

Kate Johnson, Alumna '08
Address to Turnbull School's
'Keep the Promise' Assembly for Help Lesotho

December 1, 2011

I attended Turnbull School for Grades 6, 7 and 8, and I'm now in Grade 12 at South Carleton High School in Richmond. I greatly enjoyed my time here and learned many valuable lessons, not just academic, but also environmental awareness and the importance of community involvement.

Living in Canada, everyone is aware that a good education is very important. I remember being surprised to learn that the many children in Lesotho don't attend school. I couldn't believe that education is regarded as a privilege, not a right, in some countries. I also remember wondering how these third world countries could possibly improve their way of life if their youth don't receive an education.

In Grade 6, I remember being so confused and couldn't understand why Turnbull was raising money to buy school uniforms. I thought surely paper and pencils would be more useful for students. I remember being taught that children were not allowed to attend school unless they wore a uniform, then I understood.

For Christmas last year my parents sponsored a child in Africa for me, my brother and two sisters. My sponsored child is Senate Lebeta and she attends Paray High School in Lesotho. In this past year, I have learned so much about life in Lesotho from the letters I receive from Senate and from the newsletters we receive from Peg Herbert who runs Help Lesotho. My parents chose this as my Christmas gift because I am always talking about life in third world countries and what I learn about these countries. My parents thought it would be an awesome idea for me to learn firsthand about these countries, and, let's face it, come Christmas morning, do we really need ten extra pairs of socks?

Senate is 21 and has been trying really hard to graduate high school; she is in grade 10 right now. When I found this out, it hit me; the struggles people in third world countries face are real, they are not just something we read about. Senate has been struggling with school for a few reasons on top of the tuition. I was saddened to learn that children often do poorly in school because they can't do their homework for two main reasons. Firstly, when the children get home from school they often have to do chores. Once these chores are complete, they can start on homework but the sun has set so they are unable to do their homework due to the lack of light. And paraffin oil for the lamps is in short supply. I have learned that teenage girls often can go to school only three weeks each month as feminine hygiene products are not available. I spoke to someone at Procter & Gamble and found out that they do donate supplies to African countries, and I am in the process of asking them to make sure that Lesotho receives adequate supplies. I was unaware of all the problems students are faced with once they have gotten into school.

At High School, I have been involved in a number of fundraising events, but ever since the Help Lesotho assembly I attended at Turnbull School when I was in Grade 7, I have always wanted to

start my own charity. My idea has always been to help the developing countries, particularly Lesotho. I started looking into what you have to do to start your own registered charity. I found out it could take around a year or two to receive a registered charity status, and there was so much I didn't understand about running a charity.

I had lots of ideas for my organization but realized I needed advice, so I made an appointment to come back to meet M Carrière and Mrs. Turnbull. They were super helpful and emphasized the importance of networking. They introduced me to several people at Help Lesotho and I'm hoping, that by working closely with them, I will learn what I need to know to know to run a successful charity. Kate and Susan from Help Lesotho attended the Leadership Camp at my high school recently and all 200 students at the camp attended a workshop where they found out more about the challenges of living in Lesotho. Some of them are now helping me with my fundraising. I have tried to get Carrie Underwood to work with me. I tried to have a booth at the Capital Hoedown this past summer. I have tried to work with my school, and I have tried to have a booth outside the Third World Bazaar. I was unable to do any of this for a few reasons, mostly because someone I know promised me that they could help and get me in and then they couldn't pull through, letting me down.

At the moment, I'm running a not-for-profit company called "Your Change is Their Change". It's a play on words that means the small coins in **your** pocket can make a big difference for someone else. The fundraising initiatives that I currently have underway include selling silicone wristbands, lanyards and holiday cards. All of the profits from the sale of these items will go towards purchasing school uniforms or annual sponsorships for Help Lesotho children and youth.

I have learned many things from setting up my charity "Your Change is Their Change" and want to stress the importance of not giving up. I have had so many problems and setbacks and disappointments and people offering to help and then completely letting me down. I'm not going to lie, it's been really tough. Often life is an uphill struggle, and sometimes that hill is very steep to climb. Sometimes you reach what appears to be a brick wall, but I want to encourage each and every one of you to look for a way around that wall. Maybe you have to climb over it, or dig a tunnel under it, and if all else fails, try something else, but never give up. I also have learned the importance of networking. Rely on your friends and family and people you know for advice. The people you trust and know are less likely to let you down.

So what is next for me beyond fundraising? I'm intending to study environmental engineering at either Queen's or Guelph University, and after I qualify, I would like to spend some time working for Engineers Without Borders providing water and safe sanitation to developing countries. There is no doubt in my mind that if I hadn't come to Turnbull, I would not be planning on studying an environmental topic and I would not have started this charity that I have.

Turnbull School taught me so much more than I ever expected it to! I would like to thank all my old teachers. Especially I'd like to thank M Carrière and Mrs. Turnbull for inviting me in today to tell you about my involvement with Help Lesotho, and I hope I have inspired you to follow your dreams and never give up. Remember there is so much more to school than academics!