

Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship
Report

‘Gaining Personal Growth Through Exploration, Exposure and Exchange of Culture’

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Introduction and aims of the fellowship

Having led youth expeditions for others for the past five years, I was keen to prove to myself that I can organise and facilitate my own expedition, and for the people I take to gain personal growth through exploration, exposure and exchange of culture. I completed a BSc degree in Outdoor with Environmental Education in 2009, although the first two years were Outdoor Adventure Management. Most of my fellow graduates are in the outdoor industry and many are also youth expedition leaders. It is well publicised that youth expeditions to developing countries allow an opportunity for the young people to gain and develop an array of skills and attributes that will assist them in life, of which I am a firm believer, however, I also believe that what they can gain can be increased by working with them post expedition.

Mountain Leader Training England (MLTE) Mountain Leader Award (ML) is generally the minimal National Governing Body Award (NGB) requirement in order to lead youth (under 18's) expeditions abroad. The expeditions I have led are for a month at a time and consist of four elements; community project work, wildlife conservation, marine conservation and an adventure element which is working towards scuba diving qualifications, however the options are also mountaineering or jungle trekking.

The scuba diving expeditions I have for led are brilliant, and I do not need ML to do them, however, I have always felt frustrated that I was so restricted to scuba diving expeditions because I didn't have the ML award and. This is due to being dyslexic and really struggling with map reading. Many people that are dyslexic can read maps absolutely fine, but my spacial awareness and processing difficulties make it a tough challenge. I have tried 3D maps, intense tuition and been assisted by some very patient and highly skilled tutors, however, I have resigned to the fact that after years of persevering, it is not happening and actually I am now thinking that if I had ML I could be on a completely different path. In fact, doing the ML Training was actually a huge achievement for me and I am happy with that.

This led to me wondering whether the adventure element is necessary for personal development to be gained on youth expeditions to the likes of Africa. Or, whether the focus on exploration, exposure and an exchange of culture would bring about a similar degree of personal growth without including a challenging adventurous activity. With this in mind, alongside findings from my degree dissertation in 2009 which was 'The transferable benefits of an expedition for a young person', I decided that it was time for me to put my thoughts into action.

Of course, it would be ridiculous to claim that the adventure element is not important because, I for one, know the great sense of achievement gained when a mountain has been climbed, or the trek through a humid jungle has been completed, and obviously with a background in outdoor education, I am a firm believer that the outdoors provides a fantastic vehicle to offer challenges whereby people realise that they are self-motivated and strong

willed. Often, prior to that experience they do not consider themselves to have these qualities, yet realise it was because they did not have anything to base this on.

I believe that spending time in an under-developed, less materialistic country, such as Tanzania, would enable personal growth to transpire organically. My intention was to organise and facilitate an eight week expedition specifically tailored to a small group of people, thus allowing for a more intimate experience, and to expose them to opportunities that would enable them to discover the importance of believing in oneself and developing oneself in order to gain personal growth. By reviewing and processing the experience, I proposed that the personal growth gained from the expedition may have a greater impact long-term and my aim was for this to be a fundamental part of what I offered. By meeting every three months for one year, post expedition, to record progress, pursue additional opportunities and encourage them to continue developing, I am sure that the long-term impact will be greater than if they are left to continue without that support.

I also wanted to bring some community spirit back in England, especially in a climate where many young people seem to have lost hope and ambition, and felt that there are so many youth expedition and gap year providers who offer volunteering in developing countries but there is only one that offers the opportunity to link the young people with community groups or charities here in the UK, in order to continue that volunteering. My plan was for the young people I took to give a presentation of their experiences to their peers and local community groups with the aim being to continue the voluntary element. This would also be an opportunity for them to share what they have gained, thus inspiring their peers to undertake something similar.

Finally, and most importantly, I hoped that this experience would give me the confidence to start my own business whereby I could offer bespoke expeditions to Tanzania, focussing on gaining personal growth through exploration, exposure and exchange of culture. I have so much to offer young people and believe that the more that get to experience life in a country like Tanzania, the better it is for everyone as minds will be stretched and paradigms shifted, each one will teach one and people will care more about our world. I do not anticipate the opportunity to be solely for young people and I intended to use the Travelling Fellowship to make contacts in Tanzania whereby I can offer a range of cultural experiences, activities and accommodation that will be suitable for all ages and abilities.

Outline of Itinerary

Fri 4 May 2012 - Sat 5 May: Arrive into Moshi, Tanzania. Climatisation and orientation

Sun 6 May - Tues 8 May: Safari with Kabisa Afrikan Adventures to Ngorongoro Crater and Lake Manyara

Wed 9 May - Mon 21 May: Tuleeni orphanage, Moshi. Tasks include; washing the children, preparing food, teaching those who are not in school, teaching at the kindergarten, teach swimming, playing, singing and stimulating the 40+ children and sharing ideas and knowledge regarding their development and health.

Tues 22 May: Travel to Tanga, orientation and settle in

Wed 23 May - Tues 29 May: Tanga with Camp Tanzania. Time to experience traditional village life and learn how to harvest seaweed, make a kitchen from mud and sticks, carry wood on your heads, make roof tiles from palm leaves and make an energy efficient stove from termite mound mud, grass and water.

Wed 30 May: Travel to Dar Es Salam, orientation and settle in

Thurs 31 May: Chill in Dar and re-pack for Zanzibar and Mafia

Fri 1 June: Travel to Zanzibar, orientation and historical tour of Stone Town, Forodhani night food market

Sat 2 June – Sun 3 June: Zanzibar, spice tour, shopping, explore the town

Mon 4 June: Travel to Mafia, orientation of Kilindoni, and settle in

Tues 5 June – Sun 17 June: Mafia Island, travel to Baleni. Opportunity to offer our English speaking and comprehension skills at Baleni Secondary School, only 4% of the students pass their final exams due to being taught in Kiswahili yet their exams are in English. Arrange a debate competition with the topic being 'Are man-made products damaging our environment?', prizes -English/Swahili dictionaries.

Mon 18 June: Travel to Dar and settle in

Tues 19 June – Wed 20 June: Cultural tour of Dar, shopping and chilling

Thurs 21 June – Mon 25 June: Travel to Kigamboni, orientation and settle in. Last phase of the expedition and ideal beach location to review the expedition and process the experience.

Mon 25 June: Travel back to Dar

Tue 26 June: Return flight to London

What have I achieved?

It is one thing people telling you that you are capable of something but another actually believing it yourself. Being awarded a Travelling Fellowship enabled me the opportunity to actively realise my full potential. Although the planning and facilitation was a challenge, and at times the itinerary did not go to plan, due to weather and other unforeseen circumstances, I learnt so much from the experience and this has given me the confidence to start up my own business offering bespoke expeditions to Tanzania.

I wondered whether I was focussing too much on the aspect of whether or not the adventurous activity element was necessary for an expedition and realised that I had already answered my own question. I know that the adventurous activity element is a fantastic aspect of an expedition, however it became clear that the group I took are generally not very active neither do they partake in adventurous activities, therefore, the entire expedition was an adventure in itself. They didn't need to climb a mountain or scuba dive in order to have the adventure element.

With this in mind, I recognised that it would completely depend on the people that I would be taking, therefore, if I had a group that did want to experience more extreme adventurous activities I would need to provide that, so, I used the opportunity wisely to network and make contacts with potential partners. For example, personally I am unable to lead a trek up Mount Kilimanjaro, therefore, I need someone suitable to do that and I have realised that, if required, I can always accompany the group and utilise personal development tools in order to allow further personal growth to be gained.

It is clear that the personal growth gained by the group I took to Tanzania is immense, whether this would be increased by including an adventurous activity is difficult to measure, however, it could be said that because they were not interested in experiencing that kind of challenge, it may have in fact have had a less than positive outcome as it may have pushed them too far.

My degree dissertation, in 2009, was 'The transferable benefits of an expedition for a young person', and I researched the key benefits that had been transferred into the everyday lives of a cross section of young people that had been on youth expeditions to a developing country that had included an adventurous activity. My findings were that the key benefits they noted were; environmental awareness, appreciation of family and possessions, awareness of self and self-worth, increased confidence, effective communicating, ability to work well within a team, cultural awareness and an introduction to safe travel.

The group I took consisted of two girls aged 21 and 22 and one of their mothers. It was unknown as to how this would work especially as they all knew each other and although I was in their community, we had got to know each other through the preparation of the expedition. They have faced various challenges in their lives and I was keen for them to

experience a completely different world to what they know and to gain personal growth from it. They were excited about coming to a new country, enjoying new experiences, meeting new people and getting away from home and nervous about how they would cope in new situations, especially how challenging it would be emotionally at the orphanage. They expected it to be hard and challenging but that was the whole point of it.

When asked on the second day 'what have you understood about Tanzania and the challenges the people face?', they replied " they need the rain so badly for crops, without it they have no food and we didn't realise they had such a huge reliance on tourism, I thought it would just be Africans. They are very proud, friendly people and have such a poor education system, they struggle to go to school because of finances but really want to get an education".

So by the second day they had learnt this much, and in turn, it made them realise many aspects of their own lives that they took granted, education being the main one and that we don't have to think about where our next meal is coming from, even if you are extremely poor. As time went on and we experienced each phase of the expedition, I spent time processing the experience with them and we would have an informal discussion most evenings about the days' events.

Generally, I used open ended questions and asked them to visualise their lives back home, compared to here, and share the similarities and differences. I purposefully wanted them to think about what they were learning about themselves, what they had taught others, what they had learnt from others about either themselves or Tanzanian culture and any specific challenges that they had faced. Also, at the end of each phase, I asked them what they would do differently if they were to repeat the experience. I made notes from our discussions throughout each phase and what follows is laid out in questionnaire format for ease of understanding what aspect they were commenting on, I have solely focussed on the feedback from the young people.

What did you learn about yourself?

Tuleeni Orphanage

That I'm quite adaptable, have more patience for children than I thought I did and that when I go back I'll spend more time with nieces, nephews and friends kids.

It made me think I could handle a situation with kids in harder circumstances, I would feel comfortable to go somewhere worse, also, I can't go without meat for a few days.

Tanga

I learnt that I could never work as hard as them, I am not as physically strong, the way they lift all that firewood is incredible. I also learnt that I need something to occupy myself when I'm bored like books/music/crossword but at home I have the tv, here I don't!

Mafia Island

That I was not confident at teaching which annoyed me because I thought I would be good at it but it's hard when you don't know what they already know.

That surprisingly, I was confident with teaching English and I am adaptable to conditions.

What did you learn about cultural differences?

Tuleeni Orphanage

Children are not played with, babies not stimulated as much as in England. Adults are more superior than children, it's a get what you're given kind of attitude, our children get a lot more choice and are so spoiled because of it.

There is a big difference in hygiene standards, the emphasis on brushing teeth is not so high as in the UK, however, this may be because they cannot afford toothbrushes and toothpaste. People are very happy and there is a big focus on being religious, also, I didn't realise there were so many Muslims here in Tanzania.

Tanga

They use everything and don't waste anything, the women are a lot harder working and do a lot more than men. They cook outside, animals run freely, and they put make up (black eye liner) on kids to warn off evil spirits which was weird.

Mafia Island

The boys and girls are very segregated and the girls are shy but the boys are confident, teachers are not paid much and have no incentive to teach. Students can go back to repeat forms so a 12 year old could know as much as an 18 year old. There were a lot of pregnancy shocks- many of the girls have to walk up to 3 hours to get to school so get lifts with truck drivers who expect sex in return and as a result, many end up pregnant which is terrible as many of them are between 12 -16 years old.

What were you able to teach the children and people?

Tuleeni Orphanage

We taught the adults to be more loving towards the children and that showing affection more often will assist the development of the child.

Hygiene wise, using soap and toothpaste regularly will benefit them, to put their hand over their mouth when coughing as it will reduce the amount of germs spread. We taught new games to entertain themselves and taught individuals as well that hopefully they will remember. We brightened up the kindergarten to make it child friendly and helped them to become confident in the water by taking them swimming.

Tanga

I was happy to be able to teach them English as it was hard to teach them anything else as they know a lot, we are not used to hard work like they are but at least we could help with teaching English.

Mafia Island

I taught Veronica that baby Gladys was not cold, she kept putting socks, woolly hats and loads of blankets on her but actually she was sweating too much and could have over heated. I think that we brought them out of their shells at the school, especially the girls.

What did they teach you?

Tuleeni Orphanage

They value the littlest of things, things we take for granted. They are caring towards each other, especially the older kids to younger kids, so much more than in the UK. Babies should be babies but at any age they are capable of doing so much, our kids at home could do much more if we gave them the opportunity. Also they taught us to appreciate what our children have and a reminder that childhood is so important. The older girls are loving to each other in a very sisterly way.

Tanga

Basically, how to just get on with it, we stress and moan about so much. They really support each other and it reminded me that we should do that more. They also taught us how to make makuti, how to build a kitchen out of mud and sticks, how to do new things like chopping wood and walking with it on our heads and also how to be resourceful like making money from harvesting seaweed.

Mafia Island

That we should pump harder at the water well, we were too slow! To appreciate things more generally, especially education, we should teach each other and make the best of everything.

Specifically explain the challenges you faced

Tuleeni Orphanage

Washing with a bucket shower, using a long drop toilet, getting up so early, they do so much before school and it made me feel guilty waking up at 7am! Because of the language barrier, it took longer to get to know them although it was easier with the younger kids.

Tanga

Touching mud when making the mud hut because I hate mud, we felt cut off as we were in the village, we are not used to hard physical work especially in the heat and the bugs bit us a lot so we stayed in the tent in the evenings.

Mafia Island

There was a large amount of students in each class so it was difficult to know their age and gauge their level of understanding; also it felt like we were not getting through to all the kids, especially because of the language barrier. The outside shower and toilet were strange and my bed was not very comfortable.

What would you do differently if you repeated your time?

Tuleeni Orphanage

Take the kids out more to do different activities and spend more time up at the main orphanage as we got to know the kids at the bottom more.

Tanga

Try to entertain myself more in the evenings rather than being bored, there were activities but I just stayed in my tent.

Mafia Island

I would have wanted to stay for longer and interacted with the students more at break and lunch and been more involved with farm and teaching netball, so that the kids get more out of it. Also, I think it would have been better to stick to teaching one form to see more progression, although the activities and lessons were good.

Conclusion

It is clear to see that plenty was learnt and consequently, a great deal of personal growth was gained through exploring different environments and meeting new people, experiencing new challenges, gaining insight on Tanzanian culture and traditions, learning a new language, battling with what is fair and unfair, exposing oneself to situations that are uncomfortable and pushing the realms of what is comfortable. On the first day that we arrived, I gave each of the girls a book in which I had written some motivational comments. It was up to them what they did with the book although the obvious choice was to use it as a diary. I believe that encouraging them to write about their experiences, alongside discussing them daily, enabled them to process the experience more frequently which was beneficial when the aim is to gain personal growth, as they can look back in the diary and compare thoughts now to when they first arrived, and, actually read in their own words how their mindset has changed.

I felt it was important to suggest that when they go back home, 'normal' things may well annoy them and they should open themselves up to the notion that the person they left as will not be the person they are returning as, purely because their minds would have stretched, they would have seen and experienced things first hand, which, whether we like it or not, create a shift our thinking.

The girls commented on how much they had experienced in such a short space of time and I explained that it may be hard to realise the full extent of what they have gained from the 8 week expedition and that it may take a few months to fully digest. I arranged to meet them a few months later and was pleased to hear their comments. One has started an access course at college and is "definitely applying myself more to the course having seen how much the Tanzanian kids want to get an education".

The other is pursuing opportunities to start her own shoe business, of which she discussed whilst on expedition, and we all shared our ideas with regards to product development and how she could market it. Having spoken with a family member since returning, she has been incredibly pro-active and is currently researching the necessities in order to get going with it. She has also stopped smoking which is fantastic and she was clearly pleased about this. Whether this is related to the expedition is not clear, however, when playing netball with the school students on Mafia Island, she commented on how unfit she was and we did discuss quitting cigarettes a lot.

Another aspect I found interesting was that as well as having a greater value for family and friends, they said they liked the fact that the community spirit they experienced in Tanzania, was noticeable within their own network of family and friends but that they hadn't necessarily noticed or appreciated it before and it was only from having remarked about it whilst over there, that they realised that they have it too. This was also the longest time they had been away from home so was a contributing factor.

A reviewing tool I have used on many occasions within my work in the youth development sector is writing a letter to oneself. This can be an extremely powerful activity and if framed carefully, can produce a great changing point for the participant. I encouraged them to write a letter to themselves that would include; what they are proud of, what they like/love about themselves, what have they learnt about themselves/each other/others, what changes they intended to make, how they would make those changes, when they would make those changes by, why they intended on making changes, what the next steps are for them, how will they be achieved, what obstacles may challenge their hopes to succeed, ideas of ways to tackle those challenges and why did they participate in this experience. I sent the girls' letters 3 months after the expedition and the feedback is that to even receive a hand written letter is one thing, but it being a letter from oneself has such an impact and the outcomes for these girls will become apparent in time.

Currently, the girls and I are preparing a video presentation that will be given to family, friends, community groups, charities and other interested parties. The aim is to share our experiences with others and encourage them to pursue a similar opportunity and link themselves up with a charity or community group in order to continue the volunteering but in their home town. They have chosen Bath Area Play Project to be involved with and assist in organising events whereby parents with young children are encouraged to access free play events for their children. The plan is to utilise the girls' knowledge of young parents who do not normally use the free play service and engage them in the activities. This will be an on-going partnership and all of the girls' ideas will be greatly appreciated and welcomed.

As time goes on, we will continue to meet and I will encourage them in whatever they are pursuing whilst suggesting other avenues to explore that will continue to develop them as a person, this is an element that I feel very passionate about fulfilling, especially as this is the area that most expedition providers do not offer, and which, I believe, is the most important part in order for personal development to be gained long-term and transferred into their everyday lives. We will always have the connection of the expedition and can refer back to it as a reference point of change whenever we meet.

The area of post expedition development is an area that will benefit from greater research and I think that if expedition providers could take more responsibility for the young people that they are developing then this would impact communities in the UK on a large scale. If time was taken to encourage the community spirit, by volunteering for example, that the young people had enjoyed and valued whilst on expedition then this could lead to a wonderful array of collaborations between people, consequently breaking down barriers amongst communities and creating a ripple of change.

That's my idea anyway, I guess it's now up to those in the industry to see value in it and pursue the notion. I for one am going to continue with this model and fulfil my obligation to the girls, and similarly, anyone else I take on an expedition. I feel very pleased to have been awarded a Travelling Fellowship and grateful to have had the opportunity to put my idea into action. Be the change you want to see in the world ... I am.



