

UK/INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITY - REPORT FEEDBACK FORM

Names:

Aaron Wood & Katie Henderson (Eastern Youth Rep/ Co-Moderator Elect)

Based on your trip to:

The Dominican Republic (with Compassion UK/Free Churches Group)

In February 2018, Katie and Aaron were given the opportunity to travel to the Dominican Republic with the free churches group to experience the work of compassion Uk.

Compassion are one of the leading children's charities in the world, whose approach is highly personal to individuals, and through them, entire communities of people. They work in partnership with local churches in developing countries, linking children in need with caring sponsors, all across the world. Each and every sponsor enables Compassion to care for these children through every stage of their young life, up to and including university life in some occasions!



We were a bit apprehensive when we arrived at London Heathrow on a very windy February morning. We'd heard that the infamous "Beast from the East" was fast approaching so we really wanted to be on the plane before anymore flights could be cancelled. The journey was 13 hours, which was, by a massive margin, the longest journey both of us had ever done, even with the multitude of films on offer and amazing sights out of the window, we were restless after about 2 hours!

We only had two and a half days in the Dominican Republic but we managed to fit a lot in. The first thing we did was visit the compassion office where we learned all about the practicalities of the charity and heard from the director who used to be a sponsored child. We then visit a child survival programme where we heard testimonies from the mothers, one mother told of how she tried to abort her pregnancy many times until compassion reached out and gave her the support she need to keep her and her baby safe. We visited two child development programmes; one in a urban area the other in a rural area. We shared in worship with both programmes and had the opportunity to talk with the children whilst serving their snacks. We had dinner with graduates of the child development programme who again told heartbreaking yet heartwarming testimonies made all the more inspiring as they were our translators for the duration of our stay.



Even in the shuttle busses when we were travelling between destinations in the Dominican Republic itself was a surreal experience. The sights out of the window were the things you normally see on the news so being there yourself, experiencing along with the rest of the group was an experience in itself.

The visit was in fact in partnership with many different denominations, and after a few days the sense of community we all shared was almost like we belonged to one big family, experiencing everything together. It was great to be able to come together, to unite as a group of Christians to serve the lord and to the see the heart of Jesus at work.

The main element that stood out to us both was the passion and drive from the local churches. The heart of Compassion is very much run by the local church. Despite the very crucial work that goes on behind the scenes the power is in the local churches hand and each church we visited took great pride in that. The local churches are the ones the know their local community, they can easily identify those in the most need.

Seeing the children light up when they talked about their sponsors is something that will always stick. It's easy for compassion to tell us that the children really appreciate their sponsors but when you hear them telling you their sponsors name, where they come from, how long they have been sponsored by them, all the letters they have received, all with the biggest grin on their face, that's when we both knew that we had to become sponsors.



Since returning from the Dominican Republic we both now sponsor children through Compassion UK. This is Nashla, Katie's sponsored child. She is six years old and lives in the Dominican Republic. This is Leonardo, Aaron's sponsored child. Leonardo is nine and lives in Colombia. Leonardo is your typical nine year old, even though he lives in one of the most prolific countries known for drugs in the world. He loves playing football and has recently joined a swimming club which he loves. We exchange letters once every few months, and Leonardo tells me it makes his day every time one arrives.



We both write and receive letters from our sponsored children in which we both cherish. We both talk to anyone who will listen about this trip, also having led a series of talks to our Synod's and different Church meetings about our experiences. We tell them about the children and the absolute difference that Compassion UK is making to their own and communities as a whole and what a positive outlook they have on life because of this. Always at the end of each meeting we encourage those attending to consider sponsoring a child somewhere in the world, and some people even have which is fantastic news knowing what difference this will make.

It's easy to talk about the amazing work of compassion having seen it first hand but if you sponsor a child we promise you will also see first hand the difference it is making to children's lives.