

# Leadership Training in South Africa

by Ryan Sinclair, Cardigan World Languages Teacher, Coach, and Mentor

This past summer, six current Cardigan student leaders and five recent alumni joined me and Ms. Kristen Tobin (former Cardigan faculty member) on an elite leadership-training program that began with a week spent at Dartmouth College followed by three weeks in South Africa. This was an opportunity for CMS students to experience life at an Ivy League school and participate in environmental and humanitarian projects in South Africa, with the goal to develop life skills and enhance leadership potential. As a Dartmouth alumnus, I created the program—called Ivy Leader—to coincide with Cardigan’s mission of educating boys in a global society.

During the early-summer orientation week at Dartmouth College, the students heard lectures from some of my former professors on journaling, nature writing, and life in South Africa. They also had a private meeting with an admissions director who gave the boys some great advice on applying to secondary schools and, later, college. The boys took advantage of a leadership and team-building ropes course, resided in the college dorms, and gathered clothing, sports gear, and school supplies for students they would meet while abroad.

Upon arrival in South Africa, the boys spent 10 days at a start-up game reserve owned by a Dartmouth alumnus. There they learned about fire prevention, fence removal, tracking animals, and many general practices of maintaining a 65,000-acre game reserve. A good day of hard work was always rewarded with a home-cooked meal and a colorful African sunset. The highlight of the conservation aspect of Ivy Leader was the three-day camping safari to the famous Kruger National Park, where the boys spotted rhino, elephants, lions, leopards, and cape buffalo.

Our final week was spent in Johannesburg for a combination of historical and cultural tours, as well as a community service

project that allowed CMS students to interact with boys their age, but from a much different upbringing. In the morning hours the Cardigan boys would learn about the important historical aspects of “The Rainbow Nation”



CMS ninth grader Spenser Hukill poses with a South African boy.

and visiting a drum hut for some traditional tribal music and dance.

This year, we were able to incorporate a new component to the Ivy Leader program. While last year we were able to do some community outreach, it was neither to the extent, nor as identifiable a parallel as, it was this year. The boys were fortunate enough this year to be able to work in the afternoons of that final week with a program called Twilight Children, which was established in the Hillbrow township of Johannesburg in 1983 to provide support, in the widest sense, to young boys who are living on the streets and in other public places without adequate or apparent adult or family support.

While our Ivy Leader boys come from all over the world, it was very easy for them to relate on some level with the Twilight boys. In comparing both groups, we found that the boys were the same age, living in dorms, attending school, participating in sports, and in general being groomed to be good citizens in this world. Several of the boys hit it off immediately on the first day, and following a quick tour of the shelter and a look at its programs, an impromptu game of soccer commenced in the small concrete “courtyard” of the shelter. Our group then split into two, with some boys going down to help the outreach program serve a meal to people in need off the streets, while the rest of us helped serve lunch to our Twilight boys (with of course a little more soccer in the mix). Afterward, in spite of a teacher’s strike that week, the Ivy Leader boys helped the Twilight boys with their homework and studies.

I know that I am personally very grateful to Twilight for opening their arms to us and letting us help; however, I am sure most of the Ivy Leader boys will agree with me when I say I think it was actually the Twilight boys who inspired and helped us. ■

