



ZAYA
Early Learning



It's hard to summarise the Kenya experience in a paragraph, even when accompanied with visuals of smiling children and beautiful scenery.

Kenya is a country rich in culture, which took me by surprise. Its inhabitants are diverse but the community is, for the most part, committed to the growth and development of their country.



However, in the shadows of Kenya's thriving social scene, there lies a sad reality. Poor access to education, rape, crime, and poverty, are a breeding ground for unwanted or unmanageable pregnancies, as such Kenya has a growing rate of abandoned children, who are often left in garbage dumps, at the doors of hospitals or at the gates of orphanages. These children are taken in by dedicated organisations supported by non-profit foundations, committed to providing resources, education and shelter for the abandoned children of Kenya.

I was very privileged to have the opportunity to represent Zaya Early Learning, in collaboration with The Nourafchan Foundation (TNF), on a site visit to Kenya. The purpose of this visit was to establish a relationship with The Angel Centre for Abandoned Children, in Nairobi, as well as visit TNF's funded school in the slums to see whether there was any potential for Zaya ELC to form a partnership and offer support in the future.



The Angel Centre was founded and is run by Wamaitha Mwangi, who set up the centre to take in abandoned children and give them a safe place to call home, while actively looking for adoptive families. When we visited, the centre had approximately 30 children, ranging from a few days old to about 6 or 7 years. These children had varying needs, some needing medical assistance and some just requiring that extra little bit of love and attention.

Next, we visited a slum. I expected to have my heart wrenched from my chest and to feel despair and sadness at every turn. Instead what I experienced was nothing short of enlightening and left me feeling humbled, grateful and reminded of how truly resilient the human being is.

We live in a very privileged society, where we can pick up the phone and within minutes have a bag of ice delivered to our front door. We live in a society where it is easy for us to become so consumed in the luxuries of our lives that we forget to take a moment to consider how truly lucky we are, and how so much of what we hold value to is really very insignificant at the end of the day. What counts, and what was so evident in the slums, is a sense of community. Family, friends, a network of individuals in our lives that make us feel that we are a part of something greater than the shoes we wear, the cars we drive or the new smart phone that we are anxiously waiting for to be released.

In the slums of Kenya there's a very important lesson, one that can only be truly understood when we are stripped of privilege and luxury. A lesson in resourcefulness, highlighting that what truly matters is shelter and love.

We were welcomed into the home of a young girl, who had won a singing competition and we were there to receive permission for her to appear in a music video to promote some of the work and projects that The Nourafchan Foundation fund. This tiny room was home to four people. It was probably double the size of my bathroom at home, and we were told that all four family members shared the single bed and sofa. They welcomed us into their home, with pride and hospitality. This was a family that clearly shared a genuine love, radiated warmth to everyone in their community, evident in their interactions with their neighbours and the people on the street. In this foreign and poverty-stricken neighbourhood, I felt home. And this was a feeling of familiarity, a sense of comfort and ease that took me by complete surprise, I didn't want to leave.

Overall my experience in Kenya, while brief, was filled with mixed emotions. I felt inspired by the capacity of people in even the most challenging situations, to rise above their circumstances, remaining authentic rather than appearing to be victims of their situations. These were people who could teach us all the value of gratitude and appreciation.





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