

Being Challenged

In the summer of 2013, Square Pegs Coaching was involved in sponsoring two senior pupils who were taking part in school trips abroad to assist local people with building projects. Although the focus of both projects was to give out, we were keen to see what difference it had made to them as well as to the community they visited. We asked them specifically about challenges and surprises they encountered as well as listening to what changes it may have sparked in them now they have returned. Despite the uniqueness of their experiences, there are some interesting similarities in their learnings. There are also lessons we can draw from them to help ourselves

People



Kirsty Geddes went with Royal High School, Edinburgh to work with Habitat for Humanity in Romania. She was involved with building houses on the Wesley Way for HfH Beius, a non-profit ecumenical Christian housing ministry, an affiliate of HFH International. They are seeking to eliminate poverty housing in the Beius community in north-west Romania, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action.

Cara Forrest travelled to Malawi with Dunoon Grammar School to work with Community Initiative for Self Reliance (CISER). She and her friends built a health clinic to assist in the provision of vaccinations to the Under-5s. CISER is a Malawian Non-Governmental Organization based in Mangochi, whose mission is to enhance self-reliance among the residents of local communities as a means of contributing to national development.



Challenge



Both girls talked about the level of hard, physical work as being the biggest challenge they faced. Neither of them would have claimed great experience of manual labour prior to the trip, and certainly not in the extreme heat that they both had to deal with. Kirsty talked about the hours of shovelling sand and making cement but even the 'simple' task of pushing loaded wheelbarrows of cement proved to be hard work. However, as the days went by, the task became easier, their bodies became acclimatised and they coped better.

Learning

Both Kirsty and Cara learned loads during their time away; about the countries they were in, the local people and themselves. Some of these things were quite similar. All the lessons were valuable. Some were really important for their futures.

Bonding

Neither of them had any great local language skills but yet they were able to form bonds with the local kids which surprised them. In Kirsty's case it was the orphans that they visited. For Cara, it was the children who were hanging around the building site instead of

being at school. Both found themselves drawn to these children in their different plights, wanting to make a difference for them in any way they could.



Abilities

Kirsty learned how much she was capable of doing. Physically she expected it to be hard for her but was surprised at how well she adapted, getting stronger as the week went on and coping with the labouring.

Cara also learned what she was capable of tackling. For her it was more in the realm of mentally dealing with the stress. Everyone on the trip had hard bits but she surprised herself at how well she coped when it was difficult.

Confidence

Cara reckons the last time she spoke to a packed hall of people like a school assembly was probably when she was 10. Since coming back she has felt a real surge in confidence as she has presented her experiences and learning. Wanting to help the people of Malawi has given her motivation to stand up and speak in a way she never has before.

Kirsty also talks about pushing herself out of her comfort zone more now that she too has gained confidence. Although Cara has another year of school left, Kirsty is off to work with SUScotland and feels that this new-found confidence will help her to be bolder there. (She is looking for further sponsorship for next year - if you want to help her carry on being challenged and growing then go to <http://www.justgiving.com/Kirsty-Geddes2>)



Future

Two girls set off on a one-off trip that their school friends were taking part in. It was a chance to do something to help someone, but there were no thoughts of it going any further. Both of them though have changed their outlook on life and their own futures.

Kirsty is now looking at going back to Romania in the future to help build more houses. "The feeling of helping those who have less than you, and knowing the house you help to build will be a gateway to a better future for someone makes the work somewhat... Not easier, but it's a driving force to keep going, no matter how tired you feel."

Cara definitely wants to go back to Malawi but more than that is keen to continue to help charities as they reach out to people. "This has broadened my horizons to see how much more is possible. I want to get out there and tell people about it but more than that I want to go and actually work with people to help them."

Four challenges for the rest of us

In an age where young people are often characterised as lazy, selfish and useless, it is good to be challenged in our thinking by meeting teenagers who have gone off and made a difference. The media view is not universally true (yes, there are some layabout teenagers in the UK, but it's not exclusively a young person's 'disease') and we do well to remember that there is hope. The next generation is alive and well and working for the good of society.

These two girls have stepped a distance out of their comfort zones and achieved things they didn't think were possible. The challenge to us is to look at when the last time was that we deliberately pushed ourselves. The older we are, the more routines and responsibilities we settle into and the harder it is to step out. Consequently we stop achieving new things and learning. What could you do new this week?

Teenagers from Dunoon and Edinburgh have made the world a better place to live in for people in Malawi and Romania. We should feel challenged and ask ourselves what improvement we have made in the world this year; not necessarily through going somewhere remote and challenging but just through daily living in our corner of the world.

Finally, Kirsty and Cara have both gained confidence that will make their futures even better. What are you doing just now to make your own future brighter? If the answer is 'nothing' then now would be the best time to take stock of where you want to get to and who you want to be, so that you can see what else you need to do now in order to achieve that.



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