

Ace 2 Zambia from Emma Richards

During my third year studying Architecture at the University of Bath, I was fortunate to be selected as one of six architecture and engineering students to take part in an eight week volunteering project over summer – ACE 2 Zambia. The student led project is part of a wider scheme run by the Zambian NGO Sport in Action, which every year, send out students from eight universities across the UK to enhance the lives of vulnerable young people in Lusaka, Zambia, through the power of sport. ACE 2 Zambia work specifically to build and maintain sports facilities in disadvantaged communities. We are responsible for the entire construction process including design, procurement, site management and sourcing funding – an invaluable learning experience.

This year we were in charge of refurbishing a basketball court and an ablutions block at Kabwata Play Park, alongside a netball court at Mutendere Community School. Work began with a meeting between the contractor, site engineers and operators to discuss the works and review the tender. The works employed local contractors and suppliers in Zambia, providing a net benefit to the local economy. The refurbishment of the sports courts involved stripping back the existing surface with pickaxes and we got stuck in with sweeping off aggregate and carrying out levelling, before the potholes could get patched with asphalt. Hot rolled asphalt was laid on and compressed before the final layers of slurry and paint lines. It was never smooth sailing and material delays and miscommunication between the senior engineers and workers lead to the pace of work being too slow, and we had to use our engineering experience from the UK and organisational skills to get things back on track!

The new sports courts and ablutions block will enable and encourage greater levels of sports participation in a safe an inclusive environment. Sport is an integral element of Zambian culture and Sport in Action aim to utilise it as a tool to improve the physical, mental and social well-being of young Zambians. Girls and young women particularly will have the chance to develop confidence and leadership skills. The sports facilities are owned and run within the community they serve. It was inspiring to meet and work alongside the coaches who regularly use the sites we worked on and discuss the impact that the improved facilities would have, presenting a pathway for players, coaches, officials, and sport facilitators alike. I strongly believe that every child should be provided with the opportunity to participate in sport.

Alongside this we had another project which was to fabricate netball posts and football goals. I proposed a variety of designs which aimed to be fully inclusive and suited to different sites, ground conditions and rural areas, and make the most of the limited materials available. Lengthy discussions with players, coaches and welders allowed us to explore different ideas and present the best possible options in a design manual. We also completed an asset register of all the sports sites across Lusaka to assess their quality and condition, and prioritise which need maintenance next. The experience of working in Zambia gave me an immense insight into architecture and engineering of a different culture and proved to me how architecture is not just about creating the most inventive and outstanding buildings, but is about finding solutions for basic human needs. The opportunity to work on a project from conception to completion as a student was invaluable.

I am grateful to the support from the Oadby Educational Foundation which helped allow me to travel to Zambia.
Emma Richards

