

Zimele Newsletter

Zimele Immersion 2018

On December 7th 2018, six intrepid journeyman comprising two SKC staff and four Old Boys, (Michael McGirr, Vince Toohey, Andre Coten, Phil Borg, Hugh Flanagan & Nikhil Shah) set off on the 9th Zimele Immersion to Kenya & Tanzania. We followed similar paths and in the footsteps of over 200 previous participants and previous Immersions organized by Mr Tom Purcell. That legacy is a huge one which we came to discover in all corners of Kenya.

After a jet lagged first night in Kenya, we were up early for Mass at Embulbul which was a brilliant two hour cultural feast of sights, sounds, prayers, singing, music and moving homilies. The immaculately dressed all Kenyan congregation gave us our first taste of Africa and one of its juxtapositions; the joy, religious conviction, earnestness and pride with which people carried themselves even though they came from over-crowded shanty town houses with dirt floors that are no bigger than the garden shed or laundry in most of our homes in Australia. The great beauty of Africa and its appalling multiple sadnesses, sit virtually hand in hand in every facet of the country.

At Mass, we would meet some of the families and children we would spend the next two days with at Br Beausang Primary and Secondary School. Here we would use all the sport equipment generously donated by the parents, staff & students. Cricket, Touch Footy, Basketball & Soccer were our mainstays of the two day sports camp for approx. 30 boys and girls children Years 5, 6 & 7. Our brief from the unflappable Principal, Peter Shanahan, was to give some holiday respite to the parents, entertain their children, sponsor feeding the school community and for the kids to have fun. We also had great fun and our home visits to various shanty towns to meet the families topped off a wonderful two days and showed what powerful work the Br Beausang staff are doing to give children and adults a window to a better future.

This same pattern was repeated at every social justice organization we visited- the Mary Rice Centre in Kibera, the Education For Life (EFL) Centre in Eldoret and a Loreto school in Karen just to name a few. Here, we met people like Silas the 20 year charity worker taking our Zimele group through the Kibera slum, his childhood home. An Edmund Rice scholarship got him through school and now is helping him get through university to gain a teaching degree. We would also meet the incredible 80 year old Irish Loreto nun, Sr Mary Owens whose Nyumbani campus in Karen runs a wonderful school for children with HIV infected children to give them the home, the education and medication they need to live a dignified life. Sr Mary is a 50 year veteran in Africa and holds the boast of teaching the current Prime Minister of Kenya. Lastly, we would meet the unstoppable Angie Obutu at EFL Centre in Eldoret; a similar dynamo that our Zimele work helps support each year. Her incredible work with an enormous community of HIV infected babies, children & adults; her adult work programs, micro finance work, her education work and her home visits has brought faith, hope, love, joy, work and dignity to that community. It was a privilege to witness all these amazing people in action.

We also had time to visit Iten, meet Brother Colm, run with some Olympic hopefuls; get chased by Hippos in Lake Naivasha and saw the classic African wilderness landscape of Tarangerie National Park in Tanzania. The African Immersion was a brilliant experience and

I want to thank all the brilliant people in that country that made the journey so transformational. I would like to thank the generous support of the Headmaster, ERF, Tom Purcell, Zimele team and Mission Travel that helped us get to Africa. I also would like to thank the witty Michael McGirr, and our Old Boys Andre, Hugh Phil & Nikhil that all took three weeks out of their Christmas holidays to make the great leap of faith and attend the Immersion. Lastly, I want to thank the generous families and staff that donated over 200 kgs of sport's equipment and clothes that we took to Africa. They have all found good schools and homes on the other side of the Earth. Thank you all for helping us make a change.

Vince Toohey