

O ta robala o ta ja eng? / “The Price of Success is Hard Work”

A Peace Corps Botswana Story by Sethunya Serake (Lillie Scribner)

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PLACEMENT

Country: Botswana
 Population: 2.2 million
 Continent: Africa
 Official Languages: English and Setswana
 Village: Makopong
 Population: 2,000

Located in southern Africa, Botswana is a landlocked country surrounded by South Africa, Namibia, Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The landscape is defined by the Okavango Delta which floods seasonally and is the home to many beautiful animals such as hippo, elephant, buffalo, and giraffe. I lived in the Kgalagadi (Kalahari) Desert which is the fifth largest desert in the world and covers 360,000 square miles.



CHOICE

When I applied for Peace Corps in 2013, I was not able to select my country of service for two reasons. The application process at the time only allowed for candidates to select their top three continents which still left a lot of variation. Additionally, as a Masters International (MI) student with the University of Michigan School of Social Work, I was not able to request where I served. A requirement of the MI program is that students must serve under the Youth Development framework which meant I was applying for a position anywhere in the world under Youth Development.

When I received my invitation to serve with Peace Corps Botswana I was nervous! I had never heard of Botswana before and was intimidated to go to Africa. I did some research and found that Botswana was a very safe country with a long history of Peace Corps relationships. Today I'm thankful I got to spend two years under the African sun and can't wait to return!

SKILLS UTILIZED

- Professional Identity
- Values and Ethics
- Social and Economic Justice
- Human Behavior and the Social Environment



PROGRAM AREA

PROJECT INFORMATION

Peace Corps Botswana is a Health & HIV/AIDS Capacity Building post so all volunteers are there to support and empower Host Country Nationals in their goal of zero new HIV infections. Project areas include Civil Society, Clinic and Health Team, Local Government, and my project area- Life Skills.

Life Skills Peace Corps Volunteers work in schools across Botswana doing a variety of projects that focus on HIV prevention and AIDS awareness. They can be placed in primary (K through 7th grade), junior secondary (8th through 10th grade), or senior secondary (11th and 12th grade) schools and might teach, facilitate groups, write grants, build libraries, paint murals, or organize events in their school and community.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

As a Life Skills Volunteer, I was placed with the primary school in Makopong as my primary job assignment. Makopong Primary School had about 450 students each year. Of those students, around 150 were Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) which is how Botswana refers to children whose parents have passed away or who are otherwise deemed “at risk.”

My secondary project was at the Makopong Clinic where I collaborated with the Health Education Assistant to obtain a grant and build a garden for terminally ill patients receiving Home-Based Care services. Patients receiving these services are provided with in-home care by a trained volunteer who focuses on diet, hygiene, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Our patients suffer from AIDS, cancer, and/or tuberculosis, and were in desperate need of consistent fresh produce.

My tertiary project was with other PCVs around Botswana in a collaborative project entitled Bokopano Craft Catalogue. We created a catalogue biannually which contained artwork for sale from around the country made by Batswana artisans who otherwise might not have a market in which to sell their goods. We made about \$4,000 for local artisans during my time with the project.

OUTCOMES

- Taught library and computer lessons to children in K-7th grade
- Co-facilitated an afterschool leadership and life skills group called Peer Approach to Counselling Teens (PACT) Club
- Participated in special events, fundraising, and various school committees such as Guidance and Counselling and Sports
- Wrote a grant proposal, obtained a grant, purchased supplies, and built a security fence and garden structure at the local clinic for terminally ill community members
- Facilitated sales including monetary transactions, transportation, and other details. Maintained the Bokopano Facebook page and purchase database. Planned for and tabled at marketplace events to sell crafts to fellow Peace Corps Volunteers, Peace Corps staff, Embassy members, etc.

CONNECTIONS

CLASSROOM

Issues in Global Social Work Practice, SW 648

- This course prepared me for service abroad by encouraging me to analyse my identities and values in preparation for living and working in a new and different culture.

Youth Empowerment, SW 799

- This course focused on a particular youth empowerment project in Detroit but gave me practical tools for working with youth in a way that is collaborative and empowering rather than domineering or patronizing. I took these tools with me to Botswana where I was able to facilitate lessons in an environment of mutual learning with lots of hands-on opportunities.

CAREER

I developed the skill to facilitate groups and co-teach as well as lesson planning and youth organizing. I also practiced grant proposal writing, social media marketing, and sales.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Having humility when traveling, living, and working abroad is incredibly important.
- I learned that while I can teach and students seemed to enjoy my teaching, I did not find satisfaction in teaching.
- I learned that developing countries are beautiful, strong, diverse, exciting, frustrating, and humbling.
- I learned what it meant to be a Motswana woman.
- I learned to take a step back and let people do things for themselves when they are able rather than always doing it for them.

ADVICE

1. Learn some of the local language. Even just the greetings and introductions.
2. Do as they do. Try everything once!
3. Work with locals, not for them. Your projects will be more sustainable if they know the process.

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