



Fireside Chat: Lauren Jackson (2013)

Georgian Lauren Jackson (2013) returned to the College recently as the guest in a special Fireside Chat focused on the charity she co-founded, The Children of Maasai Educational Programme. Lauren, from Collie, attended Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School before spending two years at St George's from the age of 18.

In 2015, soon after leaving College, she volunteered in Kenya as a teacher's aide and felt so moved by the impact it made that she continued fund raising for the school upon her return, and, with the help of her host parents who ran the school, registered a charity to formalise and expand that support. She now runs the Australian branch of The Children of Maasai while studying for a Master of International Development and returns to Kenya every year to provide practical assistance on the ground, accompanied by volunteers who wish to come.

The charity operates in the Kajiado District in the south of Kenya, close to the border with Tanzania. The region is primarily occupied by the Maasai tribe, who are traditionally itinerant herders without permanent homes who move to wherever they can find food and water for their cattle. But now that much of the land they once roamed is privately owned, they can no longer roam freely and their cattle often die as a result. They have had to settle in tiny villages, living mostly in mud huts, usually with no running water or electricity, except for those lucky enough to afford solar panels. Most have no primary school education and can't speak the national languages of Swahili or English, and many adults only speak

the local tribal language of Maasai. This means they have no job prospects outside the Maasai community and struggle to earn enough money to fulfil their basic needs. Efforts to make money include women making jewellery to try to sell to other Maasai, who usually have little money to buy it, or cutting down trees that are burned to turn into charcoal which is sold for heating. Neither of these activities provide a secure sustainable income.

Lauren's charity is primarily concerned with ensuring Maasai children have access to basic hygiene, medical services and education. It organises medical clinics – an absolute necessity as the town where the charity is based has only two doctors to serve ten thousand people, and the wider area has no regular access to medical care except the intermittent clinics organised by the charity, where three or four doctors will see over a thousand



Lauren Jackson (2013) with Maasai moran boys at a ceremony



Charity founders L-R Jackson Maya, Lauren Jackson (2013), Mary Saruni, with Gadiel and Naitawang Maya

people a day. It also pays school fees and provides basic hygiene products such as reusable sanitary pads for women, with appropriate education on how to use them. It has recently opened a school for children with special needs who would otherwise be shunned by their families and communities, and would like to move into funding projects that have sustainable outcomes longer term such as funding the provision of bores to provide access to clean water. These projects would be funded in consultation with the local communities.

For most of the year Lauren runs the Australian operations of The Children of Maasai around her university studies. Her primary activity on behalf of the organisation is fund raising through bake sales and raffles and collecting donations primarily from amongst family and friends with whom she has shared her photos, videos and stories of the living and educational conditions in Kenya and the huge impact relatively little money can make for Maasai children. She also corresponds with donors to make sure they receive receipts and photos as evidence of the impact their donations are making on the ground, and communicates and promotes the charity's activities and mission. She is working to form partnerships with corporate donors and organisations such as her old school Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School.

At the end of each year, Lauren, accompanied by volunteers, returns to Kenya to deliver physical donations and provide support for the charity's activities on the ground. She said she finds it really rewarding to see how much impact her efforts, and the funds raised, can have for these communities. Prior to her first volunteer trip she raised \$600 and was astounded at how far it went in terms of paying school fees and providing basic resources. One day she noticed that one of the girls hadn't attended school for a week. When she asked the principal about it, he said that it had been necessary for them to send her home as the remaining school fees of \$3.60 hadn't been paid.

When Lauren was asked about whether the charity favours support in the form of funds or volunteers, she noted that funds were always needed and anything people could donate was hugely appreciated, but there is a value in having volunteers travel to Kenya. In addition to



Kenyan child being carried on her mother's back



Mobile sight and eye clinic at work

having extra hands to assist, the impact of seeing the on-the-ground situation often inspires the volunteers even more, so that they go home and activate their own networks to fundraise for the charity. As there is never enough money to help everyone, the more people who can be inspired to fundraise, the better. Lauren also believes that it is very important for people from Western countries to have the opportunity to realise just how privileged we really are in the world.

Interviewer Oscar Devereaux, whose sister (and Georgian) Phoebe (2014) will join Lauren on her return trip to Kenya at the end of this year, asked Lauren about how her time at College influenced her. She was effusive about the opportunities that St George's had offered her. As an 18 year old in her first year she got involved, through the College, with True Blue Dreaming, an organisation that pairs university students as mentors with school students in regional and remote Western Australia. As part of this, in the mid-year break she and other residents participated in a trip to the remote aboriginal community of Looma in the far north of Western Australia, where they worked

as teacher's aides. She was inspired by the way the organisation built trust with the local community and worked with them in seeking to address issues. It set a standard for her on how charities should engage with the communities they work in and how important it is to empower those communities rather than do things for them. She also had the opportunity to volunteer with Ronald McDonald House, where she gained further experience doing charity work, and organising fund raising and volunteering events at the House for College residents. She encouraged residents to make the best of the opportunities and experiences that College can provide, as few places will enable students to gain such a wealth of experience, skills and confidence so easily and in such an enjoyable way.

For more information about The Children of Maasai Educational Programme, or if you would like to support them through fund raising, donations or volunteering, please see their website www.childrenofmaasai.org which also has a list of the items they are looking for to take to Kenya. **G**