

Perspectives from Volunteers—Trip Testimonies

“The Least Of These” – Pastor Gary Blumanthal

Posted September 22, 2016

Having the opportunity over the last two years to volunteer in helping build new housing for some of the elderly people in Nkungi village, those afflicted with leprosy but now cured, has been a very gratifying and humbling experience. There have been some who have suggested that sending money instead of traveling to Tanzania may be better stewardship of one's money. There is some truth to that point of view. However, to be there in flesh and blood with those who have been disabled and disfigured by leprosy and to see and learn of the hardships they have had to deal with on a daily basis is an eye opening experience that out measures what money alone can do for these destitute people. Their struggles in life have touched my heart deeply. Investing time, sweat, and getting hands dirty so that I can help one move from sleeping on a dirt floor in a dilapidated house with deplorable living conditions to a new permanent house with clean water at their doorstep has been a joy and blessing beyond my imagination. When one receives a new house complete with new furnishings and a small garden plot I hear, see and feel a deep and sincere spirit of gratitude for the blessing we have given to them. To receive their hugs, disfigured handshakes and generous smiles blesses me deep within. I believe that the end results of our work and presence confirms in a very tangible way that God loves them and is present to help them. As Jesus said, “As you have done it to the least of these you have done it to me”.

Pastor Gary Blumanthal

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Perspectives From First Time Volunteers – 2016 Trip

Posted September 22, 2016

Stan's Impressions:

I visited Africa with every intention of giving all that I have to make a big impact on the Nkungi village. Instead, I returned with Nkungi village having made a big impact on me. I met some of the poorest people I have ever seen. Yet these same people were also some of the happiest and most grateful. Random people on the road openly shared a greeting, a smile and a blessing. Strangers walking down the road would yell Jumbo (their word for hello) and wave.

Once, when I needed directions, I visited a shop owner. Instead of telling me where to go, he closed his shop and walked with me. We talked the whole way there. And he did this without any expectation of something in return. When visiting an elementary school, I was impressed by the 1,000+ children who all walked to be in school, grateful for the opportunity to learn.

The opportunity to work on improving the homes of those afflicted with Leprosy was also gratifying. A simple bookshelf or coat rack for someone who has felt the debilitating effect of this disease made a big impact. And their appreciation was openly shared.

I came back from Africa with far more blessings than I had expected. I will be going back!

Ellen's Story:

Being a first time volunteer with AfricanSMILE and it being my first trip to Africa, I was initially quite anxious and concerned about going. However, I felt God calling me to go to Africa, and here I am.

The members of our team were welcomed by a lovely group of women and young men of the Matiliga group with music and dancing! These wonderful people chose to share their lives with a group of strangers yet they made each one of us feel at home. The women of this group weave baskets in all shapes and sizes, patterns and colors, to sell. They use this money to pay for their children and grandchildren's school uniforms and their schooling. They were even open to sharing how they make these beautiful works of art. I tried my hand at weaving but didn't even make a stitch that compared to those of these very talented ladies. The afternoon we spent with this group was such a blessing. I am looking forward to seeing them and dancing again soon. From that moment on, I knew I had made the right decision to come to Africa!

The Nursing Students Speak

Posted June 29, 2015

African SMILE has been supporting the new Nursing School at Iambi for the last few years. Increasing access to competent healthcare is critical and begins with a focus on training new nurses to help ease the shortage of competent medical caregivers. Supporting AfricanSMILE helps to increase the quality of care to this desperate area of Tanzania.

Listen to what some of the actual nursing students have to say about the education they are getting at the new Nursing School.

“I am feeling very good at Iambi School of Nursing for education and training. Because I am learning well through theory and demonstrate practically so as to improve my skills and become competent. Even though we are lacking some of the equipment for demonstration of skills but we are trying to do our best for the equipment we have. In addition am learning many things which will help me in my life like love and peace, harmony, participation on different activities in the school and the Hospital in line with physical and spiritual things. Am also feeling good with our Tutors/Instructors for their good love and compassion to us, they are working harder to ensure our success in future that we will be good Nurses who will safe the lives of the community in future.”

“I want to become a Nurse because, I like Nursing profession and it comes from my heart, I also like caring the patients and spend much time giving them heath talk and health education in addition to that I also provide psychological support and there fore making them to get well soon, further more to provide education to the community on how to take care of their body, utilize health facilities available to them and environmental sanitation in order to promote good health and hence prevention of diseases”.

“I want to become a nurse because I like to help and safe people according to their needs and problems conformity of Nursing knowledge and skills. In addition because Nursing is professional which is world wide known, it can allow us to practice in any given country as a Nurse. But most of all I like Nursing because it cares human life right from conception to the end with a safe death”.

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My Recent Visit – By Dave White

Posted January 1, 2014

My warmest greetings to each of you.

I would like to offer a brief account of my recent visit to Tanzania and to the Iambi Lutheran Hospital in Nkungu Village.

My hope is that this report will serve two purposes:

First, to highlight African S.M.I.L.E.'s remarkable accomplishments over the past nine years, and secondly, to help galvanize the effort to keep your founding vision alive while new supporters (& funding) are recruited.

In short, there is no easy way to articulate or to quantify the profound impact that your joint efforts have made in and around the hospital and the village at large.

During my 3 day visit your long-held goal of establishing a nursing school came to fruition. 40 students arrived and began their course of study. One can only imagine this program's remarkable potential for good in the years to come. This in itself, combined with recent change in hospital leadership, is cause for celebration.

The hospital grounds are well cared for and the Infectious Ward Building that you designed and engineered is ready to be fully utilized by the hospital's new Director. In addition, I worshipped each morning in the hospital's beautiful church that you built, with 40-50 administrators, staff and nursing students.

More to come.....

Taking Notice – By Dave White

Posted January 10, 2014

I also heard from reliable sources that the Tanzanian government is considering upgrading Iambi to a District Hospital, which would provide more stable funding, additional doctors and be a huge boost to the region. I believe that your commitment to building local infrastructure over the past years is bearing fruit.

By African standards, the village is thriving. The villagers look happy and healthy. Water is flowing where it needs to, crops were looking green and hundreds of school children are going to class and playing like normal kids at recess. It was an inspired and commendable vision to build both hospital & school infrastructure. A job well done!

Charedeleco – By Dave White

Posted January 31, 2014

I've saved that which is dearest to me for last; Charedeleco, the leper community. Don took me there, on the outskirts of Nkungu, in 2011. Words can only fall short of describing the impact of that visit. Please know that no matter what the future holds for African S.M.I.L.E., the dye has been cast and hundreds of destitute people have been given hope and have had their lives & spirits validated by your generous vision and efforts.

Is there more to do? Yes, always. Yet let us take stock at what's been accomplished and give thanks for the hundreds of people, both Nationals and supporters of African SMILE, who have worked together in good faith to transform an entire community.