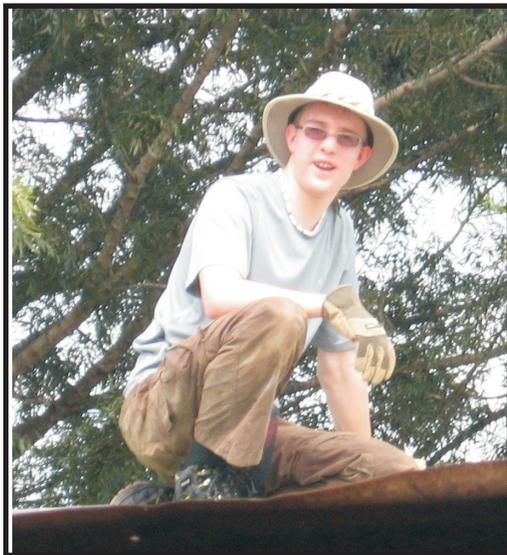




Success Stories: Greg Markham “A different prospective”

...continued from newsletter



Greg Markham

AboutFace reaches out to people who have facial differences. Advocating on behalf of these individuals helps them hone the skills already within them to lead happier, more self-confident lives.

Many of the members who have that first taste of freedom from their own misgivings about having a facial difference reach out on behalf of AboutFace as a way to give back.

Some members like Greg Markham, go a step further and use their experiences with AboutFace to shape other adventures in their lives.

Through an interview with Greg, I was able to capture some of his thoughts on his African experience. Greg went as part of a school team to repair and restore a battered school for orphans in South Africa. Here is what he had to say:

“I definitely take less for granted now, seeing people with only the most basic of things, and some of them not even having that,” Greg explains how intense it was to finally see a community living with day to day struggles.

“We were working in partnership with an organization called Sizabantwana, which works with orphans. We were stationed at an old school which offers a safe place for orphans to come eat and play. There were about 110 children in attendance every day, and they all came by walking as it is their only means of transportation.”

It's incredible how going without much can ingrain a deep sense of value in an individual for what little they do have. As Greg explains, even in the tough bouts of daily living, the orphans seemed to live life to the fullest.

“It's not what some people would expect. They were content with what they had, in some cases it was only one set of clothes. But you wouldn't know it; their clothes are always clean, and for the most part, in good condition. It's completely different in their community; everyone's talking to each other, waving 'hi'.”

Travelling, even for a good cause, can bring some trials to overcome; whether it was challenges of a quantity nature.



“Traveling with a group of 31 people invites challenges: 28 students, 3 teachers; we had challenges with each other, living together 24/7. We also had difficulties adjusting to local customs.”

Or if it was getting used to a different culture. As Greg tells it, it was a two way street of cultural exchange.

“Everything is different. They couldn't believe that all of us with our multiculturalism, attended the same school, let alone be in the same class.”

Though cultural barriers are inevitable wherever you go, Greg also found similarities.

“They attend “good” boarding schools and their school is much like ours, but with a distinct lack of opportunities to learn other languages. They learn English and Afrikaans, but options are very limited after that.”

While on his adventure to South Africa, Greg also learned of other cultural differences such as one between women and men. To justify that the women in the group were able, they had to prove their ability to do the work as well as the men could.

“Many people also are very bias towards women. The contractors that were working with us on the work site, wanted only to work with the boys of the group. The girls had to prove to them that they could do the job just as well, which they did.”

New, rewarding and life changing experiences are filled with multiple blessings and good feelings. Greg found that one of the best moments was at the very end when goodbyes' were said.

“Tied between the goodbyes we received at the worksite, from the principle and children there And then seeing the children on the last day at the orphanage, after we gave them a stuffed animal and a hygiene kit”.

Greg has wanted to participate in this event since he was younger and now that he has he sums up his experience like this:

“This experience really helped me see the world through a different prospective and that has enabled me to become a better person.”

It couldn't have been said any better, a lot of what matters to those at AboutFace when they first meet young men, women, children, and teens like Greg is seeing them flourish in all parts of their lives. Finding something inside yourself that you otherwise, ignored because it felt too “out there” or unattainable but with growth and eventual personal understanding you may find yourself taking a risk, following your heart and becoming a success story like Greg.