

Maria Ryan's volunteering trip to South Africa October 2016



On October 6th myself and my two nursing colleagues, Roisin and Laura set off for iKhethelo Children's Village in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, outside the city of Durban, South Africa. This village was to be our home for the next two weeks as we worked on behalf of TWO WEEKS International Volunteer Network, a UK based charity that allows people with various different medical and non-medical skills to volunteer on a short term basis.



The village is made up of many colourful cottages. We stayed in the green cottage.



Maria, Roisin and Laura ready to go to work!

We were greeted by 48 smiling children from the ages of 18 months to 20 years. These children have all been placed in the care of the village team leader and village social worker by the South African courts because they have become victims of the HIV/AIDs pandemic, domestic violence and abandonment. The village is very basic. It consists of 7 cottages of children who are cared for on a daily basis by their “house-mums”, 5 cottages for volunteers- both long and short term, a meeting room used for morning devotions, a chapel, a small school, offices for staff such as the social worker and career guidance worker, a football pitch and small kitchen.

Each day when the children would go to school, we would go out into the community to work in a community care centre called The White House. This is home to nearly 60 children and adults with various disabilities and medical problems. With close to no recourses they do a fantastic job in caring for the residents. We were struck by the lack of hot water or even running water at times, no heating and very basic food supplies, yet we were greeted with a smile each morning by the staff and wonderful residents.



The entrance of the White House Community Care Centre



The White House- inside and out



Our hand washing facilities



The kitchen; where meals for nearly 60 residents are prepared three times a day.

The carers hand washing all the dirty linen, clothes etc in bathtubs outside with no hot water

Our time there allowed us to teach the carers the skills they need to cater for the needs of the residents. They did not have any education to understand some of the problems the residents have.

However, in the two weeks we worked there, the progress we made was amazing. The carers now know what to look out for and have now got supplies needed to treat some of the various problems we were faced with such as dressing wounds, infection prevention and prevention of pressure sores. We also helped out with the general nursing cares, cooking, cleaning and even shovelling gravel while we were there!



Teaching sessions with the carers



Helping out wherever needed- in 33 degrees!

Because of the very generous donations we received, we were able to provide them with supplies for dressing wounds that will hopefully prevent life threatening infection and tools needed to continue the education of other staff members there. We bought treats, presents and food for the residents. We even bought nail varnish to paint the ladies nails that brought smiles so big it was as if they had won the lotto! The donations will also be used to help maintain the care home with the hope of building a new building to cater for the growing demands from the local community and people who avail of the wonderful service.



Roisin pictured with some of our newly purchased and organised supplies, ready to be put to good use!



The White House is run by these two amazing people, Adele Walters (far left) and Russell Chilli (far right)

We are pictured here on our last day as we said goodbye!

We had many tough days in The White House but each evening we would arrive back to the village to the children with smiles on our faces. We helped in the village in whatever way we could which often meant giving the house mums and break and minding the children, helping them with homework or other school projects. We did many activities with them such as baking, arts and crafts, bracelet-making and even taught them some Irish dancing!



Arts and crafts in the sun!



Selfie time!



Laura and the kids doing LOTS of baking!

We were also able to contribute generously to the ongoing maintenance of the children's village. With the money we received we chose to fix two of the broken showers in two of the children's cottages, fit new nets in the football goals, provide each cottage with a first aid kit, provide the kitchen with baking utensils (as baking is one the children's favourite pastimes!) Also, we contributed to the development of a new "brain buster" education program for the on-site school for the children with learning difficulties and to the refurbishment of a communal cottage where they hoped to install up to date computers for the children to use.

We were also very lucky to have the opportunity to travel to Durban city to help in the Denis Hurley Centre. In this clinic they feed over 1,000 homeless people each week, and offer showers and clean clothes, run a free clinic especially helping those affected by AIDS and drug-resistant TB. They go out to people living on the streets to offer HIV tests and life-saving medicines and welcome refugees from across Africa helping them sort their documents and be integrated into the local community. We were overwhelmed by the work done here, all on a voluntary basis. We were very happy to donate some of our fundraised money to this great cause also to help continue the amazing work that is done here on a daily basis.

Before leaving for South Africa I was made aware that a man called Michael Lynch was living in Durban. Michael's mother was Nora Ryan (Gerry) from Mountkinnane, a sister of Peggy Slattery and Gerry Ryan, Mountkinnane. He moved from London to Durban in his 20s and has been living there since. He regularly checks the Borrisoleigh.ie website and had seen my previous post about my travels to South Africa. We met him, his wife and step daughter in the town of Hillcrest for a lovely dinner one evening while we were there.



L-R: Michael Lynch (Durban), Maria Ryan (Borrisoleigh), Laura Brennan (Mallow) and Roisin Fitzmaurice (Lixnaw, Kerry)

The two weeks we spent in iKhethelo Village, The White House and The Denis Hurley Centre were two of the toughest but most rewarding weeks of my life. Although it was a short time to spend there, the improvements and difference we saw in those two weeks was outstanding. This would not have been possible without the funding and support that we had from family, friends and community both at home and in the UK. Without your generous contributions we would not have been able to make the positive difference that was so greatly appreciated by the local people of the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

Thank You!



"It is in your hands, to make a better world for all who live in it."

Nelson Mandela