

Michael Ashamalla, '13

Marigat, Kenya

Once we had arrived in Nairobi, we could tell that the next six weeks of our lives would be unforgettable. In the summer of 2012, I was fortunate enough to serve in a small town in Kenya called Marigat. Marigat is located in the Rift Valley province and is notorious for its extremely hot and dry weather conditions. Along with my classmates Antony, Katie, and Stefanie representing the Siena College/Albany Medical College Program Class of 2013, we experienced a summer of service unlike any other.



The Great Rift Valley Province

Our apprehension was quickly calmed however, when we were greeted by six Franciscan nuns with whom we would spend the next six weeks. From the moment we met, an immediate bond was formed. I could feel the compassion and love that was characteristic of practically all Kenyans. Each sister was in charge of a certain task ranging from a clinic and a primary school to the community outreach services provided by the Marigat Catholic Mission. These women were a true reflection and embodiment of their faith in the services they provided. They cared for everyone regardless of how poor or sick with an overwhelming love and excitement that I hope to emulate as a physician one day. Each day serving alongside the sisters was a learning

experience and made our time in Marigat special. I am indebted to them for their love and hospitality and feel so grateful to have spent six weeks with them. Every day we would eat dinner with one another and spend the rest of the night watching Kenyan T.V shows and discussing our day. We became a family and shared memories with one another that I will truly never forget. The sisters welcomed us with open arms and we are truly thankful for every moment we shared with them. Whether it was the constant jokes or just the enormous smiles on their faces, we knew that leaving the sisters of the Marigat Catholic Mission house would be very difficult.



*The sisters love to dance!
(Sister Veronica and Sister Flora)*



*Celebrating Sister Benter's 40th birthday!
(From Left: Sister Flora, Rita, Sister Caroline)*



From Left: Sister Benter, Katie, Obie, Stefanie, Sister Florence, and Sister Caroline

Our main service this past summer was working in the clinic. The clinic provides care for pregnant mothers, young children, and HIV/AIDS patients. Though our medical training is minimal, we were still able to help the nuns on a daily basis whether it was administering vaccinations, updating patient records, or just weighing the children. Because many families live very far from the clinic, on Wednesdays we would serve in the “mobile clinic”. On the mobile clinic days, we would pack the 4X4 with all of the medical supplies necessary and drive to the surrounding villages and provide health care needs there.



Administering oral vaccinations was one service we gladly provided on mobile clinic days



Sister Veronica preparing the clinic at one of our locations miles from the compound



Weighing children was the most common service we provided at the mobile clinic sites



One of the many friends we made passing through the streets of Marigat. She called us her "children"



The mobile clinic vehicle aka "Steven"



Driving on the rocky roads of Marigat to the mobile clinic sites was always an adventure!



Patient consultation rooms at the Marigat Catholic Mission

When we weren't serving in the clinic, we spent most of our time in the after-school programs at St. Paul's primary school and Alice Ingham School. To say that we became attached to these kids is an understatement. The children were somewhat apprehensive to come and speak to the new "mzungus" (foreigner in Swahili) in town. At first they would often stare at us from afar and would quickly look away if we smiled at them. Soon, they began shaking our hands and telling us their names. After a few encounters, the children had definitely warmed up to us to say the least. When we would walk in to town, the children would greet us with open arms and introduce us to their parents as the "mzungus from school." The children loved jumping on us, pinching our skin to see if it was real, and asking us to pronounce words in Swahili for a good laugh. The children of Marigat had a way about them that truly brightened up our day through their energetic and playful personalities. After school, the boys loved playing soccer out in the field and the girls enjoyed sitting down and talking to us about life outside of Marigat. It was truly amazing to see how content and appreciative these children were with the little that they had. Many times we would be leaving the school and students would ask us to come the next day just so we could spend more time with one another. They didn't worry about whether or not we were bringing gifts or candy, all they cared about was welcoming their visitors. The hospitality and warmth of the faculty and students is something I will never forget. On our last visit to Alice Ingham School, the faculty took the four of us outside and showed us four trees that the students had planted in our names just to show their appreciation for our time with them. Words cannot describe how humbled we felt but more importantly how grateful we feel to have met these beautiful people.



The children at St. Paul's School posing in their new visors!



Some of the boys I spent time with from town



The people of Marigat welcomed us into their homes with open arms



All smiles!



Our last day at Alice Ingham School



The staff of Alice Ingham School



*My boys! Top: Praise
Bottom: Misach and Albert*



The children were so thankful for any gift we gave them



Sister Flora and I near one of the four trees the students planted on our behalf

My time in Kenya was the greatest experience I could have ever asked for. The magnitude of the service that we did in Marigat will never compare to how much the people have given me. They were the *true* servants this summer, and for that I am thankful.

