



WARWICK  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# Warwick in Africa

Annual Report 2024



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# Message from our Programme Director

Professor David Davies with Mr Eddie Maota, School Principal of Cosmo City Secondary School in Johannesburg.



Since 2006, Warwick in Africa has partnered with schools in economically disadvantaged areas of South Africa and Ghana to support teaching and learning. In 2024, our student volunteers worked alongside dedicated teachers, benefitting thousands of learners through six-week classroom placements. These partnerships create powerful cultural exchanges while addressing educational inequalities in areas where resources are often stretched thin.

The impact of these educational partnerships extends beyond the classroom. Our volunteers engage in after-school activities and improvement projects, while developing their own intercultural competencies and teaching skills. Through this philanthropically funded initiative, we continue to demonstrate how collaborative approaches can transform educational opportunities across communities.

Building on our recognised excellence in student-led research, we will expand the programme to include Undergraduate Research Support Scheme (URSS) projects in 2025. Selected students will explore not only classroom practices but also wider educational partnerships, community engagement, and sustainable development through our established networks with the Africa Hub, Warwick Interdisciplinary Centre for International Development (WICID), and our partner universities in Stellenbosch and Ghana. This research-led approach strengthens our evidence base while offering students unique opportunities to contribute to educational development in Africa.

As Programme Director, I am consistently moved by the profound impact I witness during my visits to our partner schools. The transformation is evident not just in academic achievements, but in the raised aspirations and growing confidence of learners. Our Warwick student volunteers develop as both teachers and global citizens, often describing their experiences as life-changing.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary community of teachers in Ghana and South Africa. Their expertise, dedication, and collaborative spirit form the bedrock of our programme's success. Working alongside these committed educators, who achieve remarkable results despite significant resource constraints, is a privilege.

Together, we are building a sustainable model of educational partnership that continues to evolve and grow.

We are deeply grateful to our supporters whose generous philanthropy makes this vital work possible. Their commitment to educational transformation enables us to maintain and expand our impact across communities, creating lasting change through education.

With very best wishes,

**Professor David Davies**  
Warwick in Africa Programme Director

# Warwick in North Johannesburg



## Kameyca's story

**Chevening Scholar, Anne 'Kameyca' Exantus, an international student from Haiti, had a busy year in 2024 juggling a master's degree at Warwick Manufacturing Group with a summer placement at Blue Eagle Secondary School in Johannesburg.**

When I heard about the opportunity to teach in Johannesburg, I knew it was exactly where I needed to be. The idea of working in a community where education can transform lives struck a deep chord in me. Coming from Haiti, I've seen how limited resources can restrict opportunities. So, I wanted to be part of the change, to offer hope and guidance through education.

My placement was at Blue Eagle School, and from the moment I arrived, I realised how much was at stake. Some of the learners came from tough backgrounds that made focusing on education difficult. Yet, others showed a tremendous appetite and motivation for learning and growth. This dynamic perfectly matched the type of environment I enjoy working in. It provided enough challenge to push me to motivate those who needed encouragement, while also inspiring me to give even more to those demonstrating a strong passion for education.

To support the students who were hungry for knowledge, in my free time, I would voluntarily engage them in discussions on topics like leadership, business, conflict management, and teamwork. These sessions were interactive, with me asking questions and rewarding their correct answers by giving them books.

On the other hand, for students who felt less motivated during English classes, I had to show patience, provide extra materials, and spend additional time helping them stay engaged.

One of my most rewarding moments was when I managed to turn around some of the more challenging students—learners who, at first, seemed completely disengaged. By the end of my time with them, those same students were raising their hands and asking questions. I realised that all they needed was someone to believe in them and guide them.

This experience changed me in ways I didn't expect. It deepened my commitment to education, not just as a career path but as a tool for empowerment. I now understand the impact of personal engagement and compassion in education, and I want to carry that with me into the future. It's made me even more determined to be involved in projects that have a social impact, especially in education.



**Kameyca was outstanding in her commitment and positive attitude. She made sure to attend all her classes regularly, working diligently to make a positive impact on both her students and colleagues. Her dedication did not go unnoticed, and she received high praise from the staff for her consistency and enthusiasm.**

**Lerato Mashiloane**  
English teacher  
Blue Eagle Secondary School



## Jabir's story

**Jabir is a second-year student from London studying Philosophy. He assisted with Grade 8 and 10 English classes at Blue Eagle Secondary School.**

*When I first saw the opportunity in my inbox, the prospect of teaching abroad deeply resonated with me, as I have always had a strong interest in the value of education, particularly in delivering it to able and hard-working individuals – which describes most, if not all, the students at Blue Eagle High School – who may otherwise be barred from the opportunities that come with schooling. Thus, it was natural enough for me to immediately apply.*

The stages before the placement took place were both educative and greatly fulfilling. From meeting the team I'd be going over with, to lectures on the history and politics of the regions we would be travelling to and how to conduct our volunteering in an ethical and redistributive way, I felt both informed and excited for this opportunity.

*On the first day, I remember vividly being guided over to the playground, where the Grade 10s and up were having their morning assembly. You would not have been able to tell it was a freezing Monday morning, and the first day of term on top of that. The students were being guided through a motivational talk, and then afterwards a school song, which was received with an exuberant enthusiasm that surely could have been heard from the township over.*

Prosper and Lerato, who taught Mathematics and English respectively, and worked in an administrative capacity around the school as assistant head teachers, did a great job in showing us the ropes and preparing for what was to come. I have great gratitude for the effort they made in ensuring we were comfortable and able to slot in amongst the other teachers and students seamlessly. Whilst every day was different, I generally taught English to the Grade 8 and 10 classes, so around 100 students cumulatively on any one given day. Our topics ranged from grammar, to more creative projects, such as essays reflecting on episodes in their life and the lessons they've learnt from it. One student volunteered to read theirs to the class, and happened to be both moving, funny and didactic all at the same time. Needless to say, he very much deserved the rapturous applause he received at the end.

Perhaps owing to my interest in literature, the classroom highlight that stands out for me is towards the end of a discussion on a piece of poetry, where (somehow) we ended up on what constitutes 'true' poetry, and with that the definition of art itself. I contended that as long as the intention was there, anything could be considered as such, but this was met with vehement disapproval. Still though, the class ended amicably enough and one student was even kind enough to show me her personal writing, previously only circulated amongst friends and family. It was very touching in and of itself, and even more so to witness first hand the abundance of talent there was on display.



» Jabir with fellow team members during training

# 94 students

volunteered for Warwick in Africa programme between 2022 - 2024.

# Warwick in Kayamandi



## Helena's story

### Helena is a third-year Biomedical Science student.

I joined Warwick in Africa to improve my adaptability and grow outside of my comfort zone. I am African, and my parents' success in school transformed their lives and the lives of the future generation. I wanted to give up my time in the hope of helping someone else be successful in school.

I had the fortune of being placed in Makapula Secondary School in Kayamandi, South Africa. The learners were welcoming, sweet, and bright. A school hymn they often sing is called "Never Give Up," which embodies the spirit of the entire school community. Living in Kayamandi is not easy, with high levels of crime, poverty, and violence, yet these kids never brought the outside challenges into the classroom. Every day, they were polite and curious to learn.

We had only a small amount of previous teaching experience, so it was quite challenging to come up with new and different ways to teach concepts and make lesson plans that catered to all abilities while being engaging and impactful. Additionally, the school timetable changed every day, including lesson times, requiring us to adapt our lessons on the fly. All of these challenges, coupled with being away from home, gradually tired me out. However, I was paired with a phenomenal teacher, Ms. Gama, who delivered each lesson brilliantly and with a smile. Witnessing that motivated me and reminded me of the phrase "Never Give Up," which inspired me to embody that spirit and keep pushing.



» Helena with the English teacher who inspired her during her placement, Ziyanda Gama

During my time at the school, I worked with 80 learners and two teachers but formed a close bond with two Grade 11 classes. My fellow Warwick in Africa volunteer, Ayesha, and I ran public speaking workshops for the Grade 11s to prepare them for their formal assessment in September. The unprepared speech exercise involved giving the learners a random topic and allowing them 10 minutes to prepare a 2-minute speech. At the start of our sessions, many of the learners struggled with confidence and didn't enjoy unprepared speech.

To create a supportive and encouraging environment, Ayesha and I offered rounds of applause and positive reinforcement. We highlighted the difference between good and bad speeches, provided a step-by-step process for writing a quick speech, and performed various exercises to make the learners comfortable being at the front of the classroom. When the formal assessment rolled around, I was so proud of the learners and how much they had grown in confidence and improved their public speaking skills, leading many of them to achieve high grades in their assessments.



## Sarah's story

### Growing up in a working-class family in rural Austria, I realised at an early age that early childhood education can be a powerful lever to ensure equality of opportunity.

This is why, at the age of 14, I decided to become a pre-school teacher and combined my A-levels with a professional apprenticeship working with early years. Motivated to take my efforts from the micro- to the macro level, I applied for Politics & International Studies at Warwick. Financing this degree was beyond unrealistic – but being awarded a full-fee scholarship showed that my efforts paid off. I was fortunate enough that I had inspiring role models who helped me to become confident enough to apply to a top university abroad. Hearing about the Warwick in Africa programme got me excited about potentially having a similar impact on a learner in a marginalised community – what if I could be that catalyst who raises aspirations?

Being placed at Makupula Secondary School in Kayamandi, South Africa, I quickly realised that students' spoken English was excellent while their written usage of the language lacked rigour. Through a fun grammar test in one of my first lessons, I was able to identify in which areas most grammatical errors occurred. A particular focus of mine was to connect lessons to the students' lived experiences, something I found lacked in classes. For example, I planned a fun lesson on the differences of the active and passive voice based on the learners' favourite food, Umvubo. In a low-resource environment with around 50 students per class, creating interactive lessons was challenging but my efforts paid off, as one learner notes in her goodbye letter: "You are not just a teacher, but a role model and a friend and you've made a lasting impact on our class."

Being in the classroom was, however, just one puzzle piece that made this experience a positive one for everyone. As an International Relations student, I further got involved in the International Club at Makupula. I found out that the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA) hosted their annual International Relations quiz for secondary school learners. Together with

the deputy head, we gathered a group of interested students who wanted to compete in the quiz. I spent the upcoming two weeks meeting the group of learners every day after school as well as during break time, discussing current political events that occurred throughout the world – from the effects of a famine in Sudan to the US presidential election. Inspired by the learners' active participation in the quiz, I decided to take them to another SAIIA event in Cape Town – a speaker meeting with the UN Resident Coordinator for South Africa, Nelson Muffuh, on the UN Summit of the Future 2024. Being some of the only high school students at this event, the spotlight was on them. The students directed a range of questions at Nelson Muffuh. This allowed everyone to get a glimpse into how to get involved in decision-making, an opportunity my learners mentioned they felt deprived of previously. Afterwards, the students shared that this talk inspired them to continue their involvement with SAIIA.



» Kayamandi team volunteers, Sophia and Joe, set to work with painting classrooms in Makupula Secondary School

*As a group of six student volunteers at Makupula, we managed to get another project done: renovating one of the computer labs that has been neglected for a year. From tearing out the rubbish and doing a deep clean to setting up the computers, the lab now serves as a valuable opportunity for students to engage with technology and catch up on content through educational videos loaded onto the computers.*



## Aly's story

### Aly Shamsi is a Kayamandi volunteer and an Economics graduate.

My curiosity about South Africa's history and my interest in experiencing the rich cultural tapestry of the region motivated me to apply for the programme. South Africa's complex history of apartheid - a system that sought to divide and diminish - presented a stark contrast to the spirit of Ubuntu, which seeks to unite and uplift. I wanted to understand how a country that had endured such trauma could find ways to heal and rebuild itself through a sense of shared responsibility. My previous experiences, such as climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for clean water initiatives in Kenya, taught me that charity work is more than just contributing money or time - it's about acknowledging our shared existence and striving for the collective well-being of all.

*One of our biggest achievements as a group was the implementation of digital learning in the school. With the support of the Western Cape Government, we secured 60+ tablets and uploaded over 500 hours of educational content. By doing so, we provided the students with opportunities to learn independently and continue their studies outside the constraints of the classroom. It was not just about using technology but creating an environment where every student had the chance to thrive in a tangible form - enabling collective progress by ensuring no one was left behind.*

Reflecting on my time in South Africa, I realize that the most profound impact has been on myself. Living in a community where Ubuntu is not just a philosophy, but a way of life has transformed my understanding of success and fulfilment. I carry with me the idea that true wealth lies in our connections with others and the positive impact we have on their lives. In the Western world, success is often measured by individual achievements, but my experience in Kayamandi has taught me that no accomplishment is complete unless it uplifts others as well.

*Warwick in Africa has taught me that while individual acts of kindness can make a difference, it is only when we come together - when we recognize that "I am because we are" - that we can create lasting, meaningful change. I leave South Africa not just as a volunteer, but as someone who has embraced the philosophy of Ubuntu and will carry it forward in all aspects of my life. This programme doesn't just teach; it empowers, it uplifts, and it transforms everyone who has the privilege of being a part of it.*



» Aly and Sophia attending Warwick in Africa training sessions in March 2024

# 41%

According to a LinkedIn survey, 41% of professionals considered volunteer experience as valuable as paid work experience when hiring.





Upon my return home on both years, I noticed my perspectives within life having shifted. We interacted with many enthusiastic and driven students whose ambitions within life were incredibly moving. Understanding a small part of the students' lives and their positive, strong spirits, and momentarily being on the receiving end of the immensely generous community spirit, has provided me with much admiration and hope for the good within people.

Whilst there was a lot of pain within the townships, with students losing parents in just the short time we were there and the heartbreaking levels of gender violence, there was so much beauty within the community we were briefly a part of.

Sophia Witcomb  
Kayamandi volunteer  
English Literature and Creative Writing graduate



» Ayesha attending Warwick in Africa training



The most memorable aspect of my placement was working alongside my fellow maths teachers. I observed their teaching techniques so I could emulate their style, whilst adding my insights, to ensure consistency in the learners' classroom experiences. Early on, I focused on assisting with marking and providing corrections to small groups.

However, I soon realized that addressing common errors with the whole class could be more beneficial. By presenting full solutions on the board, we helped all learners, including those who might hesitate to ask for help, grasp complex concepts.

Joe Lunt  
Kayamandi volunteer  
Third year Mathematics student



One particularly memorable moment was with a student who confided her struggles with public speaking and English. Together, we crafted tailored lessons that focused on building her confidence. By the end of the programme, I was amazed at her transformation; she spoke before her peers with clarity and poise. Witnessing her growth reinforced my belief in the impact of personalized support—small, focused interventions can lead to profound changes in a student's life.

Ayesha Sheikh  
Kayamandi volunteer  
Sociology graduate

# Warwick in Mpumalanga



## Khushi's story

I'm Khushi, currently living in England but of Indian descent. I have just graduated with a First in Mathematics. I like to think I am a friendly, charitable and genuinely nice person.

Having lived in India for a few years when I was younger myself, I feel that I can relate to these children more and with their circumstances. But I want to show them that it's possible to leave this environment rather than become a product of it. I never imagined it would be possible for someone like me to be doing this or even be in this part of the world so far from home. So this opportunity is actually a dream come true for me.

I volunteered at Acorns to Oaks school in Mpumalanga in South Africa. This is actually my second time coming to South Africa through WiA as I loved it so much the first time. If I didn't have my internship last year, I would've done it then too! The school is much more deprived of resources and infrastructure compared to the UK. However despite their circumstances, the learners are so friendly and willing to learn. They showed me so much love and curiosity for my culture. Their ambition and talent is what made me come back. I want to give them the inspiration and motivation to fight for their dreams and work hard and break this generational cycle. It's given me the motivation to work hard too. I am quite money motivated and hard working since I also come from an underprivileged background. I want to earn good money so that I can give back to them, and my absolute dream would be to start organisations similar to WiA but not just for education but for basic human needs like hygiene and sanitary products for females. I



» Team Leader, Khushi with fellow volunteer Choishan, and teachers Lucy and Elsie

also want to open animal sanctuaries for stray animals, especially for cats all over Europe. Hence this has also been an inspiration and learning experience for me.

*Teaching maths, one of the issues is that maths is seen as a scary and difficult subject, so my main aim when I arrived was to come up with games to make maths a bit more fun. I quickly noticed that even little comments like "well done", "good work" and smiley faces or stickers on their work motivated them which is nice to see.*

In terms of the school, some of the classes have nearly 50 learners so you can imagine it gets noisy and hectic. I officially took on three classes; two grade 9s and one grade 11 but whenever I was free or had good maths games, I helped out with the other teachers as much as I could. We were lucky enough to get school lunch which consisted of a lot rice, pap, soya mince and beans. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Even though I've been exposed to this type of environment before, it was still difficult to process the reality of it all. It's a rather humbling experience.



## Ben's story

**I first volunteered for Warwick in Africa in 2016, launching my career as a teacher and teacher trainer. Now as a PhD student in Education, I was able to return this year to teach mathematics whilst also supporting the teachers in developing their own practice.**

Acting as an instructional coach, I worked in partnership with them to set goals, select the most effective evidenced-based techniques to achieve them, and work to embed these in their lessons over time. On our first weekend in Mpumalanga, the school hosted a teacher training workshop for all teachers in the district. This was an exciting day where enthusiastic teachers came to learn and share what they had been doing. In the morning, we used a technique called lesson study to rethink how to teach 'angles on a straight line'. This involved me modelling how I would teach a lesson before coming together as a group to analyse it and uncover which techniques were used and why. The school was equipped with a wealth of technology, including interactive whiteboards and projectors in classroom, which we used throughout the training to show other how they can be used effectively in lessons.

The challenge in the school with much of this technology was that there was no one to maintain them or train how to use them, so many become disused. We worked with the school to find the best ways to utilise them again, including providing training and getting HDMI cables for the teachers to use. Equally, the school gave each learner their own tablet to use in lessons. This was great as it meant that they had access to all the textbooks in school and at home, and teachers could set them online homework and tests. However, with no Wi-Fi in the school, learners would have to pay for their own data to access the materials. Some teachers had alternative ways of using the tablet effectively that minimised the cost to students, so we encouraged them to share this with other teachers across the school. Everyone in the school had such a positive attitude so they always focussed on finding solutions rather than living with the problems.

The learners loved using mini-whiteboards that I introduced in my lessons. This allowed all 55 learners in the room to contribute their answers and ideas rather than just the few. With this new dynamic in the classroom, learners had the confidence to have a go at more challenging questions and be willing to make and learn from their mistakes. For example, when studying probability, everyone could draw a Venn diagram and explain to each other what they had learnt before attempting the harder questions. Learners enjoyed learning mathematics together, so the mini-whiteboards let them show each other examples and different methods, sketch diagrams, create questions for someone else, and teach each other. Sometimes, rather than me going through solutions on the board, learners who had got the answer correct would become 'mini-teachers' and teach small groups of their peers around the room.

Many of the teachers in the school were incredibly kind and generous with their time, taking us to experience much of the beautiful nature, wildlife, food and culture of the region. Many of the largest game reserves and conservation centre in South Africa are found in Mpumalanga so we would regularly see monkeys, giraffes and zebras on the way to the shops! At the weekends the teachers would also show us how to cook traditional South African food like pap, samp and braai (barbeque), and how to speak the local languages. It was a wonderfully enriching experience that reinforced to me just how powerful education can be in transforming young people's lives when they are taught by passionate, effective and caring teachers.



» Ben training the Warwick in Africa volunteers in June 2022



## Choishan's story

**I'm an international student from China, studying E-Business Management at the University of Warwick. I have always loved travelling and am passionate about charity work.**

Back in China, I spent a month teaching English and Art in a remote village in Hunan. During this time, I was deeply moved by the children's eagerness to learn, but also saw firsthand the challenges they faced due to educational resource inequality. For instance, the children had to make do with incomplete textbooks, and their teachers were often responsible for teaching two or three different subjects without proper training. Despite these obstacles, the students remained curious and hopeful, but it pained me to know that their potential might be limited simply because of where they were born. This experience made me reflect on my own privileges—the access to quality education I had growing up, which ultimately led me to higher education and greater opportunities.

I became determined to contribute in any way I could to address these disparities. Following my initial experience, I continued teaching weekly at a primary school in Hunan for an entire year. When I discovered the Warwick in Africa programme, I was thrilled, as it offered a unique opportunity to make an impact on an international level. Furthermore, the thought of going to Africa reminded me of childhood memories—watching "The Lion King" five times—and I couldn't resist the call of such an adventure.

I worked as an English volunteer teacher at a public high school Acorn to Oaks in Mpumalanga, South Africa. My partner teacher was responsible for five classes, ranging from grade 8 to grade 12, with approximately 140 students in total. I focused on teaching grammar and English writing skills. Unlike Chinese students who excel in writing but struggle with spoken English, these students were proficient in communication and public speaking but found writing challenging. Explaining grammar rules was relatively easy, and the students quickly grasped the concepts during practice exercises. However, the true challenge lay in helping

them understand writing topics, establish logical flow, and recognize the nuanced meanings of words, along with creating effective transitions between paragraphs. I found it difficult to use my second language, English, to communicate the underlying meanings to other non-native speakers with a different cultural context. To address this, I offered personalized feedback on their essays. I provided my interpretation as a reader and invited them to explore alternative approaches to make their writing more aligned with the intended topic. This individualized guidance helped them improve not only their technical skills but also their ability to express complex ideas in writing.

During my teaching placement, instead of following the traditional grammar teaching method of rules, examples, and exercises, I incorporated music, games, and Chinese folklore to captivate students' attention and increase their interest. Before travelling to Africa, I brought a Bluetooth microphone to assist my teaching. One successful example was when I taught synonyms to the eighth-grade students using the microphone and speaker to play Doggyland's "Affirmation Song." The lively rhythm of the song quickly caught the students' attention. I then asked if they noticed the words or phrases that could replace "good" in the lyrics and replayed the song. Afterward, I categorized synonyms of "good" into those that described people, landscapes, and food, inviting the students to answer and discuss. Finally, I assigned homework where they used these "good" synonyms to write a letter to a Chinese friend to help dispel misconceptions about Africa. Later, I gifted the microphone to my partner teacher, Elsie, so she could continue using this method in her future lessons.

*This experience opened my heart in a profound way. During my first week, I felt a sense of distance from the students, who treated me differently because I was Chinese. It hurt at first, but I soon realized their curiosity was innocent. I chose to meet them with warmth and openness, allowing them to see who I truly was. Over time, their curiosity transformed into genuine connection, and I saw the power of small actions in bridging cultures. This journey will forever guide me in striving for empathy and understanding.*



## David's story

I studied mathematics at the University of Warwick for an intensive four years. I have always loved teaching, and during my fourth year I started teaching at the University. However, towards the end of my degree, I started to feel burnt-out, disenchanted with my lifestyle of constant studying. I felt a desire to connect with other people from different cultures, to see the world through their eyes instead of my own. This desire brought me to the Warwick in Africa programme, and together with three other volunteers we created team Mpumalanga.

While my main aim was to learn as much as I could from the students and teachers at the school, I also made an impact by sharing some of the techniques that teachers use in England with the teachers at Acorns to Oaks. One key difference I found was in how teachers check the understanding of their learners. It was very common for teachers at the school to teach a complex topic, then ask their learners 'do you understand?', to which some students reply 'yes' even if they don't understand, and then the teacher starts teaching the next topic. In my lessons, I demonstrated a different approach, whereby instead of asking students if they understand, I asked them to attempt a few questions.

By collecting answers from some of the students at random, this gives a good indication of how well the learners really understand the topic, at which point I decide whether to continue teaching the same content or move onwards. This approach takes more time, however I believe that the results are very beneficial, and so I shared this with many of the teachers at the school.

Overall, this experience has given me everything I wanted and more. I got my wish of seeing the world through different eyes, and met many amazing people along the way. I've already noticed a big difference in myself since our return, for example some things I placed value on before now seem unimportant. I've gained a lot of respect for teachers, and for the art of teaching.



» David collapsing after running a full marathon in support of Warwick in Africa

# 34,000 learners

in the last 3 years in Ghana and South Africa have been supported by Warwick in Africa.

# 1,100 teachers

in the last 3 years in Ghana and South Africa have been supported by Warwick in Africa.

# Warwick in Limpopo



## Tilly's story

**Tilly is a second year History and Politics student who travelled to Limpopo in South Africa to teach English as an additional language for six weeks.**

Kolokoshani Secondary is a big school. It caters for 1,200 learners, spanning grades 8-12 and ages 13-18. It's a beautiful school; the classrooms form a quadrangle around a vibrant garden, and a meticulously tended allotment provides vegetables for the kitchen. Despite its size, the school feels like a close-knit community, where everyone knows everyone personally. Kolokoshani is a good school. It produces some of the best matriculation results in the district and is immensely proud of its learners past and present.

Kolokoshani struggles with severe overcrowding. It has become inundated with more learners than it can accommodate, with average class sizes ranging from 60 to over 90 students. I remember lessons struggling to reach the full length of the chalkboard, due to desks stacked up to the front. The school also faces a lack of classrooms. During exam season, it was common to see groups of grade 8s or 9s wandering around the school grounds or inside their classrooms without a teacher, who might double up as an invigilator.

Kolokoshani is, in many ways, similar to schools in the UK. Some learners focus and get on with their work, while others don't. For those who aspire and work hard, however, the challenges are more significant than those learners face 'this side'. For learners who need additional help, it's much more difficult for teachers to identify or dedicate time to them.



» Scenes at Kolokoshani Secondary School by Tilly Dickinson

WiA works to support schools in addressing some of these challenges. By specialising in Maths and English, the programme focuses on improving educational outcomes in subjects that provide learners with a strong foundation for the future. Partnering with typically underfunded schools like Kolokoshani, it provides training, support activities, and facilitates student volunteer placements - to enhance the successes already being achieved by local educators.

One memory across my 6 weeks stands out. Every day, two of my grade 10 learners would seek me out during lunch break for our daily 'phrase of the day': one word or short phrase in Tshivenda for one in French, which they were fascinated to learn. At the end of my placement, we organised a mini competition to see who could recall the most - with prizes of chocolate and crisps on the line! Luckily, I won with 21 Tshivenda phrases for their shared 19½ in French. I still have my Tshivenda flashcards and, for me, these encapsulate my time with the programme.

If I hope to have left something behind, beyond the specifics of English grammar, it would be this love of language and learning - in the spirit of exchange. By providing a snapshot of my time in Kolokoshani school, I also hope to increase awareness of the WiA programme. I am confident that, with support, it will continue impact the lives of learners from Warwick University and its partner schools in Africa for years to come.



### Xia's story

I am Xia Zhang, a recent BSc Economics graduate from the University of Warwick. I have always been interested in international development and poverty reduction since high school. In the past, I have conducted various econometric studies and research on the issue of equality and development, but I wanted to see the real life behind the statistical data I worked on. I believed becoming a teaching volunteer in the local context would be the best way to gain practical insights into developing countries, their issues and current ongoing sustainable development practices.

I went to a remote rural town in Limpopo, South Africa called Thohoyandou, located at the heart of the Venda region. Different from other groups, I had the chance to live at the local university - the University of Venda. This allowed me to immerse myself into the local community and interacted with many new friends at the university. Another huge part of my placement focused on volunteering teaching. I went to the Kolokoshani secondary school located in the nearby rural area and was responsible for delivering mathematics classes to grade 10, 11 and 12 students. The school was overcrowded with more than 100 students packed in a classroom designed for about 40 students. Because of this, classrooms also suffer from hygiene and littering issues. Despite these obstacles, I was always amazed by my students' concentration and perseverance during class time.

When I was there, the school was halfway into term three and learners were starting on the topics of financial maths and probability. As the school's maths lead teacher suggested, probability has always been one of the most challenging topics due to its abstract

nature. He even had to "tour" around local schools to teach probability as there were not many competent maths teachers. I did not know I was given such difficult task at first and had to start my first class about the Venn Diagram from day two. I consulted three different versions of textbooks for contents and questions banks for sample questions to draft my own lesson plans. Instead of rote memorisation, I focused on conceptual understanding and applications tailored to a concept like probability. My first class ended up well. My students were able to finish all classwork questions. Because of this, I continued with my own lesson plans for the rest of the topics.

During the process, I created and updated my lesson plans after delivering the contents to one class. Before I left, I documented all my lesson plans which sum up to 22. I also annotated them in order to fit the different needs for students with various maths abilities. I shared them to all relevant maths teachers, including the district's maths teacher, so that she could also analyse and potentially share it within the local teaching community. I hope this knowledge management practice will effectively develop the capacity of local schools and build a sustainable approach in education.

Overall, I believe I have fulfilled my initial goal for this experience, which was to gain a deeper understanding of a developing country and offer my help to local schools and students. Besides that, I was able to create beautiful memories with my students, my lead teachers, my teammates, and my local friends at University of Venda. I even got a Venda name: Murumua, which means angel in English. I almost teared up when I saw my students singing a farewell song and read the letters they wrote to me. This Warwick in Africa journey will always be a treasure for me.



» Volunteer, Xia Zhang, with Warwick in Africa Leader Teacher, Ronewa Ramovha

# Warwick in Accra



## Hurain's story

The opportunity to be a part of something so meaningful and impactful was one I couldn't pass up, and so when a close friend spoke to me about the programme, I was instantly interested.

When asked why I applied, various reasons come to mind. Though I enjoy teaching, desperately wanted to travel and needed a summer placement for my CV - none of these reasons are my true motivations. If I am completely honest, I applied thinking of my parents. The importance of education was instilled in me by my father. He grew up with traditional, uneducated immigrant parents who had little to teach him about formal education (though they had so much to teach us about morals and life) and therefore he had limited knowledge of opportunities available to him.

As I was growing up, he emphasised that, "People can take everything from you, but they can't take away your education." His education has been invaluable to him, allowing him to leave and begin his own life in the Middle East. It granted him financial freedom and the ability to raise my siblings and I in Dubai, privately educated and so much more fortunate than him.



» Hurain with learner at Aggrey Basic School

*Many of the children at Aggrey have so much potential and over the weeks the numbers of 'star students' I recognised only increased. At the beginning, many are hesitant and stay away, probably because they're not familiar with our foreign faces. However, so many students come out of their shells and once they trust you, they're so willing to listen and learn. When speaking about impact, I truly believe the children left me with so much. I hope I was able to give them a fraction of what they gave me.*





## Ashwin's story

I remember the first day we arrived on the school grounds. It wasn't very big. There were four schools on the compound which shared a dusty red playing area. The classrooms themselves were big, but filled with rickety wooden desks which children up to three calmly shared. There was a hole in the roof, which meant that every time the rain came teaching had to be stopped. I must say, however, that besides the conditions, the staff room was big and spacious which made it an easy place to unwind...

Despite the packed classrooms, the learners were talented, hungry for knowledge and passionate about their own interests. As a teacher of English, I continued to be astounded by the creativity and imagination of the children, who wrote wonderful stories of events that had happened to them. Stories of kids falling off bikes, getting sent off in football matches and being chased by wild animals. In particular, I felt that the kids want to go far, to go to university and become writers, architects, doctors, you name it, but struggle with the finances to stay at school. When you need money quickly, dropping out at 16 to work on the family farm seems a reasonable solution. But no student should be denied the choice to continue their education. I believe that the program, then, is an excellent way of giving the children some added motivation to continue their studies. Being taught by university students is relatable, exciting and most importantly shows them that anything can happen in just a few years' time.

Personally, I changed a lot because of the program. I became more confident and more spontaneous. When lessons failed to follow plans, I found new activities and ideas to use. I felt more inspired and feel as if I have found my future calling: to become a teacher. I became a better planner and communicator. A good example of this would be the sports day we organised at the end of



» Ashwin playing with learners during the school break

the school term. With almost 300 students in our school wanting to participate, we were tasked with organising food for them, a structured and exciting sports day, music, activities and so on. We were required to interact successfully with teachers, as well as students, and I feel as if this last event really summarised the skills we had learnt from the previous 5 weeks of teaching.



Peer-reviewed journals like *Psychological Bulletin* and *Journal of Happiness Studies* have consistently linked volunteering to improved well-being and life satisfaction.



### Celine's story

I was fortunate to embark on my second placement with Warwick in Africa this summer, again to Accra, Ghana, returning for a second time to the same school. I was raised in London by French and Greek parents with a desire to travel and meet people from different cultures and experience different countries.

I studied Economics at university with a focus on development microeconomics where I learnt education is a key to escaping poverty cycles, particularly in low-income countries, and more generally the link between education and income. During my university studies I also tutored students aged 15-18. When I was first presented with the opportunity to apply for Warwick in Africa, I was very excited and believed that my teaching experience provided me with some of the necessary skills and knowledge to be effective in the classroom. My wish to learn from people and the transformative nature of education motivated me to apply to the program for the first time 2 years ago. On my first placement I met many intelligent, kind, and hard-working students and teachers which motivated me to return for a second time. I also wanted to demonstrate to the students that their education was important to me personally and to continue my work by returning to the same school. In doing so, I was also better equipped by understanding better the environment, the school system, and the people to hopefully provide better support.

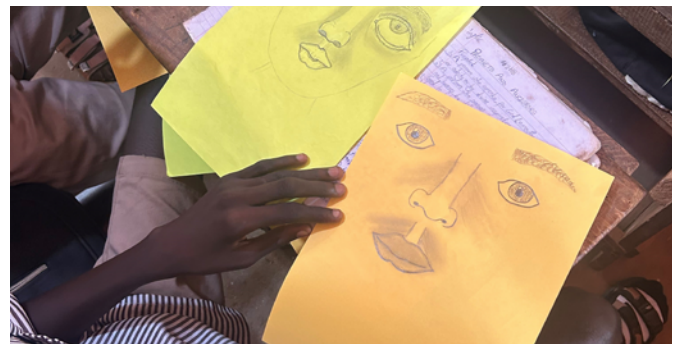
At the main school I worked with around 150 students in 3 classes and with my Warwick in Africa team colleagues at a nearby school I worked with an additional 70-80 students. I worked together with my lead mathematics teacher in the classroom. Working together allowed us to both share ideas and to have better class management, especially useful given the large number of students in the classroom. Having two teachers in the class enabled us to provide more individual support when students were struggling and when completing exercises. I hoped these sessions gave the students more confidence in

their ability in mathematics, particularly those students who were reserved and quieter in the classroom.

I was fortunate to be able to interact with many other teachers in the classroom who were all very compassionate and hardworking despite limited school resources. The students had a lot of respect for their teachers but also felt comfortable to ask them for help. I found the sense of community in the school as well as with other people in the city unparalleled to anything I had experienced before. All seemed to be committed to helping and looking out for each other which I found inspiring.

*As a keen artist, I decided to provide some additional drawing sessions in one of the weeks to a class of around 40 students. There is little opportunity in the academic syllabus for creative studies such as art, and as such I wanted to support any artistic minded students to take up drawing. In these series of classes, we drew portraits from constructing eyes to mouth to nose. I noticed how passionate several the students became when they requested paper to take home to practice the new feature they had just learnt. The students were all very focused and determined, always asking questions and for advice. I hope these students will continue to pursue drawing as creative studies can also be very important for their personal development.*

Throughout my placement I was only met with kindness and compassion from both the students and teachers which will stay with me through my life. The importance of community, working together as a team and remaining positive even in difficult circumstances are key takeaways from this experience. I am also so fortunate to experience a beautiful country with magnificent landscapes and a rich history. I am sure that I will return to Accra in the future.



» Art classes with Celine



## Umar's story

I have a deep-rooted passion for teaching. In fact, I will be joining the Teach First programme this autumn. During my secondary school years, I volunteered as a tutor, recognising the academic challenges many of my peers faced due to our school's limited resources. Witnessing the positive impact of my support on their GCSE results was incredibly rewarding.

Being of Tanzanian and Ugandan heritage, I am acutely aware of the educational disparities in these countries. My family sponsors several students there, but I yearned to contribute more directly. Whether in Tanzania, Ghana, or Bolivia, I was eager to immerse myself in these communities and make a tangible difference. I knew experiencing these students' challenges would foster personal growth and deepen my empathy.

As a Muslim, I must help others wherever possible. This opportunity resonated deeply with my values, and I was committed to maximising it. While this placement was initially six weeks, I aspire to return as early as next year,

# 70%

of student volunteers in 2024 said that their **intercultural skills** had improved.

# 67%

of student volunteers in 2024 said that their **communication skills** had improved.

and I have let Warwick in Africa and the school know about this.

I worked with over 200 students and 15 teachers, including five lead teachers for the Warwick in Africa program. The placement was incredibly demanding, with classrooms of 40-50 students each. My team and I dedicated countless hours developing engaging lessons and motivating students to attend school regularly.

One highlight was organising a sports day. We invested personal time and funds into securing high-quality medals and trophies to create excitement. This event proved instrumental in boosting student morale.

I supported several students in overcoming challenges. Stephanie, a shy girl struggling to make friends, sought my advice. Instead of intervening directly, I empowered her to seek out these friendships, offering guidance and support. Within a month, she had become more confident and outgoing and seeing her laughing with her new friends was memorable.

Despite her intelligence, Leticia, a talented footballer, hesitated to participate in class discussions. I recognised her potential and awarded her the Player of the Match medal at the sports day, giving her a platform to shine in front of over 400 students. This experience significantly boosted her confidence, and I will ensure that the teachers at the school continue to work with her in football and maths.

To address the school's long-term needs, we collaborated with staff to identify essential resources. Through negotiations, we secured two printers at a discounted price. This will significantly benefit students, especially those unable to afford textbooks.

*The cultural exchange between my diverse team and the students was invaluable. Many were surprised that despite looking just like them, I was actually of East African descent and spoke entirely different languages to them. Many now know the capitals of even more countries and aspire to one day visit these countries.*

This experience has profoundly impacted me. I have gained a deep appreciation for the privileges I have enjoyed and a strong desire to contribute to a more equitable world. The challenges faced by these students have solidified my commitment to becoming a teacher and making a positive difference. I am eager to apply the skills and knowledge gained from this placement to my future career.



## Kaushik's story

As I approach my third year of Economics at Warwick University, preparing for an exciting year abroad in Canada and Spain, I reflect on my transformative experience as a Warwick in Africa (WiA) volunteer teacher. I had the privilege of teaching at Aggrey Junior High School in Accra, Ghana, an experience that profoundly impacted both the students and myself.

My journey to becoming a WiA volunteer was deeply personal, rooted in my family's history of educational perseverance and giving back. My father, who came from humble beginnings in Tamil Nadu, India, similar to the children I would teach, escaped poverty through tremendous hard work and education, eventually becoming a doctor in the UK. My late maternal grandfather, who also went through similar struggles, took every opportunity to educate underprivileged children across the world, from his hometown in India to Azerbaijan. Both these role models instilled in me a strong belief in the power of education to transform the lives of those less fortunate. Their stories and actions inspired me to continue their legacy of education and empowerment through this programme.

My placement took me to a school where I worked with students from Year 4 to Year 9, in which each class included approximately 50 students. Over the course of my time there, I had the opportunity to interact with and teach nearly 300 children, each with their own unique personality and potential. The experience was both challenging and rewarding, as I navigated large class sizes and varying levels of academic preparation. During my placement, I worked closely with Bright Ntow, the primary maths teacher at Aggrey Junior High School. His mentorship and insights into local educational needs were invaluable, providing me with the tools to enhance my teaching skills and understand the students better. Initially, I faced cultural and language barriers. On my first day, I was shocked to see students sleeping in class. I soon learned that many worked late into the



» Kaushik with learners

night as street vendors, shopkeepers, and waiters. Surprisingly, school was often their safe haven—a stark contrast to Western perceptions of school as “work.” As I spent more time with the students, I was struck by their love and gratitude for learning even the smallest things. They were consistently happy, dancing and singing with boundless energy. However, I came to realise that some of these same chirpy students often hadn't eaten a proper meal in days. Yet, they were the ones who displayed the greatest drive for learning and outward happiness. Understanding this context was crucial. Instead of scolding tired students, I focused on engaging them as much as possible. Many had the potential to score extremely well, as evidenced by their mock exam results towards the end of my placement. This experience taught me the importance of adapting teaching methods to local realities and seeing beyond surface behaviours. It revealed the true needs and potential of students, challenging my preconceptions and deepening my understanding of education in different cultural contexts.

One of the most meaningful aspects of my experience was the genuine connections I formed with students and teachers. During an after-school maths club, I worked closely with a student who struggled academically due to personal circumstances, not ability. Through a first-principles approach, we made substantial progress, improving his understanding of the simple topics like multiplication and division, which then led to an almost instantaneous understanding of more complex topics like functions and graphical transformations. After our

sessions, the student expressed deep gratitude, but his words also stuck with me: “The white man stays and helps well, but the white man never returns”. This phrase, though partly a reference to my ethnicity as a foreigner (even though I am not white), highlighted the community’s past experiences with short-term volunteers. It suggested the connections built with these volunteers often proves short-lived. This revelation, while challenging, does not diminish the profound impact the WiA programme can have, and it further stresses the importance of having this programme and expanding it. And if given the chance, I would eagerly return to Aggrey Junior High to strengthen the bonds I’ve formed.

To conclude, the highlight of my experience was the school sports day, which I helped organise alongside my team, and teachers from Aggrey and the adjacent Nii Okine school. The day showcased beautiful cooperation between learners, students, and teachers

as we coordinated sporting events, food, and music. The emotions I felt and the appreciation I have for this opportunity are truly indescribable. This event epitomised the spirit of community and collaboration that made my WiA experience so profound and unforgettable.

Looking to the future, I am confident that this experience will shape my academic and career choices. It has given me a firsthand understanding of the importance of sustainable development and the role of education in empowering communities. As I continue my studies and explore potential career paths, I will carry with me the lessons learned and the connections made during my time in Ghana.



» Ghana group visiting Cape Coast, culturally significant due to its role in the transatlantic slave trade

# What does the volunteering programme mean to schools?

By Victoria Hani

Victoria Hani describes the 10 reasons why the volunteering programme is so welcomed by our partner schools.

1. The learners love the volunteers because they are young and understand them – they interact with learners differently to the teachers.
2. Volunteers get to know the learners well and pick up on issues with a student, or the potential of a student, that the teachers might have missed.
3. Volunteers are not burdened by the admin side of teaching, so they have more time to spend getting to know the learners.
4. Having volunteers takes some of the pressure off teachers for that 6-week period.
5. Volunteers undertake other duties in the school whilst applying their own unique skills.
6. Sometimes volunteers are more confident in some areas of subject knowledge.
7. Learners benefit from exposure to volunteers from all around the world.
8. Volunteers are very creative.
9. Learners look forward to seeing the volunteers at school.
10. Teacher morale is boosted by volunteers.



» Victoria Hani, former Warwick in Africa Lead Teacher and Committee member



» Sarah Bamberger with learners

# Get in touch

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