

**Educate Hope**

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**1**

**Journal 1: the beginning**

The first day I entered the doors of Branches of the Vine; I was introduced into a whole new world. I walked inside the part of the school where the headmistress (Ms. Amira Wadie) is. I introduced myself to her and told her my plan for the next couple of months. She then led me to the other part of the school on the other side of the road where I met the children and teachers. I saw their schedule and noted what I would be doing and when. I started out by helping the kids count. What I did not know before was, autistic children are really smart. Although they had trouble writing down the correct number in Arabic, they were going fast. I only had to guide them a little and they did the rest. After a while they had recess. I followed them to the playroom and observed quietly. They interacted just like non-autistic children and were relatively quiet the whole time. Of course, they were kids between the ages of 6-10 which meant screaming and crying but that’s normal right? After recess we all went back inside to do some puzzles. The children I was doing puzzles with had mild autism. The teachers had put me with the calmer children, which is good. They knew I was new with autistic children and did not know how to handle all situations properly. I liked the teachers; they were kind and treated the children really nice. Most of the children were speaking when I was with them. However, there was one girl who did not say a single word. A little boy shook my hand when he first met me and that warmed my heart. After 2.5 hours, they started watching movies. I had originally planned to stay 3 hours but seeing as I could not do anything for the rest of the half hour, I got my hour sheet signed by Ms. Amira and left.

**2**

**Journal 2: Leaving Branches of the vine**

Sadly, November 14th marks my last day at Branches of the Vine. I have already found a new service learning project and it is at the Found Africa Children’s Learning Center (FACLC) or Found for short. Today it was very cold; I walked into another room than the previous times. This room was the last room down the hallway. I met 3 boys around the same age as me. One of them could not speak properly and he didn’t speak the majority of the time. Unfortunately, he had an autistic fit. The teacher left me alone with the three boys and we were doing puzzles together when suddenly he started screaming and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. I rushed to get help from the first person I found. She said it was Okay and this happens sometimes. He was just tired and working too hard I think. He rested for a while until it was lunchtime. The boys set their own table every day. Each one has his own towel, which they put on the table, and they each have their own plate and spoon. The children were starving and yet, they offered me food. That just broke my heart even more remembering that I might not see these kids again for a long time. They each ate lunch then cleaned up their space of the table and sat down again. This time, I had an idea of playing hangman with them but that didn’t go too well. For one thing, they only know the Arabic alphabet. Another issue was that one of them could not even say the alphabet at all. Although it didn’t go according to plan, it did teach the kids a new game and attracted more students from other classrooms. We had a great time until I had to leave. I got my hour sheet signed and headed away.

**3**

**Journal 3: FACLC**

Found Africa Children’s Learning Center is a “school” which teaches South Sudanese, Ethiopian, and other African native children English, Math, Reading, and other topics. In this project, I am not alone. My friend Asher’s mom is organizing the whole thing. A group of CAC volunteers and I always met at Asher’s house for a snack and then we headed off to FACLC. Over there, I made new friends and learned new things about the sub-Saharan African culture. They were remarkably smart people with big hearts. I think that all of us who volunteered there agree that they all have awesome names. There were twins our age called Boss and Doss, a girl called Wilma, and many other fascinating names that I have never heard before. None of them were hard to pronounce for me (a native Arabic tongue) but for our foreign friends, they were made fun of a little by the Africans. Although I could speak Arabic with them, the whole point is to teach them English. And so I tried not to the best of my ability to speak Arabic with them but there times where I would accidentally say “ya3ni” or “mashi” (so so and ok), On the first couple of days, all we did was read and correct their reading. When we got further into the year we started doing math and counting. Some were really smart in counting and multiplication, some however were not so good. The children who were not able to keep up with most of us were taken by Mrs. Lantz for specific help in a subject. FACLC is basically an apartment with a very small kitchen and one bathroom. It has around 3-4 classrooms and then the outside area, which is multifunctional area where students play, learn, and meet in the morning. Students typically left at around 3 but sometimes they left at 2 or even 4 so there was only little time where we can teach them things.

**4**

**Journal 4: the End**

May, 2012. The final days of service learning, school, and 9th grade. Finals are coming up and this year is going to be easy…hopefully. FACLC had to close 1 month early due to the Egyptian Presidential Elections 2012. But once again, Mrs. Lantz saved the day by inviting the 7th grade girls every Sunday, Tuesday, and Saturday for cooking lessons. Cooking is one of my hobbies and I enjoy it. Volunteers brought in some recipes and the 7th graders made some. Wilma, Julia, Allison, and Jane are the only names I can remember (I have horrible memory). We would cook for hours and eat the deliciousness that came out every time. We cooked everything ranging from meringue to mahshi. We were teaching the girls how to look after themselves and bring in new cultures to their world. We had fun times from beating egg whites for an hour, to watching a fellow volunteer take complete control. But honestly it was interesting, exciting, and fun. Cooking takes a lot of effort and time, which is something hard to get out of the 7th graders because they live very far from CAC. Mrs. Lantz was supervising but all of us did most of the work. The girls were really good at cooking and had some knowledge on how to slice and chop, etc… It was a great experience to cook with them. Amazingly we had no accidents any day we cooked. The kitchen was spacious enough to fit many people and still have room to cook (not so much like the kitchen at FACLC). I hope that we taught these girls how to cook some nice food and learning new cultures. One of our big problems was time. Food has to be prepared in a specific amount of time and cannot be consumed raw or even slightly raw. And we had a certain amount of time on our hands but at the end of the day, we made it. **5**

**Reflection essay**

Hope. Hope is something that we look forward to everyday. Hope is one thing that one can never give up on. Throughout my experience I learned that hope is the only thing left in some people’s lives. Although hope is very little these days, it is all people have too. This was my first and, unfortunately, could be my last year of doing Service Learning at CAC. This experience taught me new things and exposed me to new people. At the beginning of the year I was put into Service Learning late, which meant I only had to do 8 hours, which I had completed. By the end of the year, however, I managed to get 60 hours just like my fellow volunteers that had a head start. I remember my first day of Service Learning. I got introduced to Mrs. Mazhar and I was taught that Service Learning is not Community Service, we are not just helping out anyone, we are helping the ones that want and need our help. And so, I headed on to a new world that I had yet to discover. I have been exposed to many things in my life and therefor I am a very open-minded, honest, and accepting person. I am a quick learner, which meant the supervisors at my Service Learning areas did not have to worry about checking in on me most of the time. I was misinformed about Autistic children. I was told that they would be loud, demanding, and extremely sensitive. I walked in cautiously on my first day and tried to do what I was told; stay calm and don’t scare them. To my surprise, they were calm, quiet, and very smart. I was intrigued by what they can achieve that even I couldn’t. Although I had a very short experience with Autistic children, it taught me new techniques and informed me correctly about their situation.

**6**

Volunteering in Branches of the Vine was my first and main idea/project. However, time starts becoming an issue and waking up early on a Saturday morning isn’t exactly my great start to the day. I had to say goodbye to Autism and move on to a timelier project. I chose FACLC (Found Africa Children’s Learning Center) since it was organized by my friend’s mother and fit better in my schedule. After looking around in the Center, I realized what big of an impact we can make together. Over the next few months we taught Sudanese/South Sudanese/ Ethiopian children English, Reading, Cooking, and Math. I have taught over ten different students around my age about their surrounding world and what is in it. I feel that I made a huge impact on them and so I will always remember the skills I used to teach them. Found Africa is the learning center that is based on hope. Educating people is giving them hope. By giving hope, we open new doors to new opportunities and keep the one thing in the world that no one can ever lose. What is the world without hope? Nothing. Service Learning has given me hope to better myself and help the people in need in my surrounding environment that I have been blinded of all these years. Even though I cannot take Service Learning next year due to schedule issues I have decided to continue doing Community Service in Cairo. Vodafone, and many other agencies, are reaching out to Egyptians to teach them basic human rights, Basic English, and basic manners. This will strengthen the Egyptian people and also provide more hope for Egypt. More than half of the country here is uneducated. Just hearing that one person out of 90 million is going to spend his/her summer volunteering to help others gives me hope.

**7**

FACLC for me has been a sad and happy experience at the same time. I was more than happy to take time out of my own busy schedule to give African children a better education. The school is basically an apartment, which is a very sad part. Children need to be in a better environment in order to focus more and learn better. One problem that we constantly had was the noise from the streets or even people coming up to the walls of the school just talking to people. We were able to keep them somewhat focused and in the end they did learn something so it was Okay. On the last days we could only cook in Mrs. Lantz’s house due to FACLC closing early for the Egyptian Presidential Elections 2012. Another sad thing to hear were the kids, almost our age, say “we can’t go to school next year, we don’t have money”. That broke my heart when I heard that kids our age can’t get a descent education while we get the most elite and prestigious education in the country. Service Learning has showed me that everything in my life has been sugarcoated and that most people in this country are not living the same way I do at all. It has helped me understand that life is more than just money, it’s about hope. The children wake up every day with hope inside them in order to achieve what people told them cannot be achievable. Without hope, I would not have been experiencing what I have been for the past year. This project, I’m happy and sad to say, has been completed and ended. Although Service Learning is not part of my education anymore, it’s a part of my life. I have inspired other youth and adults to volunteer to better themselves and the country. Hopefully, in the summer, there will be a dramatic change in the Egyptian education system.

**8**

**Disability Research**

**What is Autism?**

Autistic disorder (sometimes called autism or classical ASD) is the most common condition in a group of developmental disorders known as the autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Autistic children have difficulties with social interaction, display problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, and exhibit repetitive behaviors or narrow, obsessive interests. These behaviors can range in impact from mild to disabling. Autism varies widely in its severity and symptoms and may go unrecognized, especially in mildly affected children or when more debilitating handicaps mask it. Scientists aren’t certain what causes autism, but it’s likely that both genetics and environment play a role.

**Is there any treatment?**

There is no cure for autism.  Therapies and behavioral interventions are designed to remedy specific symptoms and can bring about substantial improvement.  The ideal treatment plan coordinates therapies and interventions that meet the specific needs of individual children. Treatment options include educational/behavioral interventions, medications, and other therapies.  Most professionals agree that the earlier the intervention, the better.

**What is the prognosis?**

For many children, autism symptoms improve with treatment and with age. Some children with autism grow up to lead normal or near-normal lives. Children, whose language skills regress early in life, usually before the age of 3, appear to be at risk of developing epilepsy or seizure-like brain activity. During adolescence, some children with autism may become depressed or experience behavioral problems. Parents of these children should be ready to adjust treatment for their child as needed.  People with an ASD usually continue to need services and support as they get older but many are able to work successfully and live independently or within a supportive environment.

**9**

**smart goal**

**S**pecific:

- Provide African children Basic English education.

- Make sure they can speak English well enough.

- Teach them basic everyday life skills (cooking, etc.…).

**M**easurable:

I will know that I have achieved my goal when I can have a small conversation with the children all in English and they have learned how to look after themselves.

**A**chievable:

This is a challenging goal; it is similar to raising a child or teaching a human how to live in this world. But it is something I want to do and it is achievable.

**R**ealistic:

There aren’t many sacrifices in this goal but there will be some obstacles. Such as keeping the children focused, having them remember what we did last time, and avoiding little Arabic words that could make a slight difference. This goal is very well within my capability as I speak both English and Arabic fluently and know how to look after myself and someone else if necessary.

**T**imely:

By the end of the year this will be done. It will take a long time but the results are worth it.

**10**

**Updated action plan**

**Target Problem:**

* African Children not being able to look after themselves and speak English.

**Target Group:**

* Sudanese/South Sudanese/Ethiopian children ranging from the ages of 9-18

**Project Title:**

* Educate Hope

**Goals:**

* Have a basic understanding of English.
* Be able to speak a little bit of English (enough for a conversation).
* Learn basic math, reading, and writing.
* Know how to look after yourself home alone or abroad by cooking.

**Obstacles:**

* Time (little time).
* Locations (they live far away from their school and CAC).
* Keeping them in focus.
* Remembering what we did last class.

**Tasks:**

* Keep them entertained in someway that they can remember.
* Start easy then gradually move up.
* Have set times and a plan B if they cannot come on time.

**11**

**Pictures**

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**Loulou (Jane’s older sister’s daughter)**

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**12**

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**Intensely staring at a zucchini**

**13**

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**We finally got her to smile!**

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**14**

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**15**

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**Supervision**

**16**