



Imogen Frawley- RCS Victoria speech 8/05/2014

If you asked a group of teenagers what ideas they had about what their future looked like, or what occupation would take up their lives, most would have the same idea; being no idea. I confess that I would be one of these teenagers, with no real sense of what career path I might like to take in life. Not wanting to be exposed for my lack of direction, I avoided the careers counsellor at school at every opportunity. One day a teacher declared that a gap year may be the right option for me. Therefore this year, instead of attending university, I am instead taking a very different path, one that will lead me to Tanzania, Africa.

I am here tonight because of the Royal Commonwealth Societies generosity, and to give you some insight into why I chose the program I am in, and what my trip to Tanzania will achieve.

To begin with, I have always had a fascination with Africa, possibly from multiple viewings of the Lion King as a child, and a general wanderlust, wanting to explore the continent I have heard described as “pure magic”. The organisation ‘Antipodeans Abroad’ came to our school one day to do a presentation on the opportunities a gap year could extend to us. When a young girl who had herself been to Tanzania described a year where African wildlife and scenery could replace textbooks and working at KFC, I was on board from the get go.

When I try to explain to people what I am doing, it usually brings up the same sort of questions and comments, the primary being “what does your mother think about this?” So I usually try to explain my adventure to people in the same way I explained it to my hysterical mother.

I am going on a 3 month trip to Tanzania with the organisation ‘Antipodeans Abroad’, which sits south of Kenya, on the Eastern coast. There I will be involved in volunteer work which includes the construction of houses and facilities that are desperately needed by local communities, teaching English to both school children and some of the adults, and even conservation of some of the local forests and animal populations. I don’t flatter myself to think that this 3 month trip will change the lives of the villagers, and do not attempt to persuade you to think the same. To be completely honest, I will be getting more out of this trip personally than the community in the long run. However it was explained to me like this. In the eyes of many of the villagers, school is not a priority, and unfortunately, school is seen as a privilege instead of a right. The reality for many school children in rural communities is that in a choice between attending school or staying at home to help out the family, or to join the workforce in order to bring in additional income, the parents of that child are more inclined to pull their child out of school.

My group of volunteers and I may be asked to paint the school fence. Now can you imagine the shock we would receive, thinking we had travelled half way around the world in order to save lives and end poverty, to be asked to paint a fence. To our society it seems trivial. However in the eyes of the community, to see the school facilities being modernised, by white volunteers, and even a bright new painted fence to surround it, suddenly the priority of the school and education is elevated. The school holds a higher place in the community if it is seen as having effort put into it; therefore children are more likely to go in place of work or chores.

Although simple tasks, like building or teaching lessons of English, we hope to play our part in breaking the poverty cycle. Because ultimately, that is what my trip is about. And despite trying to inform friends that it isn’t about finding a Tanzanian husband, or selling organs to witch doctors on the black market, it is about trying to make some sort of difference, and trying to challenge myself and change my perspective of the world.

I anticipate that I will get a lot of valuable life experiences out of my trip, and hope that I leave with a greater awareness of social justice issues, and are more frequently compelled to action.



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Royal Commonwealth Society for their generosity for the \$500 grant being presented to me tonight, and intend to contact Mr Colston when I get back to let you all know how my trip was and what I managed to achieve.

On applying for a position on this trip, I think I half hoped I would return with a better sense of what I wanted to do in life and what occupation I might pursue. I'm starting to be more realistic and to accept that things may be more complicated for me once returning. However I hope that I will come back a more resilient person, who has seen how the other half live and gain a new perspective on life, taking nothing for granted.

Thankyou for having me here, it has been an honour being able to present to you tonight.

Imogen Frawley

8th May 2014