

## A Scotsman in South Africa

As I have been in SA for over month now, I have written a short report about how I have been getting on so far. Firstly, to introduce myself, I am Ewan Mansley a Gap year student from the town of Helensburgh in Scotland and I am going to be working with the Izzi Trust until July, focussing on the Trust's outreach schools.

This is actually my second visit to South Africa as I was here in July 2007 when still at school as I was part of Lomond School's rugby and hockey tour. Then we stayed in Rustenburg, Pretoria and Cape Town, and I really enjoyed getting to see such a diverse and beautiful country. We also were involved with the Pecanwood Educational Trust, as we did some fundraising before coming out and also visited one of Pecanwood's outreach schools. We did some sports coaching with the children and the smiles on their faces and the appreciation that they showed towards us for taking an interest in them had a lasting effect on me.

Lomond School has continued to keep in contact with the Trust and it was with my happy experiences of 2007 in mind that once I finished school I started to look into the possibility of spending part of 2010 working for the Trust as a Gap student, before starting university back in Scotland. And so that is how I came to arrive at Johannesburg Airport on 10<sup>th</sup> January having come straight from the coldest winter that the UK has experienced in 30 years to a Southern Hemisphere summer. Although I am still adjusting to the temperature difference I think that I have just about thawed out!

I feel like I am settling in well to my weekly schedule, which is both busy and truly interesting. I am staying at the "Boarding House" for Pecanwood College, and although the house is small it is very well equipped, as it must be for we do all of our own cooking, cleaning and washing. Overall it is kept in a much better state than you might expect from 4 teenage boys!

During the week I work at 4 different primary schools associated with the Izzi Trust and all of them vary greatly in a number of ways, which shows the wide-ranging nature of the work that the Izzi Trust does. At first I approached the schools with the suggestion of me helping with English classes, and in particular reading, but I also said that I would be willing to help out in any way that the schools would find useful. This has led to me doing a whole range of different things that I have greatly enjoyed.

My working week starts on Tuesday at Re-E-Lwele primary school in Oberon, not far from Pecanwood College. The school has about 70 pupils and so far I have been heavily involved with reading, especially for the older children, and I have also started to introduce some of the students to computers as the school has 4 PCs which I think through a lack of staff and

time have been underused in the past. In the afternoons I have been helping out with athletics and soccer.

The next day is a complete culture shock as I move from the rural area near Pecanwood to one of SET's outreach schools, Philena, in the township of Olievenhoutbosch. This obviously is a much larger school with class sizes of around 50. However these have grown even larger recently as another school in the area has been forced to close due to a lack of toilet facilities, and so Philena has had to take on these extra pupils when the school really doesn't have the space or resources to do so. All of the staff seem very resilient however and will always find a way of getting by. I also look forward to helping with Philena's vegetable garden which the school is hoping to expand soon so that they can start feeding pupils with food grown on site.

I spend Thursday at another of SET's outreach schools, Madibatlou, which is even bigger and has close to 1000 learners. The school here is very well established with permanent buildings whereas at Philena all teaching takes place in containers. As classes can reach 70, it is impossible to have the same direct contact that is possible at the smaller schools but I have read stories and poems out loud with whole classes and before too long will hopefully be able to identify those that really struggle and focus on improving their English.

After 2 days spent at hectic, overcrowded schools it is good that on Fridays I am at a school close to home that is small. Laerskool Skeerpoort is Afrikaans speaking and the only school with any white pupils, but its 65 students come from a real mix of racial backgrounds. As I only speak about 5 words of Afrikaans, I wondered how effective I could be, but the school has been unbelievably welcoming and has designated Friday as an English only day while I am working with the children. As well as helping in the classroom I have, along with another teacher, begun doing basic rugby coaching, which the boys really enjoy. After school I can just walk the 3kms back to where I stay, which can be tiring after a day's work, but I know it is nothing compared to the distances that many of the children I see during the week walk every day in order to receive an education.

So that is a brief summary of what I have been doing so far and I hope that the work I continue to do will have a positive impact on the children and the schools that I am working with. I certainly feel I am being kept busy enough by working for The Izzi trust and I am extremely happy that I have decided to spend this part of my gap year in South Africa.