

Volunteer Testimonials

Volunteering with CAF in Kenya is an exciting opportunity to travel throughout the country, working with local communities and organisations in support of underprivileged street children and orphans. I was able to gain strong and committed friendships with the children and families I met, as well as create awareness of the good advice and support CAF can bring to struggling schools and orphanages,

In just a few weeks, CAF educated me and I gained insight into the hard-hitting issues affecting poverty hit and orphaned youth, including HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and human rights. This experience has been greatly rewarding and motivated me to continue spreading the achievements of CAF.

Katie Birks
University Of Sussex

From Bonita Francis:

I went to Kenya in summer 2010 and The Change Africa Foundation (CAF) Project is one of the best things that I have ever participated in. Although I was involved in the organisational side of the trip, nothing could prepare me for the emotions I felt before dedicating 6 weeks in Kenya. I was really excited but at the same time a little scared and didn't know what to expect (I was born in Kenya but had not returned since I was 13 years old!).

I remember arriving in Nairobi and feeling quite overwhelmed. We arrived in Nairobi after a very long flight to find that our luggage was lost. Of course this was stressful. We were all very tired...but we had to learn to accept the facts and keep as positive as possible. We left the airport luggage-less and I remember stepping outside and being introduced to pollution filled the air, the sounds of taxis and the sound of horns. Luckily, CAF had arranged for our in country Project trustee (Collins) to meet us with the taxi to take us to our accommodation where we had lovely homemade food and went to sleep.

The next few days were a nightmare as we were constantly at Nairobi Airport trying to retrieve our missing luggage. But in these situations you have got to attempt sorting it out and staying as positive as possible. After persevering, we retrieved our luggage 3 days later. This glitch meant that the CAF programme was a little delayed and that we did not get to Kisumu until the day later.

When we arrived at Kisumu, I was very excited. It was a calmer place than Nairobi. We went to Collins house where his family was going to host us. Again, we were fed delicious food and got familiar with our home for the next few days.

Week 1:

It was no rest for us, as were up very early to attend a meeting with the Children District Officer. This was very interesting and put in proportion the problems the area faced in terms of children welfare. After the meeting, we went to visit St Clare's Orphanage. After staying and learning about the way the Orphanage was organised, we played with the children (Baby Paul was very adorable!) and got to know the staff.

After the hectic morning, we were taken to eat some incredibly tasty Tilapia and Ugali (Kenya's staple food) by the lake – a must do if you go! Beautiful food, lovely weather and refreshing (but) interesting scenery.

After lunch, we had a meeting with Owino (who is the Remand Centre manger) as we had to collect a list for the children to be repatriated. The actual repatriation day was very rewarding however undoubtedly challenging. We were taking “runaway /troubled children” back to their home. Since we spent 6-12 hours in the car with these children, we naturally had a bond with them and so it was sad to say goodbye.

During the week we also visited the hospital and the mortuary, which again a very surreal experience which in all honesty is not for the weak stomached. Some would say it is vile, but getting the experience of seeing firsthand how the mortuary and the hospital are structured was an experience I will never forget.

Week 2:

This week was spent in Gem village. The first few days were spent visiting schools in the village and getting a number of schools to participate in the Culture day we would be organising. I really enjoyed the week in the village. It was very green, people were very friendly and we lived a ridiculously simple but fulfilling life. The time spent in the schools were interesting, we taught the children a little about England (as they were very curious) and we often got asked some bizarre questions – one that I will always remember is “do you live next door to David Beckham?”. We spent lots of time liaising with the schools who had agreed to participate in our Culture day. Organising the day was fun however difficult at times as we had to make do with a lack of resources to make posters and decorations– which tested our creative side!

I had a number of highlights this week. Firstly (name dropping) but we met Obama's grandmother, which was a strange yet personally disappointing experience due to the lady's arrogance.

Another highlight of the week for me was being able to milk cows – which for a London girl, was an exciting activity!

However my biggest highlight of the week was how at the end of the week our culture day came together, it was an amazing day where the children and staff performed for us. Kenyan people have great talent, we experienced great dancers, poets, singers and actors!

Week 3:

This week we were predominantly in the schools in Kisumu. I had a few personal highlights this week. Firstly, meeting Dominic who is the headmaster of St Marks School – he is such a passionate, inspirational man and I really enjoyed working with him. Secondly, visiting the St Marks, creating fun games for the children, donating some books, balls, playing cards and toys to the school was very fulfilling as well. Another highlight was visiting Tip Top nursery, where we distributed the donated clothes and toys and also played some games with the children. Lastly, at the weekend I really enjoyed going to the markets and practising my bartering skills, eating at Lake Victoria again, going to the Impala Sanctuary, and meeting our new friends Agnes and Nami!

Week 4:

This week we found ourselves in Seme – where the CAF orphanage is based. We had previously gone round to DIY businesses to attempt getting paint donated so that we could renovate the Orphanage. We got a few bits and bobs, and did our best to try and improve the orphanage by painting it. We were helped by the orphans and the staff working there. Another highlight was visiting Kit Mikayi Rock – a must see as it has picturesque surroundings! The

week had not finished, we had also helped at Nami's charitable organisation New Paradigm Community where she had dedicated herself to helping elderly and disabled widows who had taken the responsibility of looking after their young orphaned family members. That weekend we also went to the Maasai Mara – an incredible experience.

Week 5:

This week we spent in Nairobi. It was a very chilled week spent seeing what Nairobi had to offer such as the numerous markets and the Kenyatta International Conference Centre. My biggest highlight although extremely emotional was visiting Kibera (the largest slum in Nairobi and 2nd largest in Africa). It will always amaze me how when u stand on the railway, on your right you have the slums where the conditions are very poor and the residents lack the most basic facilities and on the left you can see Nairobi town – a very built up area with skyscrapers. I still will never understand it – the fact that the two worlds are just a stone throw away.

Week 6:

For the last week, we went to Mombasa, where we could ease into the end of the 6 weeks by relaxing on the beach and taking a well deserved few days to ourselves. My biggest highlight of this week was to be able to reflect on the last 6 weeks and also the lovely cocktails on the resort!

On the last note, I am not going to lie and say it was an easy 6 weeks, it was hard work but in return I had the most amazing experiences out there.

After doing the project, CAF gives you real life hands on experience – especially transferable skills and not forgetting lots of laughter, new found friends and the ability to say that you have survived 6 weeks of simple living.

Of course there are a number of organisations offering similar projects, but I would say that what sets CAF apart is the chance of experiencing the real Kenya life; you live in huts as the natives, you eat local food, you milk cows, you use a basin to wash, for toilet we go to the bush, you get to teach incredible children and you have the ability to put a smile on faces. Furthermore we were fortunate enough to have great contacts that meant that we could work with different organisations such as the remand centre and also see all sides of Kenya.

If you are thinking of doing it – go for it!

Thanks

Bonita Francis