

To whom it may concern,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am writing this letter upon my arrival back at home in the UK. After what I can only describe as the most incredible year of my life, I have returned and wanted to take the time to thank you personally. When I first wrote to you back in 2015/2016 I was eager to seek funding for my journey to South Africa, due to the fact I had to raise £6,200 for my charity Project Trust. After being granted a check by yourselves, I was able to reach my target and begin to plan for my year away. In May 2016 I received a confirmation email from Project Trust, that informed me I would be placed at a children's home in Durbanville, just 35 minutes from what I now call my second home - Cape Town.

My journey began on the 15th of September 2016 and ended on the 2nd of August 2017. Unfortunately just 3 weeks after arriving I was involved in a serious car accident which meant I had to take 2 months out of my project and return home to the UK. During the month of October I stayed with relatives in SA and then went back to England at the beginning of November. Although this was a massive bump in my journey, I apprehensively returned to South Africa on the 1st of Decemeber, and it was the best decision I ever made. Upon arriving back in South Africa, I was eager to get back into everyday life and start work again immediately.

Whether it was day shift or night shift, my role was vital in order to help the running of the home and the lives of the children. Each task I undertook was dependent on the house I was given. Whether it was day shift in happy feet being continuously busy from 6am – 7pm, or day shift with the older children just having chats and chilling from 3pm – 8pm, your part for them was vital. A typical day shift with the younger children would consist of waking them up, making their beds, preparing breakfast, brushing their teeth, taking some to school, picking some up, doing homework, playing with them at outside time, bathing them and getting them to bed. The tasks with happy feet (house 5&6) or stepping stones (house 7&8) are endless, and the childcare workers always appreciate your dedicated efforts, as well as the children. Your role there is to be their trusted aunt or uncle, and at times you'll feel you have more of a role than the childcare workers, so the children quickly learn to respect you and listen when they're told. If it's day shift in the older houses such as the oldest girls ages 14-18 – house 1&2, the oldest boys ages 14-19 – house 3&4, the middle girls ages 10-14 – house 9&10, or the middle boys ages 10-14 – house 11&12, your role is a little more relaxed than the younger houses. Day shift in these houses start at 3pm, when they're back from school, till around 8pm, before the night shift volunteers arrive. These shifts start a lot later and the tasks for you are far and wide as by now, the children have learned to become very independent and undergo all tasks themselves. However, this doesn't mean that you're not needed and it's a great chance to just hang out with the older kids and develop a deeper relationship on a different scale to the younger children.

Night shift's role was very different and also depended on the house you were put in. If it was working in house 5&6 or 7&8, then you would have dedicated times where you would have to take certain children to the toilet. You would also have to get them back to sleep if they had nightmares, change nappies, give medication if they were sick, give them water if they asked for



it and get them ready for school in the mornings. If it was night shift in the older houses then the children would still be awake at the time you arrived, whereas in the younger ones they're asleep. Their bedtime was 10pm however they loved to bend the rules sometimes just as teenagers do. Weekend shifts were a lot of fun in the older houses as you were allowed to just sit up and watch films with them until around 12am, and just generally chill and develop your bonds. Some common factors in the houses were the fact that you would have to stay awake the whole night – on weekdays from 8pm – 6:30am and on weekends 8pm – 7am. Another factor was that you had a book in which you would have to write down all of the recordings from the night e.g. if they went to the toilet, if they woke up crying, any issues throughout the night etc.

I believe my role as a volunteer at Durbanville Children's Home was critical to the children. Whether you're there to help them with their homework or lending them a shoulder to cry on, the children really appreciate your efforts even if they don't show it every time. The childcare workers are there to enforce the rules but your role as an auntie/uncle is there for around the clock care even when you're off shift. You're the person they come to when they're having issues at school, when they're having trouble tying their shoelaces, when they can't get to sleep at night or when they want to open up to you about their personal lives. Living on the grounds really helps to build relationships 10x quicker and you'll find yourself spending time with them, even when you're not scheduled to. The effect that my role has on the children is massive in terms of their development, as it teaches them about relationships and teaches them that there are people they can trust.

Since arriving home not a day has gone by where I don't think about the incredible and unique children at DCH, so much so, that I plan to visit again next year and volunteer for a further 3 weeks. This letter is to personally thank you for enabling me to embark on this life changing experience that has changed and shaped me so much as a person – without your help this really wouldn't have been possible, and for that, I am so very grateful. Below are just a few photos of myself and the children that I thought you might like to see.

Many Thanks,

Emily 