

Windhoek, Namibia

Dylan Lee

This past summer, I traveled to Namibia, Africa to teach children in an afterschool program in an area of the country that is marginalized. In addition to the children receiving remedial help, the after school activity of choice is soccer. A Siena College graduate, Marybeth Gallagher, who played for the girls' soccer team, started this after school/soccer program. Back in May, I started collecting used soccer equipment to take to Africa.



(MaryBeth Gallagher, right, and me, left, showing off our Siena gear in a group shot with the kids)

What did you expect Windhoek, Namibia to be like?

I expected Windhoek, Namibia to be a rural city with its 300,000 inhabitants widely spread. My vision was wrong with densely populated communities that increase with poverty as they move further from the

center. The city center is quite modernized, including a Hilton, the only 5 star hotel in the country, and two malls only two miles apart.



(Conzalec smiling for the camera in front of a mural of Namibia and their flag)

Where did you stay?

I stayed 10 minutes by cab from the city center in an area called Katatura. The literal translation is, "Place where we do not want to live," and was where black people were forced to live by the primarily white government in 1958. Compared to the historically white communities that are closer to the center, the streets here are smaller, houses lack front yards, and it is common for several families to share one bathhouse. The location of my long stay hostel is perfect for me since the children's centre, the Bernhard Nordkamp Centre that I volunteer at, is a 15 minute walk on the main street and only costs me \$1 if I take a taxi.



(Namibia's beauty, this is from Sossusvlei (western Namibia) known for some of the world's largest sand dunes that have had their iron oxidized red)

What is the centre like?

The centre consists of children in grades 1-9 with classes ranging from 15-25 kids. The goal of this centre is to provide kids with additional help in mathematics and English. The head of the centre, MaryBeth Gallagher, and newly crowned president of the rotary club here in Windhoek, started working at the centre 7 years ago when it was just a youth centre. Three years ago, a strict educational aspect was implemented and, "Kids who were receiving 20 and 30% [30% being passing] on their exams are now achieving 80s, 90s and even some 100%s," says MaryBeth.

School here ends at 1:00 and the kids start to gather at the centre around 1:45. The kids eat lunch, a sandwich and a piece of fruit, while MaryBeth leads an assembly. The kids are notified of anything new going on in the centre and are usually read a book. After assembly, the kids are sent to their classes.



(5th graders after a cornflower and water experiment to teach them about the different states of matter)

What did you teach?

I taught fourth and fifth grade English. From 2:30-3:30, I was with the 5th graders, then switched with the mathematics teacher and went to fourth

grade for an hour. Class time was usually split into half reading comprehension followed by a grammar lesson. Since this centre is completely optional, the kids were eager and excited to learn.



(The kids showing their appreciation for the new soccer gear donated by the Ridgewood Soccer Association (RSA) and their families)

What can you tell us about the soccer program?

The kids are taught Monday through Thursday, leaving Friday as a recreation day. The older girls take part in a soccer program called Galz and Goals. The response from Ridgewood (Ridgewood, New Jersey) residents to my request for donations, along with the Ridgewood Soccer Association (RSA) and members of the Maroons' Soccer Club, was overwhelming and

very generous. Thanks to all who donated The clothing received along with the shin guards, cleats and balls, has helped field teams that have uniform and equipment issues.



(The kids and me playing soccer on Friday)