

Section I: Narrative

Our project was inspired by a deep desire to give back to a community that is often overlooked. In society many of us live with inhibiting factors that aren't labeled as disabilities as they are not able to physically present themselves and may not need apparent accommodations. Namely, race, gender, ethnicity, or mental health issues. These characteristics are factors that deviate from what is considered "normal" and leave many unable to function according to society's accepted norms. Although even in the case of physical disabilities- that are much more obvious- it is apparent that neglect is engrained in the "out of sight, out of mind" philosophy. Consequently, we often go about our daily lives without acknowledging these individuals, making them almost invisible in society. This issue becomes even more worrying considering the context of Zambia, a third world country where traditional beliefs pertaining to ability, acceptable; tend to clash with existing scientific knowledge, leaving vulnerable children shunned and voiceless. The orphaned children who live at the Home for Happiness happen to be members of this marginalized community. Going out into a world where they will often be overlooked or refused accommodations. In starting this project, we hoped to make these children feel more loved, heard and seen. We deemed it paramount to understand the realities of the world the children live in and do our best to make it more bearable. Better living facilities and opportunities to interact with the wider Zambian youth communities are the biggest steps that our project aimed to meet.

When initially set out to implement our project, we had a clear plan of action drawn. Upon receiving funding, we began working closely with liaisons in Zambia to ensure that we would be able to begin our project at its predetermined date. One of the first obstacles we had to overcome was altering the roles we would play on the ground as it soon became apparent that our involvement would be compromised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As for many, the COVID-19 pandemic made it very difficult for us to be able to go back to Zambia and implement our project in person as we had initially hoped to do. This meant that we had to spend quite a lot of time figuring out what the best way would be to implement our project without deviating from the core goals we aimed to accomplish. A large part of this involved coordinating initial meetings with our liaison to draw up new time schedules on when tasks would need to be completed and finding out the best way to remain as involved and available as possible considering the difficulties brought forth by time difference. Luckily, we were able to deal with these issues swiftly and effectively. One of our paramount achievements in doing this was helping with the formation of an "acting" board that served to oversee not only the smooth running of our project, but also would eventually be formalized into representing the needs for the children and Home for Happiness on platforms that they would not be able to use themselves. Over the course of the first month, our weekly zoom meetings consisting of: existing donors, caretakers, and our liaison team we were able to develop an effective plan of action to set our date to start construction for June 20th. We feel that the formation of this board, a group of committed individuals is one of the biggest successes we were initially able to achieve as it makes sure that there is now a group of adults that have more societal power to actively continue advocating for the well-being of the children at home for happiness.

One of the key issues we wanted to address was the lack of representation and isolation of the children at Home for happiness from wider society. The proposed idea that we had to solve this issue was to work with schools in and around the Lusaka area to come up with various service projects and initiatives that would allow the children as well as youth in the area interact with each other. In doing so we sent various emails out to many schools in the area in hopes of beginning the communication process to facilitate these initiatives. As Zambia was still largely dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that we would have to change our plan regarding how

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we would implement this aspect of our project. Although we had hoped that one of the mentioned initiatives would take place during the duration of our project, many of the schools we contacted felt as though waiting till the country was able to deal with the pandemic better would be the safest option for all parties involved. However, we felt that we had still succeeded as we were able to create and influence a dialogue between Home for Happiness and schools in the area that did not exist before. In addition to this, one of the schools we contacted, the American International School of Zambia was able to provide Home for Happiness with a contact that would help in coordinating plans for the children to meet up and interact with each other.

The site that the construction took place on was a piece of land gifted to the orphanage by a very generous donor a few years ago. However due to a lack of funding, progress had been slow relating to continuous construction on the piece of land. Although helping in formulating this acting board of directors was a key success, we were always aware that the most demanding aspect of starting our project was beginning construction of the multipurpose building that would be used as dorms for the children upon their completion. It became even more important that the building being constructed would be able to be used in a multipurpose way as when we initially began construction of the building, we were informed that the home would soon be accepting more children to care for. This is important because it meant that by the building being multipurpose, they would also be able to act as initial dorms for these new children.

Upon beginning construction, we ran into a few problems that soon impacted and limited our ability to progress as we had anticipated. One of our biggest challenges arose because of the outbreak of the third COVID-19 outbreak in Zambia and the subsequent halt in construction which we had to take in compliance with government regulations. This impacted our ability to progress in our predetermined time frame and halted construction for a period of three weeks. At this time, our team turned to sorting out finalizing the legal requirements that would have been needed upon the completion of the building. This included obtaining a building permit from the Lusaka city council and working with our contractor to set up checks with a government appointed civil engineer representative. During these checks we were informed that the initial building frame would not meet the standard and we would need to make changes for us to commence construction when the government ban was lifted. At the time we had to make one of the hardest decisions which was to part with our initial contractor and work with a newly appointed government contractor. We felt that this would be the best decision to ensure that the final building met government standards and was safe for the children. Luckily, we were able to have clear constant communication with our city council representative who was essential in this smooth transition.

Unfortunately, during the weeks at the beginning of August, Zambia held their 7th democratic elections. This meant that government operations were slower than we would have liked and resulted in us having to wait longer periods of time to have the building checked before continuing with construction. All these things culminated into a series of hurdles that ultimately delayed our project by another three weeks, a significant delay that we had not anticipated. It was in these moments that we feared that the project would not be done in time and worried that we would not fulfil all the goals that we had set out. We soon had to accept this reality and work around the factors that had hindered our success. With a great deal of support from our liaison team in Zambia and great diligence and sacrifice from our new construction team, we never felt discouraged to the extent of conceding defeat. Weekly Zoom meetings were met with much of the fatigue and impersonal aspect as we had experienced with our college classes; however, they were the best and most consistent means of communication that we could afford at the time. Meetings were chaired by grant recipients Kalwa and Namambo and were attended by all board members except for a few instances wherein local power cuts made attendance difficult.

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The zoom meetings proved essential in keeping up with the construction taking place and ensuring that we were meeting the new construction goals we had set out. These meetings were certainly essential towards the end of our project as it meant that we were able to keep a close eye on construction progression, an issue that had initially proved to be quite difficult. Upon the completion of construction and looking back on the work we had been able to achieve we felt that our overall mission was upheld by a common objective amongst our team members that was the completion of the peace project. In the context of this project, we defined peace as the freedom to live without feeling burdensome for simply existing. In establishing channels that these children may be exposed to the wider community; we hope to normalize the accommodations these disabled children need and allow them to feel confident in larger society. This is of course a long-term adjustment that the surrounding community will need to make, and it is one that we expect to evolve over time. From ramped buildings with elevators to the normalization of self-sufficient individuals who are afforded the help they may need by the larger community without the unseemly gazes and discomfort of others.

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Section II: Photographs

