

This summer I was one of sixteen delegates who participated in a human rights delegation to Rwanda. Sponsored by the non-profit organization Global Youth Connect, this program directly addressed the history and causes of the 1994 genocide and its effects on Rwandan society in its aftermath. For four weeks, I participated in workshops discussing the meaning and implementation of human rights both in Rwanda and worldwide; went on site visits to such places as local NGOs, genocide memorials, international agencies (USAID), primary schools, and humanitarian projects (peace villages for orphans); attempted to implement an action project to better Rwandan society; and volunteered at a Rwandan NGO known as Uyisenga N'Manzi that works with orphans of the genocide and HIV/AIDS to teach English. After the four weeks of GYC's program, I extended my stay for another four weeks to continue teaching English.

Through this program, I participated in service on two fronts. The first front was that of my action project, which I worked on in conjunction with another American delegate and three other Rwandan delegates. In Rwanda, theater is widely used as a medium to teach social lessons and to promote healing and reconciliation. As most of the delegates in our small group were dancers (I was one of two who was not), we decided we could also use dance as a tool to promote healing from the atrocities committed during the 1994 genocide since it appeals to the same senses as theater. Choreographing a dance that fused American, Rwandan, and other African styles, our dancers created a piece that spoke about life in post-genocidal Rwanda, while the non-dancers (me and one other Rwandan) formulated a curriculum of questions to spark discussion geared toward reconciliation and healing. The dance was taught to and performed by a group of Rwandan street children who are sponsored by a Rwandan NGO known as Amani Africa at a Liberation Day celebration. By working directly with the children, we were able to engage them in an activity they enjoyed while teaching them about peace-building at the same time. In the future, we plan to expand the curriculum and the dance.

My second and more extended form of service was teaching English through the organization Uyisenga N'Manzi. I taught three types of classes during my time there. The first was a class for secondary school students (three hours every weekday) where I taught a large amount of grammar and vocabulary, promoted speaking skills extensively, and even did a little bit of writing and reading comprehension. Although the class began with students from all levels of English, from very beginners to those who had a prior five years of English, I lost some of the beginning students along the way, being left with my intermediary students. I tried to strike a middle ground in the difficulty of the material I taught since I had so many different levels, but the very beginners still found it too difficult and left. For the remaining students, however, I saw much improvement, especially in their speaking skills since I emphasized it so much. The two other classes I taught were both for the staff of Uyisenga N'Manzi in the late afternoons; many of them wanted to learn English so that the organization would be able to apply for more grants in the English language. One of the classes was for those who never had any English and only taught basics; the other was for those who had studied extensive English in college but still needed to work on their writing skills (which, despite their speaking skills, were still stylistically poor). Teaching the staff was practically speaking much more difficult since the staff members often had individual meetings and had to miss lessons; many times I had to do the same lesson two days in a row since I would be teaching one set of staff one day and another the next. While I did see some improvement in their skills, especially in vocabulary, I did not see as much improvement as I did with the secondary school students.

Overall, my volunteer experience in Rwanda was very rewarding. I was able to get to know Rwandans from all different parts of society, while still promoting reconciliation through lessons on peace-building and teaching English to those who use it extensively in the future.



