

Blog: LiA showcase (July 2022 – August 2022)

Isabella Stein, ZAMDA IRELAND
Kabwe, Zambia

Nshima: My witness to Zambia

In Zambia, nshima is like a religion. This stiff white porridge I ate each day, three times a day for 5 weeks. Each time I had nshima, I was with the children of the Sables Nua school in Kabwe, Zambia. Nshima is not a particularly flavourful food. Did I tire of this same meal?

Zambia was perhaps the best experience I will have in my life. I am 23 years old, I don't consider my life as finishing here, I know I will have many more experiences to come and perhaps some of them will be great experiences but right now, I don't want any one of them, whatever they might be, to trump my Kabwe experience.

My time in Kabwe was far too short in hindsight. It took me one week to fall in love with Zambia and five weeks to never want to leave. My purpose with ZAMDA Ireland, was on the burgeoning field of sport-for-development and my role there was to help facilitate access to sports for the children in Sables Nua primary school. Judo and soccer were my particular focus. The idea of the sport-for-development movement stems from the belief that sport will improve the welfare of others through development. Its focus is to provide better opportunities for others. Sport is a universal language. The premise for my project with ZAMDA sought to include youth regardless of economic means, gender or ability in sport. I

particularly focused on supporting positive perceptions of women in sport, to break down barriers, increase participation and also develop leadership opportunities. I found this a challenging part of life in Zambia, as the traditional expectation of women is that they remain at home, cook and have children. Young girls attend Sables but often they



stop attending school after 17 years of age as is customary. I hoped to empower the young girls of Sables to seek opportunities through sport and education that could take them places they'd never been and become the leaders of tomorrow whilst respecting and appreciating tradition.

Each day I played soccer, I practiced judo in the dojo, I mentored, I coached but most importantly I listened, I observed. The girls on the team liked having someone older than them playing with them, having an older girl tell them "Well done" or cheer them on from the side-lines. Although there is no female judo team, the girls would stand by the dojo door (without stepping foot inside for fear of being given out to – the dojo is a serious place) and watch me fight against the boys. They would cheer when I toppled my opponent and pat me on the back when I had finished training. And so, the



comradery I showed them on the soccer field became a comradery shown in everyday life.

With each consecutive judo training, the attendance increased. The dojo is a place of hope, an opportunity to develop leadership attributes and an opportunity to travel past the outskirts of Kabwe. I imparted my advice and coaching training to the "judokas" with the knowledge that they would pass it on to the younger boys joining in on the judo sessions.



The concept of opportunity costs is what I took away from Zambia. Those children in Sables didn't suddenly get smarter or suddenly become so skilled at judo or soccer that they got onto the Zambian teams. They simply had a sporting or education opportunity that wasn't available to their parents before them. This is the difference. Opportunity.

To answer my question, I didn't tire of nshima. Each time I ate, I was surrounded by children who come to school every day, walk for one/two hours to school twice a day every day and eat better in Sables perhaps than their families at home every day. This is the reality of Sables. A stark contrast to Irish school "lunchables" or cheese strings you might notice in the canteen of a standard secondary school or the colourful classrooms of a typical primary school. There is nothing quite as humbling as this. Once the plates are cleared each child puts it in the "to-be-washed pile", where one child leaves their plate on the wood of the dining table, another will remove it for them. On Friday's the children get one boiled egg, for many this is the best day of the week. And yet, a lot of children do not eat the egg, they stuff it into tiny pockets and bring it home with them after school. This is not the famous marshmallow experiment of placing a marshmallow in front of a child with the promise of another one if they wait 15 minutes before eating it. There is no double payment for patience. That egg goes uneaten, is pocketed for the rest of the afternoon and is taken home to brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers and it is harrowing to think that a small four-year-old child already understands this.



What I brought to Zambia I shared with the children I mentored, coached and trained with but I know that they gave me so much more, a different and fresh perspective on life and service to others.

Natotela Sana (Thank you)

Isabella Stein
ZAMDA Ireland
Kabwe, Zambia

