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Tanzania Alumnus, 2007



When I first came in contact with YCI at a career fair at my school, traveling to Africa was the furthest thing from my mind. I had recently gone back to school to pursue a career in Global Health, and felt that I really needed some practical life experience to help me better understand the field that I was so fascinated about, but knew nothing of. My plan was to just volunteer at the YCI office in Toronto, as I thought I was unprepared to travel halfway around the world - but after speaking with some of the staff in the office and researching YCI's programs, my excitement to go to Tanzania quickly grew as my fears gradually diminished.

I arrived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on June 10, 2007 and travelled along with another four YCI volunteers to Zanzibar six days later to begin our placement with ZANGOC (Zanzibar NGO Cluster), one of YCI's Tanzanian partners.

Zanzibar is like no other place on Earth. The convergence of Arab, East Indian and African cultures is surreal. The sound of call to prayer from a nearby Mosque fuses with the "Bongo Flava" music flowing out of a local music shop to create sounds that are uniquely Zanzibari. The jewel toned oranges, reds, pinks, and purples of the daily sunsets that complement the rich greens of the trees and tans of the sands; and the welcoming faces and heartwarming greetings of the locals imprint a permanent smile on my face. Yes, this is Africa!

In Zanzibar my group and I participated in weekly talent nights as part of a campaign called "Ushujaa Kwa Uhai" meaning "Courage for Life" in Swahili. These talent nights were aimed at getting the local community members out showing off their talents while gaining the skills to educate themselves and others about HIV/AIDS. The campaign focuses on reducing stigma, encouraging testing, and educating youth, so that they can live with courage and strength. I also worked with an environmental awareness group at the Youth Centre called "Swa Swa", which organized garbage clean ups with local school children and youth from the centre. Swa Swa's goals include educating the community about the pitfalls of garbage burning and dumping waste at areas other than designated dump sites.

My experience in Africa and with YCI is one that I will never forget, and has set me on a path in life that I hope to never deviate from. I am now back in school working towards my degree in public health and looking forward to applying to Masters Programs in International Health. But there is not a day that goes by that doesn't find me daydreaming about the country I have grown to love and the day I will return to Tanzania.