'll be living in Cape Town and working for Projects Abroad for the next for six months. (I worked in the Dutch Projects Abroad Recruitment Office before I came here). I'm working on the new Recruitment and Marketing for local South Africans. I want to make them as enthusiastic as you are to volunteer abroad! I've visited the University of Cape Town and other schools throughout Cape Town to give presentations and answer questions. I also help organize the social events during the week and weekend trips. I love getting to know all the different volunteers from around the world and I love exploring the city and having fun on the weekends!





South Africa Human Rights Office Current Events

REFUGEE RIGHTS PROJECT

Work at the refugee camps has yet to show signs of slowing down! After xenophobic attacks in May 2008, over 22,000 foreign nationals living in South Africa flocked to approximately 50 refugee camps and shelters for protection. While they did find safety from the senseless acts of violence targeted at them, the conditions they were forced to live in upon entering these refugee camps were just as grim, as reported in previous newsletters.

To add insult to injury, various departments of government have been less than helpful and often put out mixed and unclear messages about what the future holds for these people. In the month of September, the Government decided to shut down all of the smaller camps and consolidate everyone

into just three larger sites. The reason for this was that it would be easier to maintain and manage the refugees if they could all be found in these three central camps. Projects Abroad interns, working in alliance with the *South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)* and *People Against Suffering, Suppression, Oppression and Poverty (PASSOP)*, were out every week at the refugee camps to monitor this process and to ensure that no ones rights, on either side of the struggle, were violated. The consolidation did meet with some resistance and left many refugees fuming. Some felt the Government had lied to or deceived them; others were unwilling to move to a new site so far away from their home base, which would make commuting to work and/or school virtually impossible.



Shortly after this process of consolidation, the Department of Home Affairs decided to interview every asylum seeker in the three camps to determine whether or not they should be approved for refugee status in South Africa. Again, this was a somewhat controversial move on their part and the purpose and outcome of it were poorly explained to the refugees. Many refugees went through the motions, filling out long forms and going for interviews, without having any idea as to why they were doing so. Just this week, the Department of Home Affairs has returned to the camps to notify the refugees of whether or not they have been granted permission to stay in South Africa. Many refugees from countries such as Burundi, Zimbabwe and Rwanda have all been told they must leave. Projects Abroad interns were there to monitor not only these recent developments, but also the appeal process against the rejection of application for asylum of the hundreds of desperate people now being told to return to the countries from which they came.

Projects Abroad Human Rights Office Continued...

WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROJECT

The weekly workshop at St. Anne's Women's Shelter has continued with the same enthusiasm and dedication as before. Because there is an entirely new group of women there, Projects Abroad interns are making good use of the detailed materials prepared by previous interns.

One week, interns held a discussion with the women about domestic abuse. The women opened up and shared with us their painful stories of physical, mental and verbal abuse they received not only at the hands of boyfriends and husbands, but also mothers, fathers and siblings. They also discussed the undeniable role that drugs and alcohol play in this cycle of violence. It was upsetting and at the same time eye-opening to hear all of these women say that domestic violence is a very ordinary, widespread occurrence here in Cape Town, and that despite appealing to the police for help, little is done to assist them.



Hearing these sentiments led to another workshop aimed at teaching the women their own rights. Most of them were totally unaware of the basic human rights to which they are entitled, speaking to the diminished role of women in many African cultures. Further discussions also illustrated their feelings of having little responsibility and control over their own lives.

While interns spend time talking about this problem with the women, they have also enacted a more constructive plan to combat these feelings. By helping the women write CVs and cover letters and also helping them apply for jobs, the women are beginning to feel more independent and empowered. For many of them, gaining employment will be the first step to standing on their own two feet, free of their abusers and without the need of hand-outs. The interns will continue this reflective/constructive approach to help the women help themselves in the following weeks.

CHILD DETAINEES' RIGHTS

Projects Abroad interns have also begun a new program at Bonnytoun House. This is a place of safety for juvenile delinquents awaiting trial. It is administered by the Department of Social Development rather than the Department of Correctional Services. It holds more than 160 boys who have been accused of violent crimes such as rape, murder and armed robbery. While they are at Bonnytoun House, the boys have access to education as well as physical activities, psychological care and rehabilitation programs. Because many of these boys have not yet been convicted of their crimes and still have the chance of returning to their homes, Projects Abroad interns see a great deal of hope and the ability and willingness to change in them.

Since the interns were unable to meet the boys before the first workshop and were unsure of how they would behave and what attitudes they would have, a video about Pollsmoor maximum security prison was brought to watch with them. This DVD shows the horrors that occur on a daily basis in Pollsmoor, the largest prison in South Africa that is exceedingly overcrowded, understaffed and housing gangs that specialize in violence and drug dealing.

Projects Abroad Human Rights Office Continued...

If the young boys at Bonnytoun House don't soon change their ways this could be the future home of many of them. Several of them had actually already been placed in Pollsmoor temporarily. They attested to the fact that, although the images in the video were frightening, it couldn't compare to the harsh reality of what life is truly like inside the walls of this notorious prison.

Although they are young and have been accused of exceedingly violent crimes, they expressed a sincere understanding of their responsibility for the actions they've committed. On top of that, they were more polite than most of the people I meet on a daily basis! As much as the Projects Abroad interns enjoyed the opportunity to speak with them, hear their opinions and give them some guidance, the boys also appreciated our time together and asked that we come back soon. Future workshops will be aimed at

teaching the boys their rights in a variety of fields but will especially focus on the legal process they will face in court to ensure that their rights are protected and they are given adequate access to justice.



LEGAL CASES

Some Interns at Projects Abroad Human Rights Office have been working to assist a variety of complainants of human rights violations referred to this office by the South African Human Rights Commission. We have helped people who have been discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability, among others. Our interns have played indispensable roles as mediators and legal advisors to these victims and investigators and researchers of their cases. The

Human Rights Commission continue to refer complainants to this office to seek redress for an abundance of abuses so interns always find themselves busy.

PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING

Working with the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), interns attend meetings in Parliament about a wide array of topics, such as the Child Justice Bill, the operations of the Scorpions, and the suspension of a Magistrate Court Judge. This monitoring is done to ensure that a third-party, unbiased listener can provide an account of what occurs at these important meetings as well as seeing that members of Parliament remain on topic and carry out all proceedings in agreement with the South Africa Constitution. Our reports are made available to the public so that people everywhere have access to these key developments and are used by a variety of media outlets and civil society organizations.

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

On top of all the other activities Projects Abroad interns are involved in, they always remain busy preparing articles, reports and presentations. One intern has been creating a presentation about the widespread yet relatively unrecognized issue of human trafficking in South Africa in order to raise awareness about it both within the country and abroad. Another intern has written a lengthy article on the current climate of South African politics to be published in scholarly journals as well as local newspapers. A third intern is preparing a paper on the injustice and cruelty of forced enlistment of children in rebel armies in the Democratic Republic of Congo for presentation at a variety of conferences internationally.



Stepping Into A Realm of Action and Change

By: Alexandra Urbanski

Although it has been over a month since I have had to say goodbye to South Africa and the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office “PAHRO”, the memories I have made continue to evade my thoughts and aspirations.

I have shared a wealth of stories with my family and friends, and the endless collection of pictures taken to capture the memories has inevitably exposed them to the plethora of activities, beautiful landscapes and wildlife South Africa has to offer. However, exposing others to the adventures and stories lurking behind the beauty of the South African landscape and its enchanting Table Mountain backdrop has been more challenging. I have begun to grapple with the notion that perhaps, only in stepping beyond the realm of being a tourist and engaging in the grim realities of refugee camps and human rights, one can actually attain a more revealing picture of South Africa, beyond its scenic and beautifully deceiving forefront.

I could have spent hours reading and trying to learn about xenophobia or refugee camps; however, it was not until I moved outside the confines of the office and into the reality of the Youngsfield Military Base Refugee Camp “Youngsfield”, that I was able to attain a deeper understanding of the issues, and was truly awakened to take action.

From hearing children express their hunger to me, or seeing the atrocious living conditions in the camps, I was injected with a greater understanding of the nation’s apartheid past and its current canvass of xenophobia and segregation. I began to see beyond the “Rainbow” nation, that ironically prides itself on diversity and tolerance, and became attune to the various needs of refugees and a greater need for volunteers and some type of action.

For me, the first course of action came in the form of launching a campaign to raise awareness about the human rights violations plaguing Youngsfield, and raise funds to purchase diapers and milk for young children in the camp. Thanks to the inspiration of the PAHRO supervisor, Theo, along with the unforgettable passion and dedication of my fellow PAHRO team we managed to raise over 500 Rand in one afternoon. The experience opened my eyes to the power of collaboration and dedication. The gratitude and smiles of the mothers and women leaders at the camp that day will never be forgotten, nor will the capacity of simple ideas and enthusiasm and their ability to make a difference.

Stepping Into a Realm of Action and Change Continued....



More cause for action arose in witnessing the young children's expressions of hunger, sadness, and isolation. The thought that perhaps for one day the children could escape from their dour reality and engage in games, crafts and various activities became the catalyst for organizing a Play Day for them.

It is the ever-expanding presence of the PAHRO and the future volunteers that injects me with hope and an ability to propel forward. I have faith that in stepping beyond the confines of the office or the beauty of Table Mountain, they too can attain the desire for change and power to take action against the injustices they witness.

So although I may have returned to a world of certainty, I have not forgotten about the darker world of uncertainty and the memories I have gathered at Youngsfield. Rather, stepping into the foreign world of hardship and grim realities, has granted me the inspiration to move forward with a greater appreciation for the certainty in my own life and a continuous thirst to conquer the injustices I have witnessed.

The Youngsfield Play Day marks the most memorable day for me during my time in South Africa. Managing over 50 young children of various ages, who were not accustomed to any order or structure in their lives proved to be a challenging feat. However, the PAHRO volunteers ploughed forward through the afternoon with smiles and profound enthusiasm for making the day as memorable as possible for the children. The thought of the priceless smiles of the children, or the little girl, Sambia, who attached herself to my back that day serve as a testament to another PAHRO success story- one, which was sparked by a simple idea and the enthusiasm of others ready to transform it into a reality.

Despite the undeniable success of the event, I continue to be haunted by the expressions of the children as we said our goodbyes and left them in the vast, empty field surrounded by wired fences. I realized at that moment, that although I will soon return home, their escape to a better life and conditions is not guaranteed. Rather, they would continue to live in uncertainty, while I would return to certainty.

Dirty Weekend & Volunteer of the Month

Sharon van der Meer



On Saturday, 15+ volunteers rolled up their sleeves and got dirty helping to paint and beautify our beloved Seawinds Educare! Volunteers helped paint the classrooms a baby blue color, making it much more bright and inviting for the children everyday! Volunteers also helped clean up the backyard play area by clearing the litter, raking the grass/weeds and trimming the grass and plants. Creche owner, Rita van der Merwve treated us all to a delicious traditional South African potjie stew and boerwors

rolls! It was a beautiful day and we all left the Educare feeling tired but satisfied at our hard work. Well done everyone!



Donations



A special thanks to **Peggy Maas** this month for her donation to the Seawinds Educare. Peggy fundraised back in the Netherlands before her arrival and purchased new mattresses for all the children for “Nap Time” as well as musical instruments to introduce music to the Educare as well as other educational items. Creche owner Rita van der Mervwe was so excited for this gracious donation, as were the children at Seawinds.

Thank you Peggy!

We would also like to thank volunteer **Lucie Ritzenthaler** for her donation to Fairview Primary School, from fund raising. Lucie was a volunteer from 2007 where she worked as a Teaching volunteer at Fairview Primary and thoroughly enjoyed her stay. The donation will be going towards educational materials for Fairview teachers and students!

Thanks Lucie!



Conservation Update



As many of our past volunteers may know this elephant hide has been under construction for many months and has been a slow process. Time spent working on this project has been dramatically increased over the past few weeks to get this hide up and running. I am pleased to be able to tell you all that finally the first story is nearing completion and should be operational within the next two weeks. To begin with a double story steel frame was erected and over the past few weeks the volunteers have used mopane poles and lots of binding wire to build the walls around this frame. I'm sure many of them will tell you how sore your hands and arms get twisting pieces of wire together for hours on end!

The use of mopane poles for the walls means the hide blends in well with the surrounding bush and in our opinion it also looks pretty good! Once the walls of the downstairs section were completed we fastened black shade cloth to the inside of the walls. This will help further reduce the chance of an animal seeing us within the hide which allows us to observe an animal's behavior in their true natural state. On many occasions working up there a breeding herd of elephants some 20 individuals strong have come to drink and cool off at the dam. If at that time we were actually inside the hide would they behave differently, appear more relaxed, be more playful or stay longer? A few of the many questions we are eagerly awaiting answers for. If we can spend more time observing a herd within this area it will allow us to pick out individuals, preferably the matriarch, and record any distinguishing features, for example, ear notches and tusk shapes. We can also take many up-close detailed photographs of individual elephants to aid our identification of particular herds. Then we can look at how many elephants and herds we have in the Legodimo area, their movements between the seasons, their impact on the environment and their impact on other ungulate species. All that remains for completion of the ground floor is the ceiling then we can start to use the hide. Its main use will be for fixed point observations of animal behavior and birds but we will also use it for the occasional sleep out. Leopard tracks have been seen around the dam so we may be very lucky and get to see one of these very elusive animals up close at night. Thanks to all the volunteers who worked hard towards getting this hide operational!

Volunteer Stories

Volunteer Stories are a way for our volunteers to write about their experiences in South Africa, whether it be a funny happening, cultural misunderstanding, travel and leisure, anything! Living in a new place, far from home, there is bound to be comical encounters and interesting insights gained from learning about new cultures and ways of thinking. Also, upcoming volunteers are encouraged to introduce themselves and tell a little bit about what you expect out of your time here in South Africa!

Janet McKnight, Projects Abroad Human Rights Office

(From left, Theo Kamwimbi, Catherine Coughlin, Janet McKnight)



As a student at Tulane University Law School in New Orleans, I was looking for the perfect summer opportunity to get hands-on experience with international law. I signed up with Projects Abroad and they placed me in their Human Rights Office, a non-governmental organization focusing on issues of human rights in South Africa. The first thing I saw as I arrived in Cape Town was a the most beautiful sunset casting purple, blue and orange hues of light around Table Mountain and Lion's Head. My experience in South Africa turned out to be just as colorful and spectacular as that first sundown.

I was one of the first few volunteers in the newly founded office in Rondebosch, Cape Town. Under the supervision of Theo Kamwimbi, myself and other volunteers were able to choose an individual project that most interested us. With the recent xenophobic attacks that occurred in Johannesburg and Cape Town in the month before I arrived, I was drawn towards working with immigration law. I had little knowledge about current South African law and the culture surrounding foreigners but soon discovered the common misconception between ordinary migrants and refugees. I was introduced to various reading materials—everything from newspaper articles and national legislative acts to international human rights treaties.

After becoming familiar with the historical background and legal basis of immigration in South Africa, I took different field trips with other volunteers in the office. We made visits to regional prisons, judicial inspectorate offices and community events. Our office engaged in a collaborative effort with the Parliamentary Monitoring Group to be able to take notes at sessions in South African Parliament. I monitored sessions on education reform, amendments to the South African Refugees Act and a special seminar on migration and xenophobia held on World Refugee Day on June 20, 2008. The volunteers were invited to a panel discussion on xenophobia organized by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation and hosted at the University of Cape Town, where Theo introduced us to many of his colleagues in the academic community. We conducted research at the law library at the University of the Western Cape and were given the opportunity to interview professors on campus who specialized in issues of human rights. I also visited a township and spoke to people about their personal experiences and their thoughts on the future of South Africa's attitude toward foreigners and refugees. All of these encounters gave me an appreciation and understanding of the situation of displaced people in the country.

In the last week of my month-long placement, PAHRO went to Youngsfield refugee camp, the only camp in the country set on a military base. At first, South African military personnel and risk management officials were weary about our presence, believing us to be journalists.

Volunteer Stories Continued...

After we explained our purpose as humanitarian volunteers and students, we were allowed to sit in the tents and observe sessions held by the South African Human Rights Commission to inform refugees of their rights. I spoke with people from Rwanda, Somalia and Zimbabwe. They told me about their journey to the country and their treatment by the South African government and local citizens. Back at the office, Theo was kind enough to share stories with us about his life and experience as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My explorations, interviews and visits to different sites culminated in a research paper comparing South African refugee law in theory with how the laws are implemented in practice. The paper has been submitted to an international academic journal and will hopefully be selected for publication.

I have previously traveled internationally, with family and friends and as a student, but nothing has compared to the experience of working abroad in Cape Town. In even a short period of time, I learned a great amount about refugee law and the culture and people of South Africa. My time with the Human Rights Office also helped me to better understand the field of law that I want to enter after graduation. I plan to work in Africa or the Middle East in some area of humanitarian law and everything that I experienced in Cape Town has better prepared me for this goal.

I encourage those who are thinking about volunteering abroad to work with Projects Abroad. The program is incredibly well administered from the very moment you sign up and throughout your stay in the host country. The Human Rights Office will expose you to people and events you will not experience anywhere else. Especially for people who are in law school or thinking about entering law, PAHRO will be one of the most rewarding opportunities of your life!

Natasha Pesaran, Teaching Volunteer, Hyde Park Primary

Before I arrived in South Africa I was very nervous and unsure about what to expect. But I was also filled with anticipation for what I felt sure would be an amazing experience - and I was not wrong. Volunteering in Cape Town was definitely one of the best decisions I've ever made, and I have had a truly rewarding and memorable two months.

During my time in Cape Town, I stayed with a host family in an area called Parkwood on the Cape Flats. Unfortunately, my first impressions of Parkwood were not particularly welcoming; on the day when I arrived it was dark and stormy, and the heavy sheets of rain and wind made my arrival seem rather ominous! However, the hospitality and generosity of my host parents, Lecia and Les, soon made me feel at ease. The Bagley's house really became a home away from home for me. Life was very relaxed and there was always laughter and people visiting – sometimes it felt like the whole of Parkwood knew the Bagleys! Every evening, we all sat down to a family meal at 6.30 – just in time for the start of the Afrikaans soap, *7 de Laan*, which we watched religiously! At weekends there were plenty of opportunities to explore Cape Town with the other volunteers and experience South African culture. It's such a beautiful and diverse place and there is so much to do – from surfing in Muizenberg beach, to hiking up Table Mountain, going on a wine tasting weekend in Stellenbosch and clubbing on Cape Town's famous Long Street. One weekend, Lecia took us on a drive round the Peninsula and the views of the coast and mountains were so stunning – you can't help but fall in love with the city and its breathtaking location.

Volunteer Stories Continued...



For my placement, I was teaching at a local Primary School, Hyde Park Primary, which conveniently was only 2 minutes walk from the house! Most days, I didn't even have to walk alone, as some of my students would wait outside the house for me in the mornings. Sometimes it felt like I had my own personal bodyguards escorting me to and from school! Hyde Park Primary is one of the better schools in the area, and I thought it seemed well-off in comparison to many other schools in Africa; they provided text books, and there was a library and even a computer room. However, it was still under-staffed and under-resourced, and what struck me was not only the lack of resources and opportunities for the children, but also their desire for affection and attention.

I was assisting in a class of 50 children, aged between 11 and 12. On my first day, I remember walking in to be met by a sea of faces all looking up at me, wide-eyed. A few of the children even gasped in amazement! With such a large class the types of teaching activities were limited. Mostly the children were either copying from the blackboard, listening to the teacher, or doing exercises from a text book. They rarely had the opportunity do group work, or carry out arts projects or sports. They often became bored and restless, and could be really exasperating, especially when they were constantly fidgeting and wouldn't listen.

After my first week, I quickly realised the difficulty in controlling such a large number of children. One day the teacher was absent from school due to illness and I found myself alone with the class for the entire day – it was one of the most exhausting days of my life! I constantly had to think on my feet to keep them occupied and it was nearly impossible get them to listen to instructions. I constantly had fifty hands waving 'Miss' at me, all to ask the same question, which I had already answered ten minutes earlier!

The teachers often complained about the lack of discipline. Unfortunately, they had to resort to shouting, making threats, and sadly, corporal punishment. Many of the children, particularly those who were badly behaved, came from difficult home backgrounds. From speaking to the teacher, I discovered that the 'trouble makers' typically had no father figure, or one or more parents who were involved in crime or

Volunteer Stories Continued...

drugs. These children, lacking the support at home, often struggled with schoolwork and some, at 12 years old, some were completely illiterate. I spent most of my time helping individuals, especially the weaker students. Sometimes it could be a real struggle. I remember trying to help one child, Ronaldo, to read letters and recognise basic sounds. One day he recognised the sound 'er' and it was such an achievement! I was so proud of him. Moments like those made up for the tough days.

I formed a strong bond with the school and the children. They were so excited and enthusiastic, and were especially curious about my life in England. Every one of them was willing to learn and capable of achievement. Unfortunately, not all of them had the attention, encouragement and opportunities we too often take for granted. On my last day, I was so sad to say goodbye. The children had made me cards and some even brought me chocolates and gifts. I was so moved by their love and generosity and I really wished I could have done more for them.

My experience in South Africa has taught me so many things. Living in Parkwood enabled me to experience and appreciate another culture and way of life. Despite the fact that problems like crime and drugs are a part of daily life for so many, the community is so relaxed and welcoming to outsiders. I was often greeted as I walked down the street by people who would say 'Afternoon, Miss,' or 'Hello, Teacher,' and I really came to feel part of the community. Cape Town is a really unique place and I will never forget my time there. I only hope that I can go back again very soon!



Tiffani Wesley, Human Rights/Law Volunteer, RAPCAN

I worked for a children's rights organization called RAPCAN which stands for Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. I went in not knowing what to expect but came out changed forever. While working for RAPCAN I helped research and develop a program for boys ages eleven to fourteen that seeks to help prevent gender-based violence and strengthen their relationships with their families. Before I began my research I knew very little about South African culture, especially in regards to gender-based violence. I came out, however, with a wealth of new information that has forever

impacted my view on the world. What I learned, really showed me how important it is to foster a sense of self-worth and self-respect in kids starting at a young age. I realized how lucky I am to have grown up with strong family values. My research involved more than just searching for statistics about South Africa (like the fact that South Africa is believed to have the highest statistics for gender-based violence in the world). My goal was to dig deep and find out what are the cultural, economic, and social contributors to gender-based violence and what steps need to be taken to sway young South African men from becoming one of the statistics. While working for RAPCAN I also had the opportunity to attend a sub-committee hearing on the Child Justice Bill and visit the children's department at the Wynburg Magistrate Court. It was very interesting, as an American law student to see the difference in the court systems between South Africa and the United States.

Weekend Trips and Socials



Trip to Oudshoorn!

This month volunteers went on a trip 5 hours outside of Cape Town to a sleepy town in the countryside called Oudshoorn!

Oudshoorn is known for its high population of ostriches! Ostrich is a popular food item for South Africans, particularly in this part of the country! Some volunteers even worked up the courage to hang on tight and ride on one!

Volunteers also enjoyed the beautiful scenery by going quad biking through the mountains and waterfalls, abseiling down rock cliffs, not to mention the horse-back riding safari, trotting past rhinos!

It was quite the action packed weekend!

Holiday Program - Wakefield Centre



Written by: Jacob Mercer- Pontier, Teaching Volunteer at Hyde Park School

It was a wonderful feeling to be met, upon entering the building, with the excited smiles and anxious laughter of the children we were going to be spending the week with. These were the children who have been living their entire lives, as little or as much as time had endowed upon them, on the streets of poor neighborhoods and passing time playing water bottle fetch with stray dogs or kicking around half-inflated soccer balls. Although forgotten or ignored by most of society, these children were quick to befriend myself and my co-teacher, Jacqueline Edelman, and it wasn't long before we were bombarded with hugs and high fives from the appreciative children.

The holiday program, aptly named Kid's Club, was held at the Wakefield Worship Centre and was the brain-child of the church's current pastor, Franklin J. Dennison, and his son, the musically-talented, Morgan Dennison. The program charged no fee for the kids, whose numbers grew astonishingly as the week flew by, and provided both a fun (and safe) way to pass the time over the school break and a free snack of donated breads and donuts (kindly donated by one of the local bakeries). The program was run, primarily, by Morgan Dennison who started each day with a twenty-minute session of original Christian jazz/kid's sing-a-long songs that even had me, admittedly not the most religious individual, dancing along with the children, laughing, and thoroughly enjoying myself.

I spent the first day getting myself acquainted with the children and finding out their names, favorite songs, and favorite sports team (as I was answered with a nearly unanimous response of Manchester United, a big team down in these parts). On the second day, we split the classes up into smaller groups and I took my children outside to the courtyard for some games and very little teaching (after all, these kids are on a *break* from school). The third day was spent studying the movie, Horton Hears a Who, which taught the very important lesson that: "A person is a person, no matter how small". I ended the week with more games and a few devoted followers to whom I was basically some kind of Supreme Being to be hugged and hung upon from any limb they could grab on to.