

VOLUNTEERING WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

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The Bambisanani Partnership has gained international acclaim for its pioneering work in one of South Africa's poorest regions, using sport as a catalyst to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership. This summer has seen the multi-award-winning charity take on its most ambitious volunteering project in its 12-year history. Students and staff from St Mary's School in Menston, the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University have recently returned from South Africa where, both individually and collaboratively, they extended and developed the work of the partnership.

Following 18 months of preparation, planning and fundraising, 16 students from St Mary's embarked on a mission to deliver a 'Leadership Through Sport' programme to students at Mnyakanya High School, situated in the remote, rural Nkandla area. Throughout their visit, St Mary's students were assisted by three students from Eshowe High School who supported them with the delivery of the leadership programme and provided valuable assistance with English and Zulu language translation.

After four intense days of hockey, netball and rounders coaching, 30 Mnyakanya students were fully equipped and confident enough to organise and host a spectacular Sports and Reading Festival for over 120 children from Ntolwane Primary School. The success of the collaboration between the students from both countries was celebrated with a special presentation ceremony. South African students received leadership awards and annual awards as a way of recognising and celebrating their ability and potential as outstanding leaders. Additionally, as part of the visit, the St Mary's students delivered lessons in a wide range of curriculum areas. Enthusiastic staff



and students from Mnyakanya High School experienced high-quality lessons in English, maths, geography, science, music and drama. In one lesson, Mnyakanya students represented the components of the solar system and moved around the playground as a way of learning how the solar system works.

The final part of their visit saw the St Mary's students volunteering at uMlalazi Day Centre and Crèche, a centre for AIDS orphans and vulnerable children run by the Zulufadder Children's Trust. This was a magical time for the St Mary's students where they loved bringing stories to life with the use of props and toys and, for the first time, helped with the centre's gardening project by planting some vegetables.

Mrs Catherine Chattoe, Bambisanani co-ordinator at St Mary's said, *"The St Mary's students were outstanding ambassadors for the school and the charity. Their kind heartedness, emotional intelligence and energy were exemplary; I am incredibly proud of their work."*

Alongside the St Mary's visit, this was the third year of volunteering in South Africa for the University of Leeds. Members of staff led this year's visit of ten students representing a wide range of degree programmes. The students made up the Gryphons Abroad team that successfully delivered two major projects over the two-week period: *Cycling for Success* and *Inspire through Sport and Leadership*. Both these projects were also supported by three students from Leeds Trinity University.

The Cycling for Success programme was based at Mnyakanya High School where the team taught a group of 30 students how to ride and maintain bikes. Student Francisca Darko said, *"The Cycle for Success week of the trip has been amazing. To see students who had never been on a bike cycle by themselves and know how to fix them when something went wrong after only three days of teaching is pretty unbelievable!"*

By the end of the week, all students, most of whom had never been on a bike before, could ride a bike and nine students had all the skills and knowledge of road signalling to cycle on the main road. The skills the students have learnt are invaluable and many of them have already used the bikes to get to and from school, which, for some, was previously a two-hour walk each way.

The South African school teachers also spoke about the impact of the project on the students' motivation, confidence and desire to succeed, and how the bikes were being used in the community. Mrs Pk Zondi



from Mnyakanya School commented: *"It's not only the school that is benefiting from these bikes, it's also the community. Learners who have learnt these skills are now showing others how to do it at the weekend. They learn a lot doing this project, they become motivated and go on to be something outside of the community."*

The second week of the visit saw the students from the two Leeds universities lead the Inspire through Sport and Leadership programme to over 160 primary school children from the town of Eshowe. Through a range of sporting activities and

challenges, the primary students learnt a range of leadership skills based on communication, organisation and planning. This work culminated in the children taking responsibility for leading sports sessions.

The Gryphons Abroad team also led classroom sessions based around their degrees, where subjects as diverse as maths and mental health were taught.

In the Bambisanani spirit of 'Working Together and Learning Together', the University of Leeds team made a major contribution to this year's programme by



supporting staff and students from Leeds Trinity University who were making their first student visit to South Africa as part of the Bambisanani Partnership. Seven students travelled to KwaZulu-Natal, as part of the university's landmark inaugural international volunteering visit to the region as part of the Bambisanani Partnership. Three accompanied the Gryphons Abroad team in the delivery of the Cycling for Success and Inspire through Sport and Leadership projects. This first collaboration of its kind between students and staff from the two universities was a great success, representing an exciting avenue for future combined work in the region.

Meanwhile, alongside these projects, four primary education students from Leeds Trinity spent their time in two South African schools as part of their alternative teaching placement module. Their aim was to extend the successful work of the Bambisanani Partnership into some of the primary schools within the KwaZulu-Natal region. Week one saw the students work across grades 4-7 in Ntolwane Primary School in Nkandla, with class sizes averaging 70-100 pupils. A range of subject areas was covered, including geography, maths, physical education and English, with the Premier Skills resources (developed by the British Council in partnership with the Premier League) proving to be particularly useful in facilitating the delivery of English language lessons to Zulu natives. In week two the students were allocated a specific grade to teach at John Wesley Primary School in Eshowe, presenting an opportunity to work alongside local teaching staff, and to learn more about the country's education system and culture.



All of the Leeds Trinity students involved in the project received academic credit towards their respective programmes of study, and stressed the personal and professional gains they had achieved throughout the two weeks. Harriet Mackinney said she felt, *"Privileged to share the ethos of the Bambisanani Partnership"* with the primary school pupils she had worked with, and Oorjitha Prem poignantly suggested that the visit had been, *"An amazing learning experience for both parties, more so for us, in my opinion."*

Dr Chris Rowley, who led this first Leeds Trinity University visit, said, *"I am delighted that Leeds Trinity is part*

of the Bambisanani Partnership. It's a fantastic partnership that shows the impact that sport and education can have on communities and individuals. For our students it is an amazing volunteering opportunity where they can make a real difference to the lives of children and young people in South Africa."

Our challenge to all those volunteering on this project was to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before and take the partnership to a new level. The students and staff involved in this year's visits to South Africa certainly achieved that, developing and refining existing programmes and introducing new initiatives. Over 40 young people from three institutions in Leeds worked with almost 500 Zulu youngsters over the course of two weeks in the most challenging circumstances. For all those involved, their lives will have been changed in some way. These young people are an inspiration. The innovative collaborative work between St Mary's School and the two universities is incredibly positive and is now a real strength of the partnership. All the staff involved have my utmost admiration for the opportunities that they are providing for their young people; they too are an inspiration. It is wonderful to be working so closely with three organisations who are willing to 'live their vision and values' in providing these remarkable life-changing experiences. This is real education, and long may it continue. ■



David Geldart is the founder and director of the Bambisanani Partnership. For more information, visit: www.bambisananipartnership.org