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ProjectsAbroad

Economics major aids in microfinance development while volunteering in Africa

Fresh out of finishing his economics degree at the University of Florida, 24-year-old Justin Pressley had many reasons for wanting to volunteer abroad in Tanzania.

"I had always wanted to come to Africa. I took African Studies classes while in college and I also studied development, so I thought the Microfinance Project would be a great opportunity to travel to Africa and be a part of development first hand. Also, being an African American, I wanted to take the opportunity to be the first one in my family to go to Africa."

Justin's volunteer placement was coordinated by Projects Abroad, a global volunteering organization with projects all over the world. The Palm Harbor native spent a total of two months living with a Tanzanian host family in Arusha and working with other international volunteers on the Microfinance Project.

"The project involves providing loans and business training to women that own their own business. It requires volunteers to travel to each group once a week to collect instalments, monitor their processes and provide business training and tips. Projects Abroad makes

a difference by providing the money for the loans and training the local women so they can make money to improve their lives and existing business."

The placement offered Justin a great deal of responsibility and flexibility in exercising his business knowledge. He reported to work five days a week from 9am to 5pm, balancing half of the time in the office and the other half in the field with the women.

"I was able to fine tune many of the skills that I learned in college. I taught in front of a class full of people and wrote business plans for participants, which improved my public speaking and business writing skills. The record keeping methods that I taught during training were applied and I was told that it helped greatly."

The official language of Tanzania is Kiswahili and most of the people live well below the poverty line which presents many challenges for volunteers like Justin.

"It was difficult at times because there was often a language barrier between me and some of the people that I work

with. Some of the women could not read or write so I had to be creative with the training material."

Upon returning to the United States, Justin plans to pursue a career in management consulting as an analyst helping people improve their business performance. He believes his experience abroad will be invaluable to his job search.

"I learned to work with people from many different types of cultures in an environment that is very different from my own. The confidence in my ability to communicate with others in a business environment improved greatly and the application of general business skills that I learned in college, are directly applicable to any position or career that I choose in the future."



MICROFINANCE PROJECT IN TANZANIA

More info on Projects Abroad

www.projects-abroad.org