

There's more to charity than just handing money over; seeing how it helps is equally rewarding

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By Katherine Scott

Notebook - A selection of Independent views -
Thursday, 8 December 2011 at 11:30 am

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The Knowledge to Action Foundation has had a very successful first year this year, raising in total an impressive £161,381.44. Our goal was to always share the money between our two chosen charities, Barnardo's and The Ubuntu Education Fund as well as pay for this year's Knowledge to Action Youth Leadership Summit. The best part about running a foundation is always the part when you get to give the money away. At our end of year Christmas party in London we were delighted to be able to present both Barnardo's and Ubuntu with a £60,000 cheque each.



It is always important to us to connect with the reason why we raise the money and to know what it will be spent on. For this to happen Greg and I make an active effort to not only connect with the heads of each charity but also to learn as much as possible about their projects. This was the biggest factor in us coming out to South Africa over the Christmas period; to see how things are working on the ground level.

Days after arriving in South Africa last week, we flew to Port Elizabeth to visit The Ubuntu Education Fund to see how the money raised from The Flying Trader project has helped and the work they are doing with their Early Childhood Development Program. The Ubuntu Education Fund is a community-based organisation that provides thousands of children and their families with life-saving health services and essential educational resources. Their unique approach to community development has been recognised by the Clinton Global Initiative, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship and the Aspen Institute's African Leadership Initiative. Ubuntu's Co-Founder and President, Jacob Lief, was recently chosen as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.

Ubuntu's Early Childhood Development Program (ECD program) was started because there was an obvious void in the support pregnant mothers and young babies were getting in order to provide them with the building blocks of life. Ubuntu realised that many children were being enrolled into school at the age of 6 with almost no foundation to grow from. It was therefore becoming a vicious cycle of too little too late with many kids unable to keep up with the pace of learning at school. The ECD Program provides 0-5 year olds with educational and developmental training to prepare them for school ahead. The program also focuses on pregnant mothers, helping them with their nutrition and preparing them for the birth ahead. If a mother has HIV the program also assists in educating the mother how not to pass HIV onto their child. Ubuntu has a baby clinic where mothers can take their babies for vaccines as well as providing breast feeding support classes.

On arrival at Ubuntu, Greg and I were welcomed by Gcobani Zonke who showed us around the centre. It was a hot day and the end of term for the final year students who had just written their last exam. We got a warm welcome from the teenagers who sang me Happy Birthday in Xhosa and English. It was fascinating to learn what each child would be studying at university in the year ahead. Their group was peppered with future biochemical engineers, doctors, journalists and social workers; impressive! The biggest change to the centre from our visit last year was the newly built ECD class room complete with mini toilets and basins for the kids. Very cute indeed! We were pleased to hear that the money had gone to completing the classrooms and paying the teachers' salaries for the year. It was also fantastic to see them preparing the plot of land for the community vegetable garden with the view of using the vegetables to feed the kids at lunch times.

One thing that did strike us was the distinct lack of furniture in the building. The kids were all sitting on the floor and the staff kitchen had no tables and chairs. When we enquired further, it turned out that the Major of Port Elizabeth had promised furniture that had never arrived. Our hearts really went out to them as it felt as though they had come so far only to be let down at the last hurdle. We decided then and there to do something to help. The next day we had our Christmas party for our South African clients in Johannesburg and I got on the stage to auction off some prizes. Our winning auction prize was an exclusive 3 hour one-on-one morning trading session with Greg at our Llandudno beach house complete with gourmet breakfast cooked by a private chef. And with over R70,000 raised for Ubuntu's furniture the impromptu auction was a huge success!

Next weekend we approach the climax of our visit to South Africa as we accept Sir Richard Branson's invitation to the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in Johannesburg. As well as spending time with Sir Richard on his private game reserve we will take the opportunity to discuss our philanthropic ideas and missions with Sir Richard and hopefully get to understand more about his Virgin UNITE charity. Likewise we will share our experience and stories with Richard on our visit to Ubuntu and the rest of the work the Knowledge to Action Foundation does.

Katherine Scott, founder of the Knowledge to Action Foundation