

Senegal and Philippines Service Project Testimonies from Summer 2018

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Over the summer months, various service projects took place to allow members to practice living for a higher purpose and to put into practice the teachings and values of the movement. A handful of members from the UK ventured abroad to participate in these projects.

B. Vitai, 20, Senegal Service Project (20th July – 30th July).

The past few months I've been stuck in a rut. My life has often revolved around external pleasures, like watching movies, eating and sleeping to recover from long, busy shifts at work. The funny thing is, I couldn't shake this feeling that it's all an illusion. I use up all my energy at work and feel too burnt out to do much else, just to be disappointed with my pay check at the end of all of it. Maybe I just need to work more hours to be satisfied?

I can't help but feel as though there's more to life than what I've been told. That's why I decided to join a service project in Senegal for two weeks this summer.

I arrived in Keur Massar, a large suburb of capital city Dakar. I received a very warm welcome from Ambroise and Delaila Diagne, the couple who founded the school I worked with during my time there. Going into the project my main thought was "Be grateful". Right from the offset it hit me how different life was in Keur Massar. The first thing I noticed was the lack of pavements. Pavements are something that I've always taken for granted and just expected to be there. We stayed just off a main road, but as soon as you strayed from it you would find yourself in a labyrinth of sand paths.

One thing that I noticed was the neglected infrastructure or lack thereof. For example, just to get from A to B drivers had to navigate potholes, jaywalkers and livestock, yet didn't show a sign of road rage. I was so taken aback by the locals' attitude: they live in such difficult circumstances yet remain overwhelmingly joyous and hopeful. Most of all, maybe out of necessity, they do everything together. You just can't navigate the roads all by yourself, nor can anyone else, so you are interdependent.

This prompted a major shift in perspectives for me: in the UK, we have incredibly advanced infrastructure and we are externally very well connected. In London, you could go a whole day traversing the city without needing to speak to anyone or probably even without eye contact with another person. In Keur Massar, although they presently lack the external infrastructure, they possess an inner connectedness that I'd argue we lost along the way: a genuine sense of community, where you need other people and they

need you.

I was in Senegal for 2 weeks. Most of the project involved spending time with the kids and helping around the school or visiting social centres in the local area that were having a positive impact on the community. There was a real air of hope around; I got the feeling that the future is bright for Senegal.

It's funny. For some time now, I've been thinking about my dream getaway: I'd picture myself on a beach on a tropical island somewhere in the Caribbean or maybe having a lodge to call my own by a lake in Alaska. I thought that if I could run far away from it all I'd find peace. Instead, I decided to go somewhere totally alien to me and do something for the sake of others. Funnily enough, it was in this environment that I found peace.



T. Ormondi, 20, Philippines Service Project (17th June – 8th July).

We are often told to live for the sake of others, however in the midst of work, university and the art of survival, personally this act sometimes becomes buried under the rubble. When word spread that the Philippines project was continuing this year, it was a change to forget my own selfish desires to live a life of service for 2-3 weeks. Being half-Filipino, I felt an internal connection to this project, connecting with my roots, culture and the people. Nobody knows how precious the act of service is until you physically live through it, mixing cement in the scorching heat or battling through the rain.

At breaking point, sometimes you question everything and maybe resent the people you're serving. But when you feel the innocent embrace of the children, smiles of the teachers, love from the parents, help from the locals despite how humble their living conditions are, it's impossible to harness any negative energy through the aches and pains to provide them with what was needed.

My most memorable moment was during our last goodbye, when I caught a teacher turning her back because she didn't want us to see her cry. When I hugged her goodbye, she whispered:

"We will not forget you, because you have lifted up our community."

I couldn't help but cry with her, and long for the time we would meet again.