



To We Schools Educators and Partners

As an educator, I have had the pleasure of leading alongside the WE staff, 5 programs to Kenya, for teachers and students through the Continuing Education department of TCDSB. I feel it is important for me to reflect and share some of the benefits associated with these experiences.

Every single participant on these programs would say the experience invokes a personal transformation. One can't help but return with a greater appreciation for the size and scope of our world, a sense of mutual humanity with our brothers and sisters across the globe, a better understanding of the importance of relationships and an appreciation for service to others as a powerful agent in our role as co-creators of building heaven on earth.

This model of learning and leadership development incorporates service and adventure as integral themes in these educational programs. Ministry of Education credits are attached to the high school programs which adds a deep level of learning and engagement before, during and after the experiential component. A unique and distinguishing component of the WE program is the concept of "service learning". Service learning can be identified as experiential education when the learner adopts a life role that provides meaningful service to a community in order to learn about oneself and others. The pedagogical value of the service increases when the following are added to the program: an academic component designed to prepare the learner in terms of content and competencies relevant to the service; an opportunity to reflect upon and think critically about the experience; an element of adventure and challenge; an international and cross-cultural context; and an alignment of individual, placement, and system goals.

The challenge of any service-learning programs is the cost associated with a trip of such nature. After participating in these trips and the amount we receive is well worth the price. It is important to note that WE is not doing these trips to make a profit but rather to further their mission of working with youth to build Global Citizens. The cost is very reasonable considering the rural location, high quality staff, safety measures in place, and the high level of engagement with the community members,

For the past 20 years TCDSB has encouraged participants to take a proactive approach and attitude towards fundraising. The result being that over 1,000 students, from diverse backgrounds have participated in these programs. WE supports all fundraising and even facilitates workshops with the youth to ensure a strong action planning with reflection for learning. Fundraising has always been an integral part of the learning in terms of both skills and values. Three quotes from Fr. Henri Nouwen's book, "A Spirituality of Fundraising" captures the essence of the learning afforded by engaging students in the ministry of Fundraising.

"Fundraising is a very rich and beautiful activity. It is a confident, joyful and hope-filled expression of ministry. In ministering to each other, each from the riches that he or she possesses, we work together for the full coming of God's Kingdom."

"Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission."

"Fundraising is also always a call conversion. And this comes to both those who seek funds and those who have funds. Whether we are asking for money or giving money we are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration."

As an educator, I am so impressed with the student learning outcomes and the culture appropriateness for the youth. The pedagogy of service learning is embedded throughout the students truly do come back understanding the world a little better and wanting to do more.

WE travel programs are about people, connections and self-discovery—all working together to change the world. It's about being part of something bigger than yourself. Travelling with purpose will change yourself and create lasting change in the communities you connect with.

Feel free to contact me if you require further information about TCDSB service-learning programs.

Sincerely

*D. Koenig*

Dan Koenig

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Toronto Catholic District School Board