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Teens Travel to Zimbabwe

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Devon Bruzzone gets a hug from children in Zimbabwe Photo provided

the Kapnek Trust. Yet in their 78 preschools across the country, many young children have lost one if not both of their parents. The preschools provide meals, regular health checks, and most importantly, the opportunity to play and learn in a stable, nurturing environment. This provides them the best emotional support possible to overcome their devastating loss.

Despite the difficulty of their circumstances, the children of Zimbabwe had something significant to give to the students from California: a deeper perspective of themselves and their place in the world. As volunteer Devon Bruzzone, from Lafayette, put it, "(What) stood out to me most when we were traveling through rural areas in the Kapnek van was that the villagers would smile and wave enthusiastically and I felt as though our presence and work through Kapnek was welcomed and appreciated entirely. It struck me how happy and gracious the community members were despite having so little of the material items we place such a value on."

These young volunteers brightened the lives of countless children and were in turn positively impacted, carrying this experience in their hearts forever. As Cassriel said, "We felt just as much gratitude and thankfulness as they did!"

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Can witnessing a child's smile upon receiving a new ball actually change a person's life? For a group of Lamorinda teens, the answer is yes. Several students recently spent part of their summer vacation in Zimbabwe in southeastern Africa, where they volunteered on behalf of the J.F. Kapnek Charitable Trust. The Lafayette-based Trust operates the largest pediatric HIV/AIDS prevention program in Zimbabwe, supporting thousands of vulnerable and disabled children through its preschools, orphanage and health clinics.

The teens journeyed halfway around the world and then spent several days doing construction, renovation, and maintenance work on classroom facilities in the town of Chegutu, an economically-challenged town south of the capital of Harare. They also worked with local staff to distribute donated supplies, including dozens of soccer balls which were brought to Vimbainesu Orphan's Village. One of the student volunteers, Haley Cassriel of Orinda, reflected, "The excitement was tangible when we donated the balls. The orphans were so thankful to receive such a small donation. It showed me how so little can go so far."

In Zimbabwe, the AIDS pandemic has orphaned nearly a million children, a trend which is sharply declining thanks to crucial work by