

# Summer Youth Blitz Summary Report

2003

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY® INTERNATIONAL





KATHY SAAD

*The Summer Youth Blitz team in Los Lunas, N.M., participates in the house dedication.*

# Summer Youth Blitz 2003

Over the course of Summer Youth Blitz's 10 years, more than 350 young leaders have been empowered and together have built more than 25 homes in 15 different communities, including five countries outside of the United States.

Summer Youth Blitz 2003 touched the lives of 45 young leaders from 20 states and one country outside of the United States. Summer

Youth Blitz continues to provide an alternative to a typical summer program by incorporating service and diversity awareness activities into a two-week experience.

The builds this summer took place with three local Habitat for Humanity affiliates: Putnam County Habitat for Humanity in Cookeville, Tenn.; Habitat for Humanity of Valencia County in Los Lunas, N.M.; and Anathongwa Habitat for Humanity in Scottburgh, South Africa. The program is coordinated by the Campus Chapters and Youth Programs department of Habitat for Humanity International.

The SYB staff would like to extend their utmost appreciation to The Seedling Foundation whose sponsorship made the program possible. And special thanks goes out to those individuals whose extraordinary efforts helped to make this year a successful program: Gayle Haggard, executive director of Putnam County HFH; Kevin Cronk, executive director of HFH of Valencia County; Yamiko Samu, volunteer coordinator for Habitat for Humanity KwaZulu Natal; and Gavin Seidler, managing director of African Exposure. Without their dedication and help, SYB would not have been such a life-changing experience for the participants.

## 10 YEAR SUMMARY

Youth Participants	-----	350
Houses Built	-----	25
U.S. Communities	-----	10
International Communities	----	5

**"Diversity—never in my life have I learned so much in such a short amount of time. People here opened my eyes to the happenings of the rest of the world."**

—Sasha, Ohio



*Chris helps Kirby measure the drywall.*



*Nick, Allesandra, Jon and Eric pose at the house dedication.*

**"I learned we may be culturally, economically and geographically different, but we are all the same. This is a great opportunity to learn more about yourself and others and to test your leadership skills. I learned I am so privileged, and I have more than I need."**

*—Numvoyu,  
South Africa*

## GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

- To complete a new Habitat house, resulting in one less family in poverty housing.
- To develop a better understanding of the importance of teamwork.
- To deepen the commitment to community service, enhanced by principles of "empowerment, not dependency" and "a hand up, not a hand out."
- To develop an appreciation for diversity and the value of differences.
- To broaden horizons, and to stretch the perspectives of the participants.
- To allow individuals to participate in Habitat for Humanity's work and experience a culture outside of their own.
- To deal with some of the root causes of poverty housing.



*Karan and Bronwyn pass blocks down to the site.*



## HOST AFFILIATES AND COMMUNITIES

### PUTNAM COUNTY HFH COOKEVILLE, TENN.

The first Summer Youth Blitz group traveled to Cookeville, in the rolling hills of central Tennessee. In this small town about an hour's drive east of Nashville, the youth found a community eager and excited to support their unique two-week service experience. They also quickly found support and new friendship in each other, despite their different backgrounds.

During the day, the youth had a chance to interact with various people on the site, including the homeowner family, Habitat board members and local community members. The house build, an unfamiliar activity for most, provided a common, non-threatening ground for building relationships and teams. The participants were challenged with various new tasks on the construction site, where they learned different skills and listened to life stories as they worked side by side.

Workdays began with creative devotions led by a SYB staff member or a participant. These devotions helped focus the group on the important work they would be doing at the construction site in the day ahead. Devotions involved a variety of approaches—from a good morning stretch, to funny or motivational stories, to inspirational religious text readings.

Many local organizations provided “fuel” in the form of lunches for the hard-working youth each workday. Support increased as local residents read about SYB in the Cookeville newspaper and heard the excitement of the youth on local radio stations.

After showering and resting at the end of each workday, evening activities were planned to help participants grow in ways beyond learning new construction skills. “Welcome Home,” a housing simulation game, confronted the youth with issues of poverty housing. The game split the group into “characters,” and each person faced different issues while trying to obtain affordable housing in a community modeled after the area where they were working. The youth learned about the frustrations and limitations of Section 8 housing, rules in place at women’s and men’s shelters, and the bias and prejudice associated with working-class poor applying for a typical apartment.

**“This was more than a volunteer trip; it was dream come true. This opened my mind to all possibilities and impossibilities. Life is exactly how you build it.”**

—Javier, Arizona



**Facilitator Elva de la Torre explains Section 8 paperwork to Sasha during the simulation game “Welcome Home.”**



**Sasha, Kirby, Kendra and Jon wait to go on the air at a local radio station.**

OWS JAHU

OWS JAHU

**“The Summer Youth Blitz was the greatest experience of my life. It was an opportunity to live with and learn about people of different races and religions, and make friendships and memories that will last a lifetime.”**

—Justin, Maryland

**“We all had differences but came together as one and respected each other, which is not something you get to experience all the time.”**

—Jenny, Wisconsin

Another activity, “Diversity Jeopardy,” tested the youth’s knowledge about groups that have been marginalized throughout history. A skit night called “ISMs” challenged the participants to create a short skit about issues such as racism, sexism, religious bias and age bias. At “Habitat Night,” youth learned about the history of Habitat for Humanity as well as other service opportunities in their hometown communities. All of these activities, and others, sparked many moving and powerful discussions.

The group spent the middle Saturday of their trip hiking, picnicking and canoeing at a state park. On Sunday the group toured the Belle Meade plantation, which is famous for its racehorses. There the hoop-skirted tour guide opened participants’ eyes to the old Southern culture of Tennessee.

The youth ended their last workday with the house dedication—a celebration of the challenging and unique experience. The homeowner family, their friends and the Habitat affiliate staff joined in thanking the participants for their service during the build. In turn, the SYB participants honored their hosts and homeowner with gifts and speeches expressing their gratitude for the experience.

### **HFH OF VALENCIA COUNTY LOS LUNAS, N.M.**

The second domestic build for Summer Youth Blitz 2003 was in the “land of enchantment”—Valencia County, N.M. The SYB team arrived at Albuquerque airport on a 105-degree day, which proved to be an average temperature during the build. Not discouraged by the heat, the group piled into vans for the 20-minute ride to Los Lunas, their home for next two weeks.



**Peter and Nick pose for a photo at the house dedication.**



**Ryan, Justin and Arlan share stories on the build site.**

KATHY SAAD



**Sasha secures the drywall in the new living room.**

KATHY SAAD



**Natasha takes measurements for the next sheet of drywall.**

The Valencia County Habitat affiliate is in the process of building a 150-house subdivision. The Summer Youth Blitz house was located on Nehemiah Street and was the affiliate's sixth of 12 houses for the year. Albert and Garry, the construction supervisors, showed patience and understanding while helping the youth participants learn new building skills.

On their days off, the youth explored the sites of New Mexico. One such opportunity was a visit to the Acoma Pueblos, one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in North America. This community has been living on top of a mountain with no electricity or water since the 12th century.

Another excursion was a 2.7-mile ride on the Sandia Peak Tramway; the ride started in the desert realm and then soared into the pines of 10,300-foot Sandia Peak. The youth were treated to a view of a magnificent sunset, followed by the Albuquerque city lights across the desert floor below and a galaxy of stars above.

As the build neared its end, the days were full of last-minute details in preparation for the dedication of the house. The homeowner, her family and other members of the Habitat community came together at the dedication. The participants gave gifts of appreciation to those who had helped them and also presented the homeowner with a SYB T-shirt and a mailbox that they had all signed.

**"I've learned that no matter how much I don't have or how much I do have, I should always be thankful because there is always someone less fortunate than me."**

*—Tammy, Ohio*

**"This experience is a once-in-a-lifetime chance. [I learned] poverty does exist, and a helping hand can make a difference."**

*—Nick, North Carolina*





KATHY SAAD

*The Anathongwa community welcomes the Winter Youth Build team in Scottburgh, South Africa.*

“[This trip] was greater than I could ever imagine. Not only did I grow as a person, I made life-long friends. It was [during orientation] that the reality hit as to the impact my two-week stay would make, not only on the homeowner but also on me. It was there where I first started making friends. I learned not to be nervous about interacting with others from different racial, social, economic or geographic backgrounds.”

—Colleen, South Africa

### ALTHONGWA HFH SCOTTBURGH, SOUTH AFRICA

In the southern hemisphere, July is the middle of the winter season, so the South African “Summer Youth Blitz” program was renamed “Winter Youth Build—Siyafana.” *Siyafana* is a Zulu word meaning “we are all the same.”

Althongwa HFH completed its first house in 2002, and the Winter Youth Build team worked on the affiliate’s seventh house. The cinderblock houses built by the affiliate are 45 square meters in size. The average income for area is 800-1000 Rand per month, which is about US\$100-135.

Throughout the program, the youth learned about each other through “cultural nights.” On these nights, youth would share parts of their daily life, their family history and the history of the area they came from. Some youth talked about their Zulu background, others their Xhosa tribal background, and some their mixed heritage from the United States.

The youth’s free weekend was spent exploring a different part of the KwaZulu Natal area. One day was spent at a game farm viewing South African wildlife; the other was spent taking a historic Banana Express train ride through tribal lands. The weekend concluded with trust- and team-building activities on the beach.

Construction was almost completed on the two-bedroom cinderblock home in Zulu tribal land. The house dedication brought together the homeowner family, the Zulu community and Anathongwa HFH committee members for a traditional *brai*—a South African barbecue. The youth presented the new homeowner with a Bible that each of them had signed, expressing how they felt while helping her build her new house.

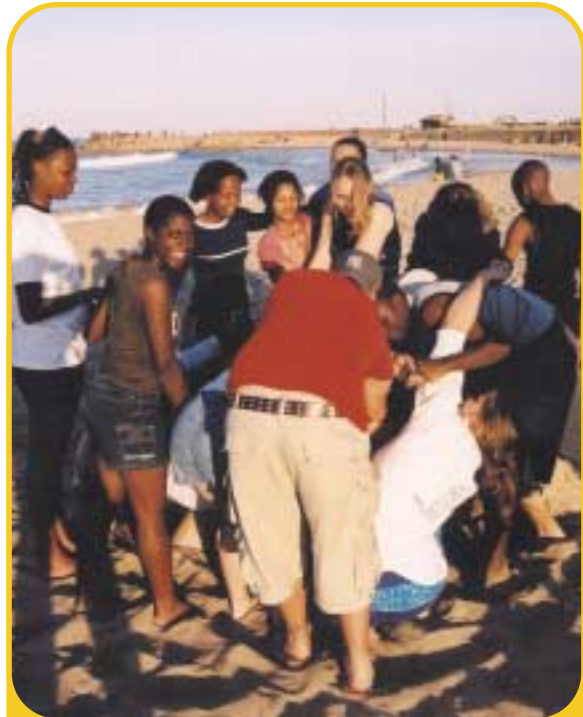


KATHY SAAD



*Colleen, Stephanie and Karan, all from South Africa, proudly display the first block they laid without the help of the mason.*

KATHY SAAD



*Participants try to complete a team-building game on the beach in South Africa.*

KATHY SAAD



*Nomvoyo and Javier work on the outside wall of the house.*

KATHY SAAD



*Antonie presents the Bible to the new homeowner in South Africa.*

## THOUGHTS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS



KATHY SAAD

“My favorite moment during the whole trip occurred when I was nailing the plywood roof to the trusses. It was hard work, but as I looked across the roof I could see how much my partners and I had done in just a few hours. There was a real roof on this house that would protect a family from rain, heat and cold. It was a great feeling.”

—JAMES, RHODE ISLAND

“The Summer Youth Blitz was very fun, and it is good for teens to help other people in need.”

—ERIC, KENTUCKY



KATHY SAAD

## HOMEOWNER SPOTLIGHT

The Tennessee SYB participants had the pleasure of partnering with Crystal and her daughter Danica in building their house. Crystal and Danica were amazed that the participants were spending two weeks of their summer vacation to help them construct their two-bedroom house in just nine days. Crystal spent as much time on site with the participants as possible, taking days off work to help with construction and provide encouragement and inspiration.

During her house dedication, Crystal shared the story of her and Danica's struggles: “I was working two jobs, but I just couldn't keep us going. It's too hard for a single parent.” But Crystal's story also described how her Habitat house was helping her turn their lives around. Crystal's words were a powerful reminder to the participants of why they had spent their time working with Habitat for Humanity.

The participants presented Crystal with a mailbox that they had all signed and decorated with the words “A Dream Come True.” Crystal was visibly touched by the present and promised to put it at the end of her driveway—and to speak about her partnership with Habitat for Humanity with pride whenever anyone asked her about her unusual mailbox.



KATHY SAAD

KATHY SAAD

**Above: Danica smiles inside her new Habitat house. Below: New homeowner Crystal receives a Bible from Gayle Haggard, executive director of Putnam County HFH, at the house dedication.**



KATHY SAAD

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that opened my eyes to new experiences. I have learned more from this group of people than I could have learned from a book or television set. Just because you’re black, white or purple doesn’t mean you can’t get along. Character is not skin-deep; therefore we should look at people’s character before we begin to notice their skin color. I feel if more people join Habitat, it could eventually eliminate racism, a world-wide disease, as it brings people closer together and forces us to deal with differences.”

—KARAN, SOUTH AFRICA

“Feeling the impact we have had on others and that which they had on us—this experience has been a real ‘blitz’ personal growth period for me. The best way to realize your full potential and what’s missing in your life is to take part in an experience like this.”

—SAMANTHA, MASSACHUSETTS



KATHY SAAD



KATHY SAAD

“It was great! We were the same age group, so we had things in common, yet we have different traditions. Some were funny; others made you think. I plan on doing more volunteering with HFH in the future because I enjoyed this experience.”

—KIRBY, ILLINOIS

“I’ve had a blast meeting new people and making a difference in [the homeowner’s] life. Everyone helped each other, whether it was easy or challenging. I’ve shared a lot of things in common with those who are way different than me! It has been one of the greatest experiences I have ever had. Just making a difference in someone’s life is a blessing. Thank you for sharing that with me.”

—ALLESANDRA, CALIFORNIA



KATHY SAAD



KATHY SAAD

“I can’t even put it in words. I’ve changed lives, and my life has been changed. I found that underneath—WE ARE THE SAME.”

—JESSICA, NORTH DAKOTA



KATHY SAAD

“I learned that you can misjudge someone because of the language they speak, and it is important how you communicate with people.”

—SANELE, SOUTH AFRICA





KATHY SAAD

**Summer Youth Blitz staff: Steve Messinetti, director of Campus Chapters and Youth Programs, Sarah Middleton, Robyn Lewis, Brad Ward and Stuart Rhoden.**

**“You grow so much as a person. It was truly fulfilling. I got to know more about other people’s cultures, and I learned how to tolerate them. You learn something new about other people every day, and it’s a good way to unite the youth. I learned that there are people out there who do not have the luxuries I have. I think I need to be more thankful for what I have.”**

*—Khalipha, South Africa*

## SUMMER YOUTH BLITZ STAFF

Three of the Summer Youth Blitz staff members were summer interns who trained at Habitat for Humanity International headquarters in Americus, Ga., before going to working in the field in Tennessee and New Mexico. The Summer Youth Blitz interns this year were:

### **SARAH MIDDLETON** DAPHNE, ALA.

Sarah is currently enrolled at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where she is completing her master’s degree in public health. She was president of the Habitat campus chapter at the University of Southern Mississippi during her undergraduate work.

In reflecting on her work this summer, Sarah said, “One of my favorite parts of this summer’s SYB was the house dedication. The youth came face to face with all the people that their two weeks’ worth of work had impacted. In this simple yet powerful celebration, a change of heart is realized. It’s so awesome to hear all the commitments to service after that. And I’m so thankful to be a part of that. The youth gave me such tremendous faith that people their age are able—and want—to make a positive, lasting impact on their communities. I was so blessed to serve those amazing people as a leader.”

### **ROBYN LEWIS** MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Robyn holds a university degree in marketing, and she has extended her work with Habitat for Humanity International by committing to volunteer for the next year in HFHI’s Marketing department.



Robyn had this advice to share with the staff of SYB 2004: “Take the opportunity to be the participants’ friend. They will accept you for who you are, be loyal friends, teach you new things, and be so much fun to be with. I laughed so much while spending time with the participants on the work site, in the vans and at the housing.”

## **BRAD WARD** **JASPER, IND.**

Brad is a sociology major and a Bonner Scholar at DePauw University. The Bonner Scholar program is a competitive scholarship program at 25 universities nationwide; it places an emphasis on community service and social justice.

“I was with five participants, and we were discussing politics, global issues, race and religion all in one conversation,” Brad said, when asked about his best moment of the build. “Everyone contributed and respected one another. I was so impressed by their level of maturity and respect for one another. Never have I been around such a diverse and talented group of high school youth before. They truly are amazing, and it is so powerful getting to know them.”

## **OTHER STAFF MEMBERS**

Other staff members for the builds included Stuart Rhoden in New Mexico and Thando Miniki in South Africa.

Stuart is currently a teacher in California’s “Teach LA” program, which seeks to attract teachers who are active in social justice issues and empower them to be educators who serve that purpose. He has several years of experience working with SYB.

“My experience during the HFH Summer Youth Blitz for the past six summers has been an invaluable, life-changing event,” he reflected. “I never thought it would be possible to build a house in 8 to 10 days, but I’ve seen it done nine times in four different states. Each time we reach the final day, there is such a strong sense of accomplishment and humility. Never underestimate the power of young adults—they will amaze you when given a chance.”

Thando is a counselor at the Oil Reach Out, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in the Cape Town area of South Africa. The Oil Reach Out’s mission is to pioneer and implement best-practice adolescent peer education in one cross-cultural South African community and model this to communities throughout Africa. High school peer educators are equipped with the skills of being role models, referral agents and helpers who are effective in promoting skills, creating a value-based social norm and providing healthy alternatives among their peers. These peer educators are preparing a way for South Africa’s HIV-negative teens to remain negative and reach their dreams, and for the nation’s HIV-positive teens to live longer, healthier, purpose-filled lives and, in turn, help others.

Thando served as the evening facilitator in South Africa, working through the cultural night activities and acting as a liaison for the youth. When asked to reflect on her experience, she said, “This experience gave me the opportunity to express my love for God by using my hands. I was able to witness a group of young people from different countries, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds come together to make a homeowner’s dream come true. I felt that my life’s work had been validated. It was truly a life-changing experience.”

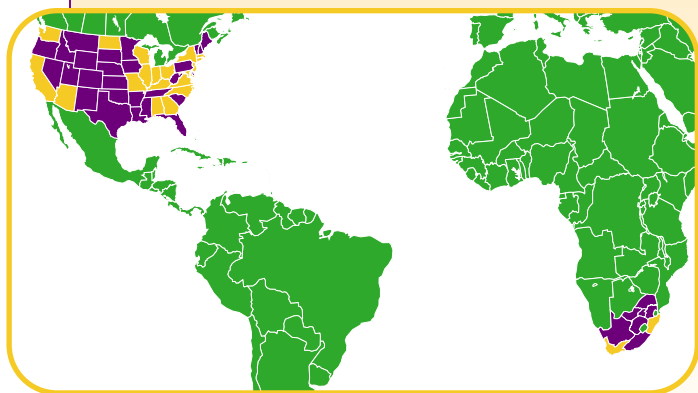
**“This program made me feel good about myself by helping others in a whole new way. This program made me feel proud about how people can help throughout the world.”**

*—Nisha, Missouri*



KATHY SAAD

**Summer Youth Blitz staff:  
Thando Miniki.**



## BY THE NUMBERS

- 45 total participants
- 20 states represented: Alabama, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin
- 2 regions of South Africa: Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal
- 7 youth who are dependants of current Habitat for Humanity homeowners
- 29 of the 45 participants were on full or partial scholarships

**"I do feel that I have a better appreciation for diversity after spending such close times with such a diverse group. I would recommend SYB for the lessons that are taught in the program about friendship and work."**

*—Chris, Maryland*

## SYB UPDATE

Most youth leave their two-week SYB experience changed, and then they face the challenge of adapting to life back home. Responses to the Summer Youth Blitz experience vary from starting a high school or college campus chapter to volunteering once a month at a local nonprofit or NGO. Over the 10 years that Summer Youth Blitz has been impacting lives, here are some examples of how youth returned to their hometowns and put their experience—and love—into action:

- **Debby**, from Minnesota, participated in the 1999 Summer Youth Blitz in Anniston, Ala. She went on to join a Habitat for Humanity Global Village trip to Alaska. Habitat for Humanity's Global Village trips give participants a unique opportunity to become active partners with people of another culture. Team member's work alongside members of the host community, raising awareness of the burden of poverty housing and building decent, affordable housing worldwide.
- **Emmy**, from Massachusetts, participated in Trinidad in 2000. She spent a year serving with the AmeriCorps at a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate before going to college.
- **Emma**, from New York, participated in the 2001 build in Greenville, N.C. She returned to her high school and started a campus chapter.
- **Nicci**, from Portugal, participated in the 2001 Summer Youth Build in Romania. She is now volunteering at Habitat for Humanity International headquarters in Americus, Ga., for three months before attending university.
- **Miles**, from New York, participated in the 2002 build in Anniston, Ala. He has since volunteered locally with his Habitat for Humanity affiliate.
- **Vicki**, from El Salvador, participated in Costa Rica's 2002 Summer Youth Build. She has become the youngest voting member of the El Salvador Habitat for Humanity national board of directors.
- **Kathleen**, from Pennsylvania, was a summer intern with the program in 1999. She has continued her work with nonprofits and currently works with one of the largest soup kitchens in Maryland.



## HFHI MISSION STATEMENT

Habitat for Humanity works in partnership with God and people everywhere, from all walks of life, to develop communities with people in need by building and renovating houses, so that there are decent houses in decent communities in which every person can experience God's love and can live and grow into all that God intends.



### **Habitat for Humanity® International**

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