



Service Learning Reflection

Scouts Canada - South Africa Scout Association UNMDG #1 Creating A Better World



Student Name: L. Creighton Avery
Organization: Scouts Canada
Location: Welkom, South Africa
Date: 1-27 August 2010

Reflection Date: 3 August 2010

Today we worked around Camp Samac with general maintenance and some demolition to do.

We started the day as a group, but moved into our patrols later in the day for work. Along with three other members, I was put to the task of taking apart an old canoe trailer, so it could be used as a luggage trailer for other campers. This involved saws, hammers, drills, and more. Other people worked clearing trails, cutting grass on campsites and more.

These projects were a double bonus as we were not only able to learn the basics about tools and work safety which will be very important over the next month, but we were able to give back to the place that is hosting us for this pre-camp.



Kelly and Bruce fix a nearby bridge.

Reflection Date: 4 August 2010

Contingent members complete the Discovery Phase of SWA.



Today wasn't so much about the do and act, but the explore and learn as we completed the first phase of the Scouts of the World Award: The Discovery Phase.

Learning about the UN Millennium Development Goals, we examined different situations where someone isn't able to go to school, or doesn't have access to medicine and clean water, and so on. Examining the factors that contribute to it, and why they can't get out of their situation, we then came up with ideas in small groups on what *we* could do to address their needs and help alleviate them from poverty. As our project in South Africa deals with UNMDG #1: Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger, many of our solutions were schools that also provided food to the students, teaching them water management and farming techniques. This is exactly what we'll find in South Africa as the places we are going to, have food gardens in place at schools, but can't grow food in the dry season, due to the climate. By installing water reservoirs we will be giving them the chance to continue their work all year around,

providing a stable source of food, in all seasons.

As well as what *we* can do, we looked at what the government's responsibility is, and how it is, or isn't being reached. For the younger youth on the project, this has really begun to put things in perspective showing them what is happening and what an impact they will have on the lives of so many others.

Reflection Date: 10 August 2010

Today we started the work that is the purpose of the trip: installing water reservoirs at schools to support local Scouts' Food For Life program. When we were originally planning this trip, we were looking to Mafikeng, South Africa as the location site, because that is the birthplace of Scouting. It would be so appropriate to return there and help the place that started it all. Unfortunately, because of protests and riots in response to the World Cup, we were unable to go. Looking around to the rest of South Africa, the area of Welkom approached us and asked for help. Going into greater detail, we found that the Scouts run a very successful Food For Life program, where they grow food on school property to supply the school, orphanages and half-way houses with food they desperately need. The problem they have come across is that during the dry season, they can't afford the municipal water to keep their gardens alive, and quite often have to suspend the program for that part of the year.



Food For Life gardens at various schools.

It was in the problem, that we found a solution. During the wet months, the country gets a lot of rain, that at times causes mudslides and flooding. By installing rain gutters and directing them into two 5000 gallon water tanks, we could collect the water during the rainy season, to be used in the dry season, instead of using the municipal water. This would save them money, and allow them to carry on their work all year long. We could help them, help others.

It was very important to us to talk to them and determine what they need, because there is no point building a school, if there are no teachers, or a hurricane shelter, if they already have one. This was something they needed, and something we could supply.

Yes, we could have sent the money down for someone else to build it, but this project isn't only about the South Africans. It is also about the Canadian youth that take part, showing them a different part of the world, and how they can make a difference, and make an impact, on a much larger scale than they ever thought possible.

Reflection Date: 11 August 2010

Me, fitting the tanks for the pipes.

It's the second day, and second school. Today I worked with Kelly and she taught me how to tap, block and connect the two water tanks. It was very entertaining, and I dare say I even learned a bit. It's so cool to be able to connect the tanks and attach them to the gutters. While before I was just taking directions: stand there, hold this, lift this, today was different. I got to be an active part in construction, physically building, and changing this place.



Reflection Date: 12 August 2010

There are no words to describe today. Every day I think I have seen everything, nothing can be new, and every day I am completely surprised. Showing up at our third school, we were greeted by not only a formal Scout parade, but the entire school. With speeches, cultural dances and everything else, we felt bad that we hadn't prepared for it.



It was amazing to hear them sing, dance and laugh. Possibly at us, but that's ok. Afterwards we took a bunch of pictures and then started to work. Today, it was up to me to teach Gillian and Tommy what Kelly taught me the day before. I didn't even do that bad, and they were excellent pupils!

This afternoon we had the privilege of visiting Morning Star, a centre/day care/school for HIV+ children. This centre holds 90 children at all times and has a waiting list of over 100 with upwards of 1000 children with HIV not even on the list. After explaining how the school works, we went for a tour. The first thing we saw was a wall of stars with names on them. Then our host explained that these are all the children who have died during their time in this program.

Teaching Gillian how to waterproof the pipes



After more of a tour, we went and saw a women's program where the single mothers embroidered and completed other handicrafts which are then sold for a small profit. Practically cleaning them out, we were told that for many women, it is their only wage or income for the entire household.

Playing with a child at Morning Star

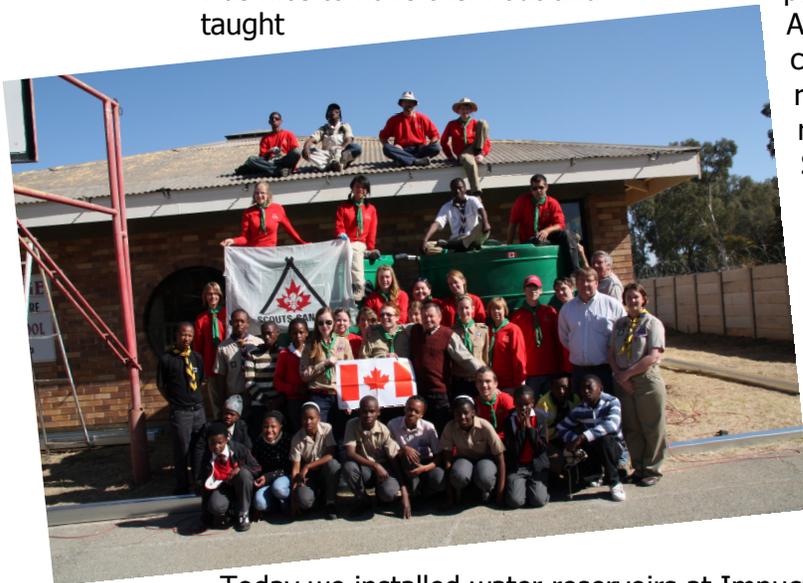
After this, we went to play with the children. As it was time for the toddlers and infants to play outside, that's who we played with! And they are so cute! Our host made it very clear that HIV cannot be contracted through hugs, but only blood and sex. Picking up the kids and spinning them around, their smiles made us all so happy. There was one kid I kept spinning around that eventually caught on that when I said "Again?" I would spin again. So all he said after that was "AGAIN!" I don't think any of the kids could speak English. We also played a lot of games with them, which kept them entertained. We've been told we can come back next Thursday, and I'm very excited for that.



Reflection Date: 13 August 2010

Today I worked in full uniform. Why you ask? Because today we had a media representative (paper, I think) come and ask us some questions. While he was more interested in Welkom Scouting, it was nice to have them out and taught

promoting Scouting. In actual work, I Andrew, Kiki and Ivy how to tap and connect the water tanks. I also helped rivet the gutters in their brackets! It was really great to have helped out the local Scouts gain publicity, and put this organization in such a good light. Teachers have told us that many students don't like being in Scouts, or won't join, because it's seen as nerdy, much like here in Canada. Then, when they see us, they all want to be Scouts so they can hang out with us, talk with us and be associated with us.



Reflection Date: 16 August 2010

Today we installed water reservoirs at Impucuko. It's amazing how we all seem to know what we're doing here! We've learned very fast, and by taking on new jobs every day, we're ensuring that we learn something different. Today I helped attach the gutters together to make the proper length. I really don't like riveting, but it has to be done.

Photo taken for the local press, which is why we're in uniform and activity shirts instead of work clothes.

Every school has new people. Hundreds. Hundreds of people that we have helped. It's incredible really. In the other projects I've been apart of, it's the one local area that we've directly helped. Here, by travelling to different schools each day, we help each school, each teacher and each child in that school. That's a lot of people. And each day, our hearts grow a little more. We realize the heart these people have, their unwillingness to sit down and take what life gives to them. Instead, they are all ready to fight for what they want, what they deserve. It is truly amazing.

Reflection Date: 17 August 2010

Today we installed water reservoirs at Ed-U-College. While this was a much nicer area, the barbed wire around the place tells us it's still not safe. It was a little odd being here because there wasn't a single child or teacher around. With the teachers on strike, there have been few students at each location, but many show up to see us, see what we're doing. They like to play with our hair, see our skin and listen to us talk. Here, because we were in a complex, there wasn't a single child. It made our work much simpler, and we were done much faster, but it was odd. We know that our work will make an impact, but we couldn't see their faces, sing our songs, take pictures, and more.



Hard at work, installing gutters

Reflection Date: 18 August 2010

Today was a short day at work. Arriving at work, we only had to connect the pipes and change the down spout. Finishing in an hour and a half, we then had tea and sandwiches supplied by the staff at the school.



Badge for completing the HIV/AIDS seminar.

This afternoon we had a seminar on HIV/AIDS. This typically is a two day course and is mandatory for all Scouts in South Africa. We blew through it in two hours because of time constraints. At the end of it, we could see that HIV clearly isn't a small problem, but an epidemic that affects 1 of every 3 people. Statistically, that's 7 people from our group. Looking back at the hundreds of children and Scouts we've met, how many of them have HIV? How many have lost family or friends to this disease? It just hits home a little bit. Playing with the kids, imagine all the kids not in the program at Morning Star, or

any program to offer sufficient food, activities and love. It's an impossible feat, and I hope one day it moves towards a cure.

Reflection Date: 19 August 2010

"Today a new born died as a result of the civil servant strike."



So read the newspaper today. For the past two weeks, we've been hearing about this strike affecting doctors, nurses, the courts and more pressing for us- teachers. While it hasn't changed our work schedule, it did mean there were few children around the school and no teachers some days.

Today was different.

Today, as we started to pile into the vans to go to work, Roger called us back into the main room. At the school we were supposed to go to- our last school- there had been disturbances as people were forcing children to go home. Edgar (my night hike guide) called us from the school (he works here) and told us rocks were being thrown at car windshields, the strikers were lighting things on fire, and it just wasn't safe anymore. Instead, we planned on heading over at 10:30, hoping the strikers would have left by then. Getting another call from Edgar, we were told to stay home. No negotiations- today, it's safety first. I really hope things are calmed down enough that we can go to the school tomorrow. We only need one more school for our successful completion, and I want to complete our goal. Really, really want to. Roger says if we can't finish it, he'll get Scouts in there to finish it when it's safe.

Trying to decide what to do with our day, we went to Morning Star, so those that didn't have money last time could buy something. I just wanted to play with the children and headed over there with Bruce.

You'd never know they're HIV+. They are some of the happiest, more energetic children. At times, I can't help but think "Take it easy, if you get too tired, you'll get sick! You can't get sick!" But then you remember they are children and deserve to act and behave as such. If they die tomorrow, I want them to have lived a life, not sat it out. A life of constant worry is no life at all. That is what these children have taught me. Without speaking the same language, they've taught me more than any school lesson ever could.



Child at Morning Star

Saying goodbye to the kids, it feels as though we'll be back next week. I could get used to this. It's so fun, so rewarding and makes such a difference to them.

Going back to the Scout Centre, we did some work around here. We painted the window frames, buffed the sign, and made our own sign, cleaned gutters, raked gardens, and more. Just a small thank you to the place we've called home for the past two weeks.

Reflection Date: 20 August 2010

Ready for work this morning, we were looking at newspaper headlines and one read "South Africa strikers break out into chaos." Then Lawrence and Bernie made the announcement that we would not be going to the school today. Not only were children being sent home, but the police told people to avoid school areas. This strike is not only affecting schools, but health care professionals and the courts. I heard one story today about a half charred baby found in a dumpster. They are unsure what happened in its entirety, but they believe it's because the mother was unable to go to the hospital and receive help, and instead tried to get rid of the body of her newborn infant. Can you imagine?



Taking a break from varnishing the doors to read our article in the newspaper.

With no work at the school, we continued our work around the Scout Centre; picking up garbage, painting window frames, re-varnishing signs, and other miscellaneous jobs.

Close to lunch, Val came by again with her kids. Interviewing us earlier in the week, she was so impressed with what we're doing that she wanted her kids to see us, and meet us. While she was here, she told us about House of Hope. Every Friday, Val volunteers at this house, which shelters abandoned and orphaned HIV+ infants. Inviting us to go with her, we sent a car load to visit the house, and hold the babies.

This proved to be one of the most difficult days yet. Walking in as they were coming out of their nap, I was reaching towards one girl (Melissa) and she reached back, and I picked her up. She was a quiet girl, and was content just looking around.

As there were only five babies but 12 holders, we had to share. Just Beavers. Passing them around, we took photos, cried a bit and held them all. We even bathed and feed them. At the end, I had a little girl that I swore fell asleep in my arms, but her eyes were wide open. She was so peaceful and cute. How could anyone ever give her up? I don't pretend to understand the circumstances under which she was given up, but I feel compassion. Not just for her, but for the mother. Was she irresponsible? Raped? A prostitute? Did she die because of AIDS? I don't know, but in this country, every answer seems more likely than the last.

While the things we've done here would be very difficult for some, in a way, I find them more important than the water reservoirs. Now we are witnesses. What we do now could

like



Infant at House of Hope

change everything. No longer are HIV/AIDS a statistic, but a deadly killer we have looked in the face. The future for these children may be bleak, but their smiles are not. And while HIV is horrific, it's doesn't rule their life. They are children. They need love, faith and support. All of which are free. We can make a difference; from providing water in the dry season, to holding a child. Everything counts.

Reflection Date: 21 August 2010

Today was Scout/Cub Day, where we invited all the local Cubs and Scouts to come visit the centre we were staying at, for a day of activities. Having opening close to 10:30am, we ran activities all morning such as an obstacle course, first aid and my tent- Ask A Canadian. Here, they learned anything they wanted to know about Canada, including our government, favourite foods, favourite sports and some questions I've never had to answer before. Questions like: Do you have shanty towns? Does your government help them? And the hardest question: What do you do in Canada to stop AIDS?

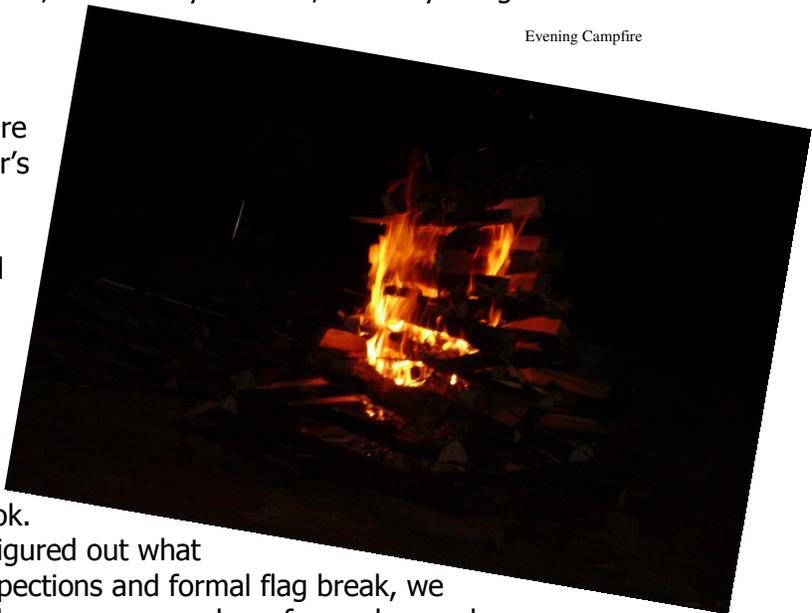
How I do, a person who has never witnessed AIDS first hand, begin to answer that when one in three people here have AIDS? Besides my skin, it was the first time I really felt like an outsider. No matter how much I learn from them, and spend time with them, I'll never understand. I'll never fully relate. I'll always be an outsider looking in.

After lunch we ran different events such as fire building, using a drill, using a laptop, rope bridge, etc. Odd array of activities, but for these people I guess it's all new. Many had never seen a laptop, so learning to turn it on was new and exciting. We also had face painting. In Canada, face painting is a staple at all fairs and it would be hard to find someone who hasn't had their face painted in their life. Here, it is different. For many, it was their first time having their face painted, and they were so excited. They would ask for something Canadian- a beaver, a maple leaf, a moose- you know, the easy things to draw!

We had a quick dinner, and then it was time for campfire. My favourite part of the campfire was getting called up to be part of the leader's song. Marching around the campfire, we could have been saying "I'm so stupid" in Afrikaans, but I didn't care. The brotherhood with these Scouts is incredible. This is what Scouting is about!

Reflection Date: 22 August 2010

Gathering in lines for patrol inspection at closing, for once the Canadians were doing ok. It only took us three weeks, but I think we figured out what we're supposed to be doing. After all the inspections and formal flag break, we moved into horseshoe. Once in horseshoe, there were a number of speeches and investitures. First, all the Canadians were invested into 1st Gilgold. This unit is reserved for special members of South African Scouting, but they extended this honour to us



Evening Campfire



Practically a tourist attraction

Canadians for all our help over the past two weeks. We, in turn, invested Roger, Lawrence, Doctor, Gee, T.F., and Tutu into our contingent. It was pretty awesome.

Leaving the centre, the Cubs and Scouts formed two lines for us to drive through and they sang a traditional farewell song. These Scouts are resilient, strong and proud. They are active not only for themselves, but for their communities. The

community food gardens they maintain help feed their own families as well as House of Hope, various shelters and so much more. I am proud to say that I was able to help them. What we did was not a hand out, but a step up. By installing water reservoirs, they will be able to maintain their gardens and continue to grow food in the dry months where food prices rise, making it more difficult for the less fortunate to afford nutritious meals. We are helping them, help others. Together, we are all Creating A Better World.

Conclusion

This trip has been absolutely incredible. It's almost as if it's my Goldilocks trip. In Belize, I felt really young and babied. In Paraguay I felt really old and that nothing was planned. This trip, however, had the perfect balance of ages with Mitch at 14, all the way to Caroline at 26. While I originally thought such a large age difference would only hinder us, and make it cliquey, I have found that the maturity makes sure we get things done, while the naivety reminds us to laugh and not take ourselves so seriously. While I would have preferred some more structure in planning and such, I think we did a very good job at remaining flexible, and all survived just fine.

This trip has made an impact locally, nationally and internationally. Locally from the schools we talked to, fundraisers we held and cultural nights we put on, not only to raise money but to teach those here about South Africa, what we're doing, and what they can do too. We reached the national level by including people from all across Canada on this trip. This was also reached by being organized with the National level of Scouts Canada which helped publicize our trip in the Scouting magazine. We finally reached an international impact in South Africa itself, but through the greater World Organization of the Scouting Movement (WOSM), which mentioned us on their website and heard of the work we were doing. We in turn managed to tell all our friends locally and abroad. This was not to brag about what we were doing, but to encourage others that they too can make a difference. In one press release I wrote a statement that I have found to be very true:

"We are not only building water reservoirs, but leaders and well-rounded citizens, unafraid to lend a hand where need be."

By Creighton Avery

