

Local Students See Another Side Of The World

By: Barb Shea Hayter - Walden Publications



In August, students from Medway High School and Mother Teresa Catholic Secondary School in London went on a trip to the Dominican Republic with an organization called 'Go, See and Do' for eleven days to help repair and upgrade schools. Front row from the left: Adrian Rende, Raha Mirshahi, Quin Jordan, CJ Clark, Damaris Parades teacher of school, Carol Buys, David Kang, Emily Turczyn, Katie Krische, Katie Schiller-Deorksen, Judy Warrington. Back row from the left: Zameer Bharwani, Jason Lockhart, Chris Bueschleb, Niki Grzywnowicz, Erin McMurray, Jess Pigeau, Raena Balsdon, Corinne Radenburg. Absent from picture: Dominique Giguere, Jed DeCory, Katie Ferris.



Here is CJ Clark, a Medway High School student from Lucan, with a little boy he met during his recent trip to the Dominican Republic. He says, "My experience in the Dominican was the most amazing thing I have ever done. Few words can describe how taken away I was by my adventure."

A hand up, not a hand out - while teaching young people empathy for those less fortunate - were the goals of a trip by local high school students. Fifteen young people from Medway and Mother Teresa High Schools in London embarked on an eleven-day journey this summer to the Dominican Republic, taking part in an experience they will remember the rest of their lives. CJ Clark, a Lucan resident, was one of the young people to go.

He says, "My experience in the Dominican was the most amazing thing I have ever done. Few words can describe how taken away I was by my adventure. While in the Dominican, we repaired a community's public school, built them a brand new bathroom & new office space. We also toured the area a bit."

A common thread expressed by the students was the fact that these people who had so little could still be very happy. CJ says, "What touched me most was how simply happy everyone could be with so little to their name."

Don and Lisa McMurray, whose daughter Erin went on the trip, says, "She talked a lot about the Dominican people and the importance of family and community and how happy they are without having much of anything. We have heard many wonderful stories, some with tears, so many with smiles and pure joy, and seen hundreds of amazing pictures which tell a remarkable story of the time in the Dominican. They accomplished and experienced so many amazing things!"

During this trip, CJ says, "We stayed in the Tubagua area, at the Tubagua Plantation Eco lodge and we travelled through the Puerto Plata area, seeing many of the villages & beaches. The children there are the most amazing thing in the world. I've never had children spontaneously walk up to me & hold my hand. Or ask for a piggy back throughout their community. It was incredible."

Go, See and Do! is an organization run by Judy Warrington that takes students on one or two week trips to the Dominican Republic to empower communities to become self-sustaining, as well as giving these young people an experience they will never forget. Warrington started organizing these trips in 2000 and has gone on 40 since that time. The former teacher says, "I was an opportunist. I spent my last 15 years in the private school world and had the opportunity to take students to international conferences and organize student exchange programs with schools around the world. I did service work locally and internationally via an association the schools were members of, called Round Square. Once I left teaching in the classroom, I focused on my passion --- joined

Rotary, whose slogan is 'Service above Self,' became more involved in outreach programs at church, and grew this program into what it is today. "

"I have some favourite outstanding people I like our groups to meet. Many are amazing role models, individuals who are leaders, making a difference in their own communities. I like to say hello to the teachers of schools we have made over in the past, check out the status of the schools, their current needs, remind them we love them and leave them a gift basket of school supplies. I like our groups to participate in playing sports with kids who live in squalor, doing crafts with street kids, coaching coaches, teaching teachers, facilitating medical clinics and then listening to what all the doctors treated and learning where education comes into the big picture - always and fundamentally THE KEY to breaking the poverty we witness," says Warrington.

"I feel strongly about the kinds of service we do around the world. What kind helps and what kind of service in fact leads to nothing but dependence and an open hand begging when you return to say hello. Look at Haiti! I am very keen to teach our volunteers what empowerment looks like. What a hand up looks like, because we all know handout. We are raised to be the Christian charitable giver, to clothe the naked, house the homeless, feed the hungry, etc. but we have to take this charity up a notch, to wrap it into helping the needy to help themselves, providing educational opportunities, planting seeds, nurturing them and then standing back and watching them grow, working WITH and NOT for, building sustainable projects. We need to teach about health issues, life skills, child development, especially. Teach teachers, coach coaches, counsel counselors, partner with the local med teams, the local construction workers, the plumbers and electricians, work alongside the locals and help them to learn, so they can help their own communities. Hopefully, our participants learn what questions to ask when charities knock on their doors asking for support!"

Student CJ Clark expressed his thoughts to others who would like to take part in this experience. He says, "To other kids I would highly suggest this type of trip. No resort or hotel could give them such an experience. I would tell them that they will find such a sense of happiness in the Dominican."