

Tonya Detailed Report for Be the Change- Kenya

Before I started working with Be the Change- Kenya (BTCKE) on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2012, I thought I knew exactly what I was getting into and what I would be doing there. I was to go in as a 'Program Intern,' and my duties were twofold; to 'oversee mid-year evaluations of Young Adult Participants' and to 'increase the amount of development work undertaken by BTCKE in Nairobi, Kenya.' It sounded simple enough, and I actually had a hard time understanding how I would play an important part in this organisation while doing such 'small' tasks. Looking back, I am grateful to Natalie Finstad, my internship supervisor, for structuring my internship the way she did, by trusting me enough to do things in such a way that I was able to take my outcomes in a direction that I felt best suited the purpose of the organisation, so that what was to be a simple summer internship turned into something I felt quite passionate about and will continue to work with from this side of the Atlantic too.

Before going into detail about my internship with BTCKE, let me explain more about what the organisation actually does. BTCKE is an organisation that was started up sometime in 2010 by two American women, Natalie Finstad and Sarah Welch, who had both worked in Kenya before. Between the two of them, they have a wide variety of skills like community organising and leadership training, and they were able to recognise the need for a different approach to the serious, but in the case of Kenya, quite neglected cause of child poverty. While I would not say that the other organisations who have come into Kenya (or have started up within Kenya) to work with this cause have approached it from the 'wrong direction,' it is true that many of these organisations and their programmes have not yielded positive results due to a number of reasons; red tape, corruption, asymmetric information, starting off too big, just to name a few.

The primary focus of BTCKE is to bring in the *Kenyan* public, educate and mobilise them, and use these people to help children living in poverty rather than to encourage a culture of international dependency by organisations such as children's homes and children's centres. Thus, Be the Change-

Kenya trains local 'Young Adults' (YAs), who work on a volunteer basis, in a variety of leadership and community mobilising skills. These YAs are then split up into teams of around five or more, and each team is paired with a children's home or children's centre. These Young Adults have to work with the directors of the homes to set outcomes for their own home, and are responsible for meeting these outcomes; whether recruiting mentors for the homes, spreading awareness about the homes, starting up income generating activities, teaching them how to manage their finances or other such things that they see fit. One thing that stood out about these adults was their commitment to the children who lived in the homes that they worked with. Many of the YAs were from different backgrounds; one had fifteen siblings; one had just graduated high school; one was in law school; one was an ex-Rwandan genocide survivor; one was a mechanic in the neighbouring area. Uniting all these differences was a common passion, the need to find a solution to child poverty.

BTCCKE also trains the directors of the homes, and in the period before I left, had started training 'executive mentors' who would work closely with the directors of the. Be the Change- Kenya also has a Local Advisory Network (LAN) of Kenyan professionals, who are in charge of meeting with, and giving the nonprofit advice from time to time. The people who sit in on the LAN are from many walks of life. One of the members I recruited, Mr. Cecil Agutu, is actually an employee of another nonprofit organisation that works with various projects involving the youth of Kenya on a much, much larger scale than ours.

By now the question must have arisen, how did I play into this vast network of dynamic Kenyan individuals with a shared goal? Having been born and brought up in Kenya, I grew up with an awareness of the child poverty that was rampant around me, and knowledge that there was need for intervention, but when I was younger, I had no idea how I could help. My high school would make trips to other schools in 'disadvantaged' regions, and make well-timed donations of maize, blankets, or other necessary materials. At that point, I recognised that instead of self-sufficiency, we were fostering dependency. Luckily, I was able to approach child poverty from a different angle when I started work with BTCCKE.

While I was working with BTCKE, the surprising thing is that I did not get to interact with the children living in the homes much. I made one visit to a home, and that was it. This made me realise that there were other ways of helping these children, even though I was not working *directly* with them, and it made me appreciate my work even more.

I had two main duties while I was interning with this organisation. The first was to create, implement, and compile leadership evaluations of the Young Adults that BTCKE had been working with, which I spent Tuesdays and Wednesdays doing at the headquarters in Ongata Rongai, and the second was to increase awareness of BTCKE amongst the Kenyan public in ways that would help the organisation with our work, for which I used the rest of the week, especially Mondays and Thursdays. Fridays for the most part were set aside for strategising, reflecting on my work, brainstorming, blogging and seeing what else needed to be done. While it was a small part of my internship, I was appreciative of this time, for it gave me the opportunity to better focus on what exactly I wanted to achieve.

For increasing awareness about BTCKE, I held meetings with a number of professional and corporate partners, and was able to recruit people for a number of things. Some, like Mr. Agutu, were interested in being a part of the LAN. Some people offered to donate, and some were more inclined to volunteer at our trainings, having skills that would be useful to the YAs and the directors. Others decided that they would be interested in mentoring the children themselves, and there were a few who came up with interesting ways that we could help the YAs and the children.

While my direct supervisor was Natalie, she was in the US for the majority of my internship, and I worked more often with Sarah, her co-director, Beatrice, the communications intern, and Ken, the program associate who was in charge of the YAs while Natalie was gone. I would check in with Natalie once a week via Skype, email her if I had queries that were not urgent, and if there was something that I needed to know about the day-to-day work I was doing, I would ask Beatrice. Sarah would accompany me to some of the meetings that I had.

The first week that I spent at the organisation was used in developing the evaluation, learning more about BTCKE and compiling a contact list of people who I could meet with. I read the biographies of the YAs, and tried to get to know them a little before I actually met them. The next week after that, I started scheduling meetings with the YAs, and people who would offer to help out in a variety of ways

I enjoyed meeting with people about BTCKE, to try and recruit them to help us, as I actually got to talk to people who had never heard about it, and explain to them why there was need for an organisation such as ours. I got to go out and do actual recruitment, and to be able to meet with many high level executives, despite being just an intern. One of my favourite meetings was with the leader of Ashoka, an international non-profit organisation that works at developing social entrepreneurs. He grew up in a children's home himself, and thus was very interested in our project. He offered to get some of the Ashoka Fellows, social entrepreneurs affiliated with Ashoka, to come and do trainings on how to start up income generating activities. He also offered me some tips that came in very handy on how to have events that would help publicise BTCKE.

Aside from the help that I asked for, some people volunteered in their particular area of expertise. One IT company offered to take on two or three (older) children living in the homes, and train them free of charge in IT skills that would enable them to have extremely high starting salaries compared to their peers, provided that they worked with this company for a period of time agreed upon in a contract.

The leadership evaluations were educational too, in a whole different way. Being asked to develop a leadership evaluation brought up a question that at the time I found difficult to answer; what is a leader? Eventually, I realised that leadership covers many aspects of life, and not just being able to get people to follow you and do what you say, and I felt that this was an important life lesson. Meeting with the Young Adults was very inspirational. Here were ordinary Kenyans, who had realised that there was a problem affecting children in Kenya, and instead of waiting for someone else to come in and solve it, as many have, they got up and took an active stance.

My internship with Be the Change- Kenya taught me so much more than I can ever sum up in paper. I was able to witness and appreciate the power of ordinary people who had the courage to believe in their country and their fellow citizens. I learnt that when you talk to people about something you feel passionate about, most will not turn away, but will walk with you and show you the way to your destination. During my last week, I remember being surprised at how quickly the internship went by, and I decided that my work would not stop there. Having had the opportunity to learn that however much or however little I do to help is valuable made me feel like an important part of BTCKE, and I am extremely thankful for the internship, as well as for the Tonya Public Affairs Fund, which enabled me to be a part of something so wonderful.