

From South Africa to Brussels How the Bambisanani Partnership helped me reach the role of UK Young Ambassador

Sylvia Cullen

My involvement with the Bambisanani Partnership started in my first year at St. Mary's, Menston when I was inspired by the schools amazing work in South Africa. This was reinforced by listening to students who had actually been out to South Africa volunteering on the various Bambisanani programmes. Early on in my school career I had the opportunity to get involved in 'Bambisanani Enterprises' a student led group that raised funds for the charity. The partnership was a constant throughout my time at St. Mary's and in the Sixth Form I had the fantastic opportunity to visit South Africa as part of the volunteer team. I have stayed in contact ever since; its influence on my life and on my world view has been quite remarkable.



In October of last year, during my Freshers week at University, I was fortunate enough to be elected a UK Young Ambassador and Britain's official delegate to the European Youth Forum. The Youth Forum is the meeting place of delegates from all of the Youth Councils across Europe and I get the privilege of voting on behalf of the British Youth Council. Due to it being an independent body and not affiliated with the EU, our place remains secure and hopefully I will be able to spend the rest of my three year term travelling and working in wonderful European cities, rather than visiting them virtually on Zoom!

I have long been interested in Politics and whilst in the Sixth Form I was elected to represent Leeds as a member of the UK Youth Parliament Westminster. During my two year term, I spoke in numerous debates on various topics. It was a great honour to be asked to give a presentation about the Bambisanani Partnership to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee where I presented the Chair with commemorative book about the charity's work. It has always been clear to me that the work of the partnership is about so much more than the two week visit to South Africa, wonderful though it may be, and during the application process for the UK Young Ambassador role, I realised just how much it has enriched my own life and opportunities.



The leadership skills that you are taught in the lead up to the visit and then develop whilst you are there are timeless and transferable. I have used one amusing example of this in several interview situations. Very few people can give the answer "I had to adapt my sports coaching to work around the cows" when asked for an example of a time that they showed flexibility and leadership! The opportunity to speak publicly about the charity, both within school and out, is fantastic for confidence and public speaking skills, something that I was very grateful for when I was given the chance to speak at the dispatch box in the Houses of Parliament. Most of all, the underlying value that we are strongest when we work together, as seen with the slogan of the Bambisanani Partnership of 'Working together, Learning together', is something that I believe to be incredibly special, in our current times more than ever. The Bambisanani Partnership taught me the value of working cohesively and now, as I find myself debating policy positions with delegates from other countries and feeling ever so slightly (!) out of my depth, I realise how lucky I was to get to work with a charity that set me up with so many skills for life.



“ Sylvia is a most impressive young woman. Her commitment to the partnership started early and has been exceptional. I, like the rest of the Bambisanani team, am absolutely delighted with her achievements but not at all surprised by them. Sylvia is genuinely concerned about social justice and is prepared to take action to make the world a better place. She is an outstanding leader, campaigner and advocate with the ability to motivate and inspire others. Her vision, energy and humanity are an asset to any team and we are delighted that she is still involved with the partnership through our Alumni Group. I am not sure where all this will take her (Education, Law, Politics?) but what I do know is that Sylvia is destined to make a real difference whatever she decides to do in the future.” – David Geldart, Founder and Chair, Bambisanani Partnership

For more information about The Bambisanani Partnership visit

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