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Doctors Charter students return from trip to South Africa - Ten students from Doctors Charter School visited South Africa this summer.

Miami Herald, The (FL) - Sunday, July 22, 2012

Author: *Miami Herald, By Rebecca Burton*

Kayla Joseph, 11, had never left Florida until this summer. Having never had even been on a plane, the North Miami rising seventh-grader prepared for a long flight to South Africa on June 22.

"It wasn't really that scary," Joseph said when she returned to Miami on July 2. "It was really interesting to see the kids. The way they live is so sad from the way we live, some of their homes look like huts."

Joseph was the youngest of 10 students, ranging from sixth- through 12th-graders from Doctor Charter School in Miami Shores who embarked on an educational trip to South Africa planned by social studies teacher, Kayla Dorsey.

Dorsey said she planned the trip to offer students a more comprehensive education on culture, geography, environment and social justice, which were the learning themes of the trip.

"As school systems, especially charter schools, throughout Florida grapple with budget cuts, we must question whether they are capable of providing students with a comprehensive education," Dorsey said. "Education is much more than what students receive in a formal classroom setting."

Parents paid most of the cost of the trip, about \$4,500 per student, but students also held car washes and garage sales to help. They received no financial help from the school.

During the trip, students visited various parts of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Ruben Island, where they saw Nelson Mandela's former prison cell.

While the students were there, they were asked to write journal entries about their experiences.

"While setting foot into the empty cells of past prisoners I realized that I did not have it bad at all," read 17-year-old Makana Levy's journal. "I took a deep breath, reading the letters that an imprisoned husband sent to his wife, and I tried to understand how that felt. I realized how blessed I was, walking through the prison on vacation-not on a sentence," the rising senior from North Miami wrote.

For Nicole Stallworth, 14, learning about the race struggles in South Africa is what resonated with her about the experience.


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"In America, if you are dark-skinned, you're considered black," Stallworth, the rising ninth-grader, said. "There, if you're colored like sand brown, you're 'colored.' If you're brown and real dark, you're black. I learned all of their struggles to get out of the apartheid and just . . . wow!"

Stallworth said she signed up for the trip just to get the chance to travel.

"I was born in Miami, so to me everywhere else is prettier," she said. "The caves and the mountains were breathtaking, just seeing the scenery in person and not on the internet was awesome."

Ashley Vilsaint, 16, said her favorite part of the trip was the safari and the chance to see wild animals up close, particularly the baby elephants. But, her view of the country changed once she arrived.

"I didn't think the city would be as advanced as it was," Vilsaint said. "I thought it would be poor, but it was actually quite advanced."

Shellee Baker, 14, remembers it a little differently than Vilsaint.

"My most memorable moment was when we went to Saha village to distribute candy to the children," Baker said. "It really moved me because I realized they don't have as much as we do and we have to be thankful for what we have."

Dorsey said what the students learned on the trip cannot be taught in a classroom.

"They learned that the world is much bigger, has more to offer, and is more complex when compared to Miami," Dorsey said. "The students gained a greater appreciation of the opportunities that have been afforded to them life, and they understand that it is important to view African countries from an objective perspective as opposed to how the media often portrays the African continent. They worked extremely hard for this tour to become a reality, and they felt a great sense of accomplishment once they were able to plant their feet firmly on South African soil."

Provided By: The McClatchy Company

Index Terms: Doctor Charter School

Location(s): Ruben Island

Personal Name(s): Kayla Joseph; Kayla Dorsey; Nicole Stallworth; Ashley Vilsaint; Shellee Baker

Record Number:

201207220000KNRIDDERFLMIAMIH_bdc8e338db8f78e81bf75eb5369de965

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