Mwauka Bwanji, America! (Good morning, America!)

It'd be too simple to say it's been quite a ride. When we arrived we were warmly welcomed by the people and by the staff who coordinate our volunteer projects. We settled into a residence hall, where 8 or so people share a set of bunks in a room. The accommodation - Livingstone Backpackers - has a pleasant set up where there's an open pool, bar, and an area where we grill occasionally (the equivalent of a BBQ here is a Braai). We are surrounded by other volunteers aged from 18 to 30, from Germany, Iceland, Spain, South Africa, England, and New Zealand, along with other Americans (even a guy from Boulder...small world). There are even some house cats living here who like to cuddle up with fellow CSU students Jackson and Nick during the night.

The coordinators are consistently on their "A game" (i.e. maintaining punctuality, being up to date, on the same page, and in tune with what's going on around us when we're out on projects). It's extremely helpful, considering we're in a foreign place and you want to make sure you aren't offensive while actually helping keep sustainable practices.

The NGO for which we volunteer is called African Impact. This organization has multiple locations around Africa that operate rather similarly. In Livingstone, there are three main focal points: Healthcare, Education, and Community.

**Community Health:**

After a brief afternoon training, we were officially granted permission to provide basic care and take some measurements. A typical day will consist of either seeing people in a clinical setting or at home-based care. I'm not sure which is more experiential yet
because our team has had such exciting and valuable experiences at both. I'll start alphabetically I guess, so here we go...

We were trained beforehand to take blood pressure and temperatures of incoming patients. As soon as the fellow healthcare volunteers and I stepped into our first clinic, we were also presented with weighing babies (with adorable big brown eyes), charting notes made by doctors, and giving new identifications of newborns (they number all patients and order them that way). Those tasks were relatively simple once you got the hang of it.

On Monday, Ellen (Dr. Brinks - our Honors professor/teammate) and I were having a slow day taking vitals until two women went into labor. There was only the head nurse and her assistant nurse on duty (which isn't unusual) so we were graciously welcomed in to help (AHH!).

One woman was dilated fully to 10 cm while the other woman's baby was crowning. The gown came on, along with gloves, but the rest of the equipment seemed to be minimal. We didn't have masks, there were packages of pads used to soak up fluids, the nurses had sewing materials, and there was a small cup that was filled with water or Fanta to give to the mother in place of a glucose solution. She was laid over an oilcloth covered with a chitenge, an all-purpose cloth used for carrying children, keep clothes clean, and carry food. Besides seeing the sight of childbirth itself, we also experienced the culture shock of how they treat woman in labor. They are not allowed to yell or whimper; there is no anesthesia for the pain; and after delivering, they quickly get off the table and hobble away. Women are powerhouses here, and I mean that in every sense of the word.

The other days we are out on home-based care. We are dropped off to meet the caregiver of a certain community. She guides us around
her neighbors and directs to the people who need the most immediate help. She is a huge help in also deciphering and translating what the patient is saying (since typically they speak very little English). The usual patient has aches and pains, but we have also seen anything from bed sores (probably stage 2-3 out of 4) to large burns that cover the entirety of a grown woman's thigh (her child was burned as well). Our job is then to administer pain medications and advice for self-treatments (i.e. stretching, drinking water, lowering sodium intake, etc.) We also clean and dress wounds. Talk about having a strong stomach! If you still have an appetite after seeing this work, you can find a place in healthcare.

The last case I want to mention was during home-based care. We approached a home where an elderly woman was laying on the dirt floor outside, covered by a chitenge. She had a fever of 103 degrees F, pain through her spine down to her legs, and chills. She also hadn't eaten for 6 days because her neighbors who have let her stay on their front yard don't want to feed her since she has HIV. Here, HIV education is just beginning to really branch out, but many still think it is a curse from God. The only thing we could do for her was refer her to the clinic (even though chances were no one would spend the money to take her), ask that her neighbors feed her, and move her into a sunny area so she would feel warm. We still haven't heard of an update from her, but it is not promising.

Emotionally, this occupation is not for the faint of heart. We brush it off, telling ourselves that is all we can do and we have done our best. We appreciate our circumstances at home that much more, of course, but then what? We love to help and it is empowering, but when Death is staring at you in the face and asking for help, a referral to the clinic isn't exactly the answer. I won't have an answer by the end of this, and I'm fully aware of that, but it has helped propel my love for what educated healthcare professionals can do.
I hope in the next week or so I get the chance to see a male circumcision here (they are free and encouraged to reduce a number of things). But until then I'll be absorbing as much as I can! 'Til next time!

- Alexandra Orahovats

Here is a picture of the entrance of Linda Clinic. It's small but mighty. African Impact is working on building a hospital right next to it.

**Community Projects:**
The organization we are working with, African Impact, has lots of different projects and connections to the community of Livingstone. From HIV education to building projects to child sponsoring programs for school costs, African Impact, and us as volunteers, encounter the community in a variety of ways. One project specially designed for our CSU group is to reduce plastic waste by Eco-bricking. Eco-bricking is done by taking used plastic bottles and stuffing them with other plastic trash. The bottles can compact the equivalent of a whole trash bag when done correctly. Eco bricking reduces waste that is scattered on the streets or in water sources. The compact bottles can be used as bricks to build various structures when they are stacked, with clay in between and a layer of concrete to cover them. The CSU group is using this method to build a large compost bin for Linda Farm. The Farm is for people with disabilities and their families. They live on the farm and earn a living by farming. They want a compost bin to compost waste, keeping it away from goats and chickens; they will use the compost on their growing crops. So far, with the help of the community members, we have dug and poured the foundation for the walls we will build out of Eco-bricks. The design is curved so Linda community members can turn the compost into the next section, making room for new waste. We have also made and collected a lot of complete Eco-bricks (the children there love helping with this part). We plan to have the compost area completed by the time we leave Zambia.

The community of Livingstone has been so welcoming and interesting. Children wave at the van that takes us from project to project, adults greet us with a special handshake used in Zambia, and all the people we talk to seem eager to share their culture and learn about ours. Where we are staying, there are people from all over the world. We have had the opportunity not only to meet Zambians, but also volunteers from around the world, and share ideas and perspectives.
In between work weeks of volunteering, we get to spend weekends taking in the sights of Southern Africa. This past weekend, we went to Botswana to stay in Chobe National Park on a camping safari. We had a ton of fun seeing lions, giraffes, elephants, impala, fish eagles, hippos, a leopard and so much more. We all enjoyed the beauty of the park and are looking forward to our trip to Victoria Falls this upcoming weekend.

Already half way through, we can tell this trip will be one to remember.

- Jo Buckley
This is the foundation of the compost bin. Alexandra is placing crumbling rubble as the foundation below the first layer of Eco-bricks.

Community Education:

Wow, how time has flown. This journey to Livingstone, Zambia is two-thirds over. These past two weeks have been filled with sensational activities, including teaching and an awe-inspiring camping safari in Botswana.

My morning involvement with a fifth grade class at Nakatindi Community School has slowly become routine, in which the children are comfortable with (but still intrigued by) my presence. My self-assurance in my teaching abilities is slowly increasing. Being a muzungu (white person), my appearance still turns heads when I walk among the students. But now, I can sense they are seeing me as human more than simply white. If nothing else, I hope my presence here helps the racial barriers caused by misconceptions to crumble. Even just a crack in the wall would make this trip worthwhile.

One of my newly established friendships has given me hope. A 13-year-old girl at Nakatindi named Esther spends every morning break by my side. We ask each other questions about our lives and homes. She wants to be a journalist after attending college. (I know she will meet her goals! Her fiery personality and passion to learn is evident from the breaks I spent with her.) Esther lives with her older, married sister in order to attend Nakatindi. Her parents' home is beyond walking distance, and her father is currently absent from the family home due to his mother's failing health.
Esther gives me hope and models how cross-cultural interactions should look. Yes, maybe Esther only wants to be my friend because I am so very alien. But now, she stays by my side because we both see beyond our motherlands and skin colors. We recognize and celebrate our commonalities, our humanity, our spirits.

One question that has been gnawing on both my active thoughts and subconscious is one of futility versus effectiveness, friendship versus dependency. It is the age-old question: how should interactions between the Western nations (i.e. America) and developing countries (i.e. Zambia) look? Being among other volunteers from around the world, I find myself questioning the motives of humanitarian aid workers. Just like Jessica Alexander (Chasing Chaos), I am observing those with pure intentions, some motivated by greed or "do-gooder syndrome", and others heavily embracing the "white man's burden". Life is full of contradictions. The point is: Why do we choose inconsistency? Why do our actions never match the purest of hearts?

I have arrived at the most sensible conclusion I can muster: every human is a flawed, imperfect creature capable of both horrendous and beautiful things. Once we deny ourselves and move past our own selfish natures, we can look to serve others in a way more genuine than before.

- Sincerely,

Kathleen Wendt
Created by Kathleen Wendt with the help of Nicole Sutton, these maps served as educational tools in a geography lesson and ethnocentric awareness in Nakatindi’s 5B class.

Well, that's all from us! Check back in with us at the end of our trip for some final thoughts and more information on how to get involved next year or even tomorrow!

Tionana, America! Goodbye for now!