

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Emma Byhurst

Dates	February 2012 to March 2012 and June 2012 to August 2012
Locations	Malawi and USA
Activities	Teaching and Camp Councillor



Why did you want to do a gap experience?

I wanted to explore new cultures and meet individuals who lived differently to how I live. I also wanted to better myself as a person, become more independent, whilst building, improving and learning new skills. My aim was to become more confident and prove to myself that I was capable of travelling alone. I hoped that the experience would assist me both currently and in my future career as a geography teacher. As my ambition is to become a teacher, I wanted to use the scholarship to teach and mentor in two different areas of the world; I wanted to teach in an LEDC and an MEDC.

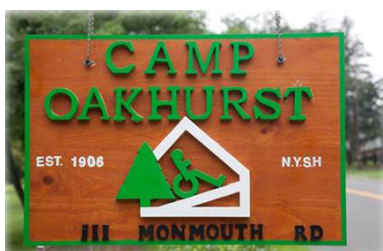
What did you do on your gap experience?

After months of researching, I decided to teach in Malawi for a month and later on in the year, travel to America to become a councillor at a Summer Camp for 3 months. In between destinations, I was in full-time employment and I volunteered as a teaching assistant, focusing on geography at my former school. My first destination was Malawi. Here, I taught core subjects to 180 children, I coached a football team and volunteered at an orphanage. I decided to use a provider for this trip as it was the first time away from home and I felt more comfortable if arrangements were being made for me. When I arrived, I was met by four other female volunteers who I was to share the month with. The other volunteers were great in helping me settle in, as were the organisers of the programme.



This part of my year was by far the most challenging due to the fact that I experienced such a 'culture-shock'. This experience gave me the confidence to teach children and impact their lives positively. I was able to amend the curriculum to a way in which I believed would help them to learn as much as possible. I enjoyed this as it allowed me to use my own initiative.

My second destination was New Jersey, U.S.A. Here, I was employed as a 'General Councillor' at a Special Needs Summer Camp. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and within three days of work, I was promoted to a 'Lead Councillor'. My job role was to manage a team of twelve staff and twelve clients at any one time, ensuring that specific needs were met, personal care needs were met and ensuring both of these groups of people had an enjoyable





experience. I also took on a supervisory role where I led one of the programmes. I educated individuals of all ages and abilities about geography. I arranged activities, games and quizzes to make sure that every individual could be involved regardless of their disability.

Through this specific experience, it gave me the confidence to lead a large team of people with confidence, a skill which I can use from here on. This experience also helped me to build upon skills which I already acquire; my organisation and communication skills have improved vastly. I really enjoyed my employment here, even though I worked long days and didn't get much sleep, I found it exceptionally rewarding.

What impact has your gap experience had?

At the beginning of the gap experience, I would have described myself as a quiet and shy individual who found it difficult to approach new people. I'd hate the thought of going anywhere on my own. I was lacking confidence and was hesitant to put forward my views. I believe that this gap experience has allowed me to flourish personally. I would now describe myself as a confident individual, who is very outspoken and I am never afraid to say how I feel. I always input my ideas and opinions across when needed and I love meeting new people. I am a happier individual who is truly grateful for the experiences that I was lucky to have throughout the past year.



Were there any unexpected outcomes?

I was offered a job in America working the 'respite' season, caring for individuals with various disabilities, whilst being in charge of the educational side of camp.



What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?

Take every opportunity that arises. Secondly, go to the places you have always wanted to visit, do not let anybody sway you or influence your destination choice, but make sure that you thoroughly research the area before you visit. Finally, visit these destinations with an 'open-mind'. If you don't, as I did, you will experience a huge 'culture-shock' and you will not enjoy or appreciate the experience.

Overall, I've made friends who I will stay in contact with for the rest of my life, along with useful contacts for the future. I feel proud to have had an impact on those individuals who needed it most and I will take away an experience that I'll never forget.