

# How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Days spent in service to others mark the summer experiences of girls who are informed, bold, resourceful, ethical global citizens.

## South African Service

In July, juniors Kenzie Henke, Attiyya Settle, Sofia Palumbo-Dawson and Diana Villegas joined History Teacher Bridget Gagne for the Ivy Leader Program at Dartmouth College. Ivy Leader is a four-week program that begins with orientation sessions at Dartmouth and is followed by three weeks of humanitarian and environmental service projects in South Africa. Through service and cultural immersion, students cultivate leadership skills while developing an understanding of the interconnections within our global community.

Following a busy week at Dartmouth where trip preparation included lectures by professors on South African history, journal and nature writing, and HIV/AIDS in Africa, the girls embarked on their journey. They arrived in Johannesburg and were immediately shuttled six hours north to Letsitele. For the next week, they lived on Riverside Farm and worked



Diana Villegas

"Kenzie's intellectual curiosity was piqued by a Porter's History of South Africa class, and she was driven to learn more. When the opportunity to participate in the Ivy Leader was presented to her, she grabbed it, but what she experienced while in South Africa wasn't always pleasant. She saw poverty and corruption, HIV+ children who were expected to live only a few more years, and orphans who yearned for love. These experiences profoundly affected her, and she came back home a much stronger young woman—one who was more knowledgeable about the world and confident about her ability to make a difference. Her re-entry to the United States was difficult as she struggled to find a way to put her energy and passion to work. This past fall, she organized a new group at Porter's called 'P.S. I love you.' This group will send letters of love and inspiration to many of the children she worked with in South Africa."

"The thing that I was most excited about was teaching the kids, but looking back, I realize just how much they taught me as well."



Kenzie Henke and Sofia Palumbo-Dawson

—Janell Carroll Henke P'13, P'14

—Kenzie Henke '14

as teachers at the Tshega Mission School. They were the primary instructors for the week and offered lessons on diverse topics ranging from science experiments to friendship.

In the afternoons, the Porter's team assisted at an after-school program for vulnerable children, went orange picking to learn about the demands of manual labor, and visited Kaross, an embroidering initiative formed by local women to create employment opportunities for their peers. The week of intensive cultural exchange was both exhausting and exhilarating as the girls realized that not only was their work greatly appreciated by the community, but how much they learned from the experience themselves.

During the next two weeks, the group continued their work with children while taking on other new assignments. While



*Attiyya Settle*

staying at the Enkosini Wildlife Reservation, they hiked over three miles each way to volunteer at the Kopi School, a two-classroom, government-funded school of about 90 students in kindergarten through grade eight. At the reservation, the team also helped prepare for the reintroduction of wildlife by clearing barbed wire fences left on the land from its cattle farming days. They collected their own firewood to heat their water and learned to appreciate simple amenities.

During their stay at the Siyafunda Research Camp, they traveled to the Holy Family Care Center, an orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS and children who have lost their parents to the disease in the rural area of Ofcolaco. The Porter's team welcomed the children with open arms and big smiles; they colored, played games, made friendship bracelets and served lunch. Their early mornings were kept for collecting data for the Makalali Game Reserve. Wildlife conservation requires precise data collection as well as weekly reports; as such, the group learned to use a

"Ivy Leader provided me an opportunity to grow as a teacher of African history by immersing myself within the culture and working on the land. Most importantly, it allowed me an opportunity to work with our students outside the classroom. I was proud of the girls' ability to take on challenges and work through problems with their peers. Their work epitomized our school's mission to become 'informed, bold, resourceful, and ethical global citizens.'"

—Bridget Gagne, history teacher



Bridget Gagne, Kenzie Henke, Sofia Palumbo-Dawson, Attiyya Settle, and Diana Villegas outside the Apartheid Museum.

GPS system, to identify and track animals, and to rely on teamwork to complete their tasks.

"The Miss Porter's School students exemplified intellectual curiosity, confidence, and leadership in their work throughout the trip," shared Ryan Sinclair, founder and program director of the Ivy Leader Program. "They asked thoughtful questions, persevered in conditions that were unfamiliar to them, and worked well with others in the group as well as in the communities they visited. Ivy Leader would like to commend them for their passion, poise and investment to global education throughout the program."

*Editor's Note: photos courtesy of Ryan Sinclair.*