

Youth Development in the Kingdom of eSwatini



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University of Michigan School of Social Work Master's International Program

Location: Ekukhanyeni, Manzini Region, Eswatini.



The Kingdom of eSwatini is a small country landlocked by South Africa. It is home to 1.2 million people. The official language is Siswati. The country is predominantly Christian.

Relevant Facts

- The country is one of the last standing absolute monarchies
- eSwatini gained independence in 1968
- Formerly known as Swaziland until King Mswati III changed the name to eSwatini in April of 2018
- eSwatini has the highest prevalence of HIV in the world at about 26%
- According to UNICEF, more than 200,000 people are living with HIV in eSwatini and around 17,000 children are exposed to HIV at birth yearly.

Global Field Placement

The first two years of my Peace Corps service, most of my work was done within Ekukhanyeni Highschool. I taught English literacy and acted as a teacher's aide. I also worked closely with the school counselor and taught life skills classes. A year into my service, I started the first girls soccer team and the high school. I spent other free time at the preschool assisting the teacher with lesson planning and working as a teacher's aide.



Grassroots Soccer

Grassroots soccer is a non-profit organization that originated in Zambia. It is an adolescent health organization that uses the popularity of soccer to educate at-risk youth in developing countries. It promotes healthy living and inspires adolescents to become leaders within their community.

I used Grassroots soccer as a way to create conversation around sexual health and HIV education. It was a fun way to engage the youth in speaking about very sensitive issues that they may be facing. Our soccer club met every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday to talk about important issues the youth dealt with followed by soccer scrimmaging and training.



Classroom Connection

SW625: Interpersonal Practice with Children and Youth

This course really helped me in preparation for my service. The course highlighted risk and protective factors and how they relate to coping mechanisms and resiliency. This course informed me of many evidence based interventions used with children and adolescents based on the social context.



Home Life

My host family was very big. We had over 20 people on our homestead which included many small children. It was amazing to have children around because they express themselves through play. This is a language we could both speak and use to form bonds.

During service you can feel isolated being out of your comfort zone and surrounded by individuals who do not speak your first language. The kids on my homestead made my experience a lot less lonely and filled with love.



Recommendations

- Educate yourself as much as possible on the country you plan to serve in.
- Learn the language. There is no better way to get through to an individual than speaking their first language.
- Find support in country. This could be host country nationals or other volunteers but make sure you have a support system of some sort
- Do not compare yourself to other volunteers and their work. You are an individual with unique, invaluable skills.



Acknowledgements

A special thank you to friends and family who supported me while being so far away from home. To all the individuals who donated to my "paint the preschool" project.

I would also like to thank my Rockstar counterparts (pictured above) Mr. Mcamiso Dlamini and Miss. Shakila Mukasa. You are the reason Grassroots continues today in Ekukhanyeni. You have passion for your community and your country and you were my good friends and support system while I was abroad.

