

zambia



IMMERSION PROJECT 2016

On Saturday morning the 3rd of June 2017 10 students and 3 teachers departed Cork airport. Our destination was Mazabuka in Zambia, a trip that we had all been eagerly anticipating since our selection in October 2016. After lengthy and arduous fundraising by the Team and in particular the parents who worked tirelessly throughout the year. There was a varying degree of emotions but the outstanding one was one of excitement for the trip we were about to embark on.



Back Row (L-R): Tom O'Regan, Victor Callinan, Seán Wallace, Ciaran Adams, Cormac McCarthy-Hann.

Middle Row (L-R): Lughaidh Wiseman, Matthew Gibson, Rory Murphy, J.D. O'Hea, Cillian Barry.

Front Row (L-R): Mr Trevor Hussey, Ms Clodagh Bergin, Mr Pol Ó Seancháin, Mrs Anna O'Brien, Mr Michael Burke.

We flew from Cork to Heathrow, followed by an 8 hour flight to Nairobi. We had a relatively short stop -over in Nairobi and from here we flew to Lusaka. From Lusaka we were transported to our final destination Mazabuka in a bright pink bus. It all looked unfathomably different from anywhere we had ever been and all that we knew. SERVE had organised for a volunteer, Vostor, to accompany us to Asumption House where SERVE volunteers are based. Vostor made our 3 hour journey so enjoyable with his local knowledge and African music playlist. We made our introductions to the host, Chris O'Donoghue from SERVE, and all the boys of Asumption House who were waiting to greet us.

Asumption House is home to seven African boys who are without their families. We all spent time in this house and our students interacted with the boys living there, playing, singing, cooking, cleaning, dancing, conversing and learning so much from each other. We could of never have anticipated the peaceful connection that the boys, Maureen the cook and additional helpers in

the house went about their daily lives with such grace and dignity. The boys from Asumption House demeanour never changed, always open and giving, smiling always smiling. There was a lot of love for the boys in the house and a ready support from SERVE, the local brothers and Father Milimo who oversees all the projects in his extensive parish..

We had the opportunity to visit a number of schools during our time in Mazabuka. Our first school that SERVE is involved with was called The Flamboyant School which caters for children with special needs and disabilities. The students and teachers were so welcoming. Our boys had the opportunity to spend time with students who were at an initial learning stage with computers and communicate some of their knowledge to them. This school is such a success story and it was so rewarding to see the wonderful work been carried out there. In sharp contrast we visited a State school called The Luyobolo

School which caters for hundreds of local children. We all experienced the poverty and lack of basic sanitary needs that were not been met for the students in this State run primary school. We visited St. Edmunds School which is a Secondary Christian Brothers school that is approximately a 15 minute drive from Asumption House. Prior to our visit, we had heard that this was the school that all boys in Mazabuka aspire to attend. It definitely lived up to its reputation. The principal and his staff were so professional. They received us very warmly and invited all our students to attend classes with a view to teach a topic of choice

on their return later in the week. This was a great success with our boys bringing Irish sports, culture and music to the classrooms of St Edmunds where they were inundated with questions about Ireland referring to our politics, education and religion.

We were invited to experience the outdoor life on a farm which SERVE fund for the local community. Camping on The Farm had to be one of our highlights. We travelled to the farm in two pick-up trucks packed with food, sleeping bags and all the essentials for camping out. When we arrived at the farm, we met up with



the German team who had spent a couple of days on the farm and were returning to Asumption House. After a quick lunch, it was straight down to work for the boys, and hard it was. In the searing heat, with the sun beating down on their backs, they worked tirelessly for hours cutting down the corn. The farm was run by a farmer call Semana; he instructed the boys on all different tasks to be carried out on the farm and was really impressed with their work ethic. On the farm we went back to basics. The nights were simple. We sat around a bonfire at night-time listening to music, telling jokes, writing journals and relaying events

from the day. It was so simple yet really enjoyable. The lack of technology and social media was not missed. The camping at night-time was a novel experience, the creepy crawlies proved a challenge for some of the boys. The sounds and smells of the land, animals, earth and vegetation soothed us to sleep. There's a beauty to stillness which enabled us to really experience the present, to allow ourselves to sense and breathe and be. By day 3 when we had to return to Asumption House, we reluctantly left simplicity and beauty of the area but at the same time looking forward to a bed that night.

A further SERVE project was a neighbouring bakery and a craft shop. This was really important for local employment. We had the opportunity for a tour of the inside of the bakery and sample pizzas which they delivered as a treat one evening. In the craft shop, there was a selection of gifts to chose from, wonderful copper jewellery, an assortment of bowls and sculptures made from a dark cherry black wood. They were exquisite in their precise detail, all handmade and carved by locals from the surrounding villages and compounds.





The boys had the unique opportunity of being involved in an International Student weekend with German and Zambian students organised by SERVE (Chris O'Donoghue) in the neighbouring Nchete House. They mixed with all the other students who had been invited to part-take working in groups and giving presentations. This gave the boys the opportunity to learn about Zambia culture first hand from the Zambian students and also the different aspects of the German culture through visual and oral presentations. The highlight of this

weekend had to be the *Tri-nation Soccer Tournament* between Ireland (CBC boys), Germany and Zambia. After some hard fought battle on bone hard pitches, our boys eventually emerged victorious.

The trip was filled with many eye opening experiences another of which was the opportunity to attend Mass in the local church. We were given a warm welcome by the clergy and parishioners. It was so evident the Zambians close connection with religion. It is a huge part of their lives. The Mass lasted for over two

hours and was filled with vibrant colour, joyous singing, local dancing and was a pleasure and privilege to attend. The choir's different renditions of hymns engaged all the Mass goers from the very young to the elderly. There was a pace and pattern here that we really started to understand and enjoy.

From extreme poverty in Mazabuka, we were able to experience a different world of wealth in Livingstone. To see one of the Wonders of the World by experiencing the Victoria Falls, to travel through the bush on a Safari and see animals like elephants, crocodiles, bamboos and rhinoceros close up was memorable. It was such a privilege to have elephants walk across our path, they had a dignity and energy that fitted with their huge bodies.

The trip was unforgettable. It was a success due to the collaboration of the teachers, students, parents and SERVE all involved. It was an immersion project that from the beginning we all endeavoured to work hard making it a success and this was accomplished. There's was a power and vitality in Zambia that will stay with us wherever we are.



**Mr Michael Burke,
Mrs Anna O'Brien,
Ms Clodagh Bergin.**

THE **hope** OF volunteering

by **Rory Murphy**

Parents, siblings and friends all walked on eggshells around us when we arrived back from our two-week immersion project in southern Zambia. It was like they thought we'd greet them in the airport as catatonic shells of men, nihilists condemning the world to death. As if our experience had harrowed us to the point that we would no longer function when we re-entered the "normal world". Some of the things we experienced during the project were undeniably challenging but the overriding emotion we all got off the plane with was much simpler than sorrow or guilt.

It was hope.

President Obama once told a small group of young people of about our age the following; *"The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope"*.

We didn't fill the world with hope, we didn't save Africa and we may not even have changed lives. But we bettered them, if only for an hour. And the quote rings true. How could one not be filled with hope when walking out of Flamboyant Special School where disabled children came from miles around and receive some level of education where previously they'd have just been left at home? How could you weep for humanity when you see the sheer joy just a hurley can bring a group of children? Knowing we have a lifetime to make a difference, how could we end the project with anything less than enthusiasm?

To be joyful, though, is not to be naive, and the suffering we saw was not lost on us.

While our school was completing development on a state-of-the-art gym, Luyabolola Primary School in Mazabuka had to forbid students from entering their newest building for fear of it collapsing. Many of their students, we were told, ate their only meal of the day at school. A solitary tap spat unclean water in the yard, the only source for the whole student body. Here more than anywhere else, the clichés made perfect sense. The corruption was palpable, overt even but we were the only ones who could see it. The standard of education was piteous. The unfair distribution of wealth was as startling as it was distressing. But then the most accurate of clichés was the one that

shocked us the most. The kids, everyone really, were staggeringly happy. It's a weak adjective to use but it's apt. Unadulterated, unmitigated joy was plastered across every single one of their faces.

This is a region that is starved of funding. If negativity breeds negativity, then the opposite is certainly true. Their hope breeds hope. Their joy breeds joy. Their unwavering belief that they will be doctors and engineers and architects and that their lives will be better than that of their parents is as inspiring as it is heartrending. If they believe that they can rise above all the disadvantages dealt to them and make something of themselves, how can we not believe that we are able to make a difference over the course of our lives?

