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My Experience in Swaziland With Give Hope, Fight Poverty

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COMMUNITY PARTNER SNAPSHOTS

Community partner snapshots describe the mission and vision of a community partner and highlight engagement opportunities for Purdue students with the organization and/or the clients.

My Experience in Swaziland With Give Hope, Fight Poverty

Megan Kaser, *College of Health and Human Sciences*

Student Author Bio Sketch

Megan Kaser, a recent 2017 alum in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Purdue University, describes her experience with Give Hope, Fight Poverty (GHFP)—a nonprofit organization in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in physician assistant studies. GHFP's mission is "to foster philanthropy domestically by designing service-learning programs that engage U.S. college students with rural communities in Swaziland, Africa, and work together to educate, empower, and lift orphaned and vulnerable children—particularly those living in child-headed households—out of poverty" (Give Hope, Fight Poverty, n.d.). By incorporating college students in the implementation of GHFP orphan education programming in Swaziland, it allows the Purdue students to become key players of the orphans' future success by creating a means in way of education for the orphans to lift themselves out of poverty.

Student Introduction

I studied in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Purdue University and received my bachelor's degree in science, with a minor in biology. I aspire to receive a master's degree in physician assistant studies. I played on the Purdue varsity women's soccer team and served as a member of Purdue's Community Standards Board.

I was fortunate to be involved in the West Lafayette community through participation in Purdue's Winterization community service project, which was part of the CREW organization. I partnered with the local YWCA and served as the treasurer of Purdue's chapter of BeTheMatch, a national bone marrow registry. Due to my interests in medicine, I was a member of the American Medical Student Association at Purdue and was involved in Purdue's Pre-PA club. I met Annie Elble Todt, CEO of Give Hope, Fight Poverty (GHFP), during my environmental health class in the spring of my sophomore year when she gave an informational talk about the work she does in Swaziland. Out of all the extracurricular activities I was involved in, nothing drew me in more than the work of GHFP. Hearing what Annie had to say that day was enough to inspire me to want to help facilitate GHFP's mission through a hands-on, service-learning experience with the orphaned children in Swaziland. Through this article, I educate readers on the need for continuous service learning, while I describe my experience with GHFP in an attempt to call other's attention to the work of this nonprofit organization and the lasting impact international service learning can have.

Give Hope, Fight Poverty

Give Hope, Fight Poverty works exclusively in Swaziland, Africa; however, the domestic address is 2436 N Alabama Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46205. Their mission is

to foster philanthropy domestically by designing service-learning programs that engage U.S. students and professionals with rural communities in

Carrying building materials for a toilet.

Swaziland, Africa and work together to educate, empower, and lift orphaned and vulnerable children—particularly those living in child-headed households—out of poverty. (Give Hope, Fight Poverty, n.d.)

Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world, leaving the number of orphans exceeding the number of potential caretakers (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). These orphans typically live in child-headed homes with no access to the basic resources they need to survive, such as clean drinking water, food, and proper sanitation. As a nonprofit organization with board members from various backgrounds requiring only the desire to offer their time and support in return for the generosity of others, GHFP relies on public support in the form of outside donors, corporate philanthropy, grant money, volunteers, and fundraisers. In addition, GHFP utilizes social media and short presentations to educate the community in effort to generate awareness and support of the mission. GHFP believes that through education, these children will be empowered to change the course of their lives and the future of their nation.

Activities, Opportunities, and the Impact

I was excited to take part in their mission, so in December 2015, I boarded the plane to travel to Swaziland with GHFP as a service-learning volunteer. I was unsure of what to expect, trying to anticipate whom I was going to meet, and figure out how I was going to contribute, hardly considering the fact that the Swaziland orphans would end up being among the top on the list of my

priorities in life. While in Swaziland, I worked directly with Annie Elble Todt to implement programs aimed to educate and empower the orphans. We sanitized used hotel soaps and delivered them to families in the rural areas of Swaziland to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases, assisted local builders in the completion of a toilet to promote sanitation, purchased building materials for a new home for an orphaned child, and delivered emergency food aid to child-headed homes. Our time in Swaziland also included installing solar energy in two child-headed homes to energize three LED lights, as well as delivering reusable and disposable sanitary pads and underwear to almost 100 rural adolescent girls to prevent their absence from school. We also purchased and delivered a wheelbarrow to an orphan's home, which would be used for fetching clean water from far-away access points. We accomplished numerous endeavors, but it seemed like there would always be more. Despite the arduous living conditions, the children remain hopeful and inspire me each and every day.

While in Swaziland, I was able to observe how instrumental an education is to providing orphan children a path to lift themselves out of poverty. Delivering LED lights and reusable sanitary pads, using fundraiser and donor money to pay school fees, and providing the students with uniforms and shoes allow for the children to work on homework after the sun has gone down, not be absent from school, and wear the proper attire. The support and tools provide the opportunity for the children to be fully engaged in their education, thus producing the best possible chance for the orphans to earn college degrees and, with a degree, become better qualified for employment in Swaziland. By creating the foundation and background that a child needs to attain a higher-paying job, GHFP can change the course of these orphans' futures and create a life without limited potential. I have learned that maintaining the basic needs for these children inspires them and philanthropically drives me to propel the mission that they continue to receive an education. This can be a difficult task, as GHFP relies solely on donors, fundraisers, partnerships, and the work of its nonprofit board members. Each year is spent fighting to make ends meet in order to continue sponsoring the already-sponsored children, as well as to add on the additional children who so desperately need it. Every year is different from the last in terms of where money for the organization comes from, and with hard work and nonstop fundraising, the sponsorship continues to grow. Beyond education, GHFP also provides food to starving families, and during the vacation months for schools, it provides daily meals for some children at the GHFP-founded New Hope Primary School. I came home

from Swaziland wanting to continue my affiliation with GHFP, and I plan to return. My continued involvement is ever more rewarding as I get to witness the contributions that my hard work has made to the growth of the nonprofit organization, not only in funds, but also in the number of sponsored orphans. My goal remains not only to empower the children, but also aid in transitioning the hope of living out of poverty into a reality.

Reflection

After the service-learning experience in Swaziland, I was inspired to continue to support GHFP's mission. I took the initiative to set up a registered Purdue student organization so I could recruit other students to take part in the effort to reduce poverty by educating and empowering orphans in Swaziland. Through the founding and establishment of Purdue Give Hope, Fight Poverty, I was able to learn and lead, as I had to create bylaws and manage a leadership board. This also allowed me to work closely with an amazing Purdue faculty mentor, Dr. Shweta Singh, who was a consistent ambassador of my efforts and GHFP's mission. My focus as the club president was to fundraise for the program needs I identified on my trip and to advertise this service-learning opportunity to my fellow Purdue students.

I developed countless skills throughout this experiential learning process. From my time abroad, I learned how

donations could be utilized to the maximum benefit of the recipients. Back at Purdue, developing the student organization and managing the student volunteers, I learned how to organize the group and manage fundraising opportunities. These skills will be invaluable in my future personal life, as I know I will continue this path of philanthropy. They will also be vital to my professional career as a physician assistant, as leadership and organizational skills are two critical components that make a great health care provider. My suggestion to other Purdue students contemplating an adventure like mine is to research this organization, reach out to past volunteers, and make time with Annie Elble Todt to ask questions and get to know her. Students from all different backgrounds with a desire or passion to serve others will find themselves in good company on a service-learning trip like this. I went as a student studying health and human sciences with three other students—some Purdue students, some not, all of them pursuing degrees from industrial engineering to elementary education. I tried to predict what the trip would be like; I tried to prepare myself for what lied ahead as I boarded the plane to Swaziland, but the truth is, you never really know what to expect, and each time I go back will be different. All anyone can do is try to have an open mind when they're called to help, and be ready to carry that cinder block or enjoy the company of the children while playing soccer together or taking selfies. I wish I had known how great the need is in Swaziland and how this nonprofit organization came about when I traveled. I would suggest fundraising and becoming a contributor to this organization before you travel to Swaziland, so you can see the rewards of your fundraising firsthand and return knowing why your work must continue. The rewards from serving in this capacity will exceed expectations as you see the orphaned children directly benefit from your volunteering.

Acknowledgments

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The rural Swazi children love the camera. And selfies!