

Andrew Dawson
Beyond the Book Scholarship

What Does the Community 'Think' When the NGO and the International Students Leave for Home? A Study of Township Locals in Cape Town, South Africa

This summer, I had the life-changing opportunity to travel to South Africa and work as an intern with the Amy Biehl Foundation. Through my research and my job, I was able to immerse myself in a culture completely different than my own and learn about the South African people, their beliefs, their politics, their lives. My research focused on the ways that international volunteers fit into the non-profit sector, the ways that volunteers affect the people they try to help, the organizations they volunteer through, and the community as a whole.

My research involved four steps: First, I reviewed studies of service learning and drew on this literature to guide me in my assessment of the relationship between the volunteers and the NGO. Second, I immersed myself in the population with which I was working, observed the relationships within the organization, and the ways that they executed their mission. I made as many contacts as possible with the people I worked and developed a level of trust with my coworkers. Next, I formally interviewed different members of the NGO, students, and community members about their views on service learning, its benefits and flaws. Lastly, I communicated my findings with the organizational director of the Amy Biehl Foundation. I was not able to use a formal questionnaire in my interviews, as I found that most of the people I consulted did not want to write down their views and feared a breach of confidentiality.

Through my observation of the Amy Biehl Foundation and the interviews I conducted, I determined that there are many different ways in which international volunteers partner with nonprofit organizations. These relationships vary with the group's size, age, level of education, length of commitment, and focus of the trip, among other variables. I found however that most interactions could be classified into three categories and those into subcategories: individual volunteers (interns, college students, single-day), service learning groups (multiple-day and single-day), and volunteer groups (multiple-day and single-day). I found that the longer that people stay and work with the foundation, the more comfortable they interact with the township adults and children, the more they learn about the culture, and the more they understand the ways they fit into the lives of the people they volunteer to help and the organization with which they volunteer.

Andrew Dawson
Beyond the Book Scholarship

The perception of the volunteers that make a single-day commitment, and do not contribute anything visual (a garden, building, equipment, etc.) is generally negative from community members, teachers, older students, and even the workers within the foundation. However, the people I interviewed and observed positively view people who contribute visually to the community. I also found that sex, ethnicity, age, and level of education have a great impact on the effect service learning has on an individual and the ways that the community perceives their volunteer effort. The most important impact I observed was the way the relationship between international volunteers and township children affects the children's ability to trust volunteers who they know will eventually leave. I found that older children are much less likely to connect with volunteers, as many have watched people that they grew to care about leave and never return, and without use of the Internet, contact is nearly impossible upon return. Whether this has a lasting effect on the ways children perceive internationals, I cannot objectively say.

Through my research, I concluded that service learning must start to analyze the effects that their programs have on the community that they believe they are helping. From my observations, slight changes in the model of service learning and volunteer expeditions could drastically increase the education of the volunteers and improve the effects of the service. My research is ongoing and I will continue to work with Professor Richard Grant to develop a paper on this subject. Due to the size restriction of this paper many of my findings were left out.

I also wanted to formally thank the University of Miami for affording me this opportunity to go to Cape Town, South Africa. It was truly life changing. During my time working with the Amy Biehl Foundation, I was able to raise over \$4,000 for the organization and started, with the help of other volunteers, the First Annual Amy Biehl Winter World Cup. A soccer tournament for 200 children in the townships, in which each child received warm food for the duration of the tournament, a t-shirt, trophies, prizes, and a chance to compete in an organized tournament with their peers. Without your help, none of that could have happened. Thank you so much!