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Student Spotlight

Student: Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza



Julia-Anne Savarit-Cosenza (left), 19, of Radnor, with students orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Zambia. She took a trip there in January.

School: Savarit-Cosenza, 19, of Radnor, attends the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

What she has done: Along with two other Radnor High School sophomores, Savarit-Cosenza in 2004 started the African Education Program, a nonprofit organization that provides support for education in Kafue, Zambia.

Since then, the group has delivered 13,000 books and 30 computers to schools there. Last August, it opened a youth center to house a library and computer lab, and in January, it paid the \$80-per-pupil tuition so that 25 orphans aged 12 to 18 could attend school.

So far, the group has raised \$40,000. It soon will deliver 50 more computers donated by the Radnor School District. The equipment was available because it had been replaced in an upgrade. The gear will be packed in boxes lined with clothing for the Zambian students.

Savarit-Cosenza traveled to Zambia from Jan. 15 to 31 and kept a log of her impressions, posted at www.aeprogram.org.

She spoke by computer video-phone late last month from the University of Cape Town. It was midafternoon here, and 10 p.m. there.

Question: What are you currently studying?

Answer: I'm doing a semester abroad in international relations and development in Africa. I have two more years at American University, School of International Service, in Washington, D.C.

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Q: How do you see your studies dovetailing with your African Education Program (AEP) activities?

A: I would love to keep working with AEP. I would like to turn this into something bigger than we imagined - promoting education through nonprofits - and yes, I will be living in Africa; my family needs to prepare because this is what I want to do.

Another idea is to become a diplomat and to do a little more. I will definitely be in Africa.

Q: Did you get to see the results of your efforts initially?

A: No. When we first started, we said, 'Hey, why don't we do this?' We packed up the books and sent the container by ship. That was maybe two weeks tops, before we actually left to go there, so the container didn't get there in time.

Q: What was your first impression of Africa?

A: I didn't think I would be so touched. It's how they are always smiling. They're living in poverty and walking miles upon miles to go anywhere every day, but they are always smiling.

We were traveling one time, and we saw school kids. At one recess, they were playing soccer with rocks. So when we saw that, and they were just so happy, we couldn't believe it; we wanted to just stop, but we had to be in three different [places].

On the second trip, we got to know the people that much better. These people, I have a whole new feeling for.

Q: How did you get all this done - your studies and your nonprofit work?

A: You can't stop helping them. I don't get a lot of sleep, but that's OK.

To help: To support the educational effort, visit www.aeprogram.org; write to Box 6, Wayne, Pa. 19087-0006; call 610-574-9872; or e-mail info@aeprogram.org.

- Bonnie L. Cook

Student Spotlight

Excerpts of the log that Julie-Anne Savarit-Cosenza kept during her stay in Zambia in January:

Jan. 17: Today, I am visiting some of the public schools attended by the orphans (of parents who died of HIV/AIDS), whom we are sponsoring. We find out the exact tuition fees, and if they have places available for our students. This is an odd concept to me, based on American standards; there is no guarantee that a student will have a place in the public school. When outside, I can peer into the classrooms and watch the students. The classrooms appear empty; no book shelves, no posters, just a blackboard covered in writing. Those students who catch me gazing in smile at me.

Jan. 27-28: After church, we visit an orphanage near Kafue, 27 miles south of Lusaka, the capital. The orphanage is run by the Sisters of Charity, Mother Teresa's order. Our organization has been helping the orphanage by donating books, clothes and blankets, but this is the first time that I can visit in person. This is one of the hardest moments in my life. We walk into the nursery, where toddlers immediately stand in the cribs, reaching out

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for attention. We pick some up. They smile, laugh, hug. You feel their craving for attention. A tear comes to my eye, as one will not let go when I try to put her back down.

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