

Advancing Knowledge

Reflections from a Fulbrighter

Mary Wagner, St. Catherine University

2010-2011 U.S. Scholar, Zambia

I spent 11 months in Lusaka, Zambia, teaching in the University of Zambia's Library Studies program and working with the Lubuto Library Project, helping open a new library and creating literacy activities for children.

University Library Studies department lecturers welcomed me and prepared me well to teach in a different style than I use at my academic home, St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I especially enjoyed accompanying two lecturers to Zambia's Copper Belt to supervise students in their required practicum. I observed students working in public, academic and corporate libraries, talked with their supervisors and learned much about the challenges of developing, accessing and using collections of books and online materials in under-resourced settings. Just as in Minnesota, libraries in Zambia form consortia and networks to facilitate access to information for those who need it.

The children – many living on the streets - who regularly visit the two Lubuto Libraries in Lusaka are drawn to picture and informational books. They engage with text and pictures, reading and re-reading books that grab their attention. Beyond providing a sound collection of youth-appropriate materials and literacy activities, the Lubuto Libraries consider children holistically. They provide opportunities to experience art, drama, dance and music in a safe, nourishing environment. Working with children at the newest Lubuto Library, in Garden Compound, returned many rewards, both professional and personal.

I also had the pleasure of working with Mr. Chabamba Johnstone, a Library Studies student who, with colleagues, started a community library in Chawama, one of the largest and poorest compounds in Lusaka. The CHABS Community Library is open to children and adults of all ages, and provides a quiet space to study, a venue for meetings of the Reading/Writing/Spoken Word club and a place to dream about futures that can follow from doing well in school. Mr. Chabamba inspires me. He epitomizes the generosity of Zambians who dedicate their talents and personal resources to serve the children and build a better future for their country.

So many experiences brought new learning and satisfaction to me! I attended a regional conference of librarians and information professionals, presented a paper at the Zambia Library Association annual conference, joined the School of Education Female Lecturers Association, and participated in International Women's Day activities that brought ladies from the compounds and women university lecturers together to discuss how education changed their lives.

Other memorable experiences included attending Zambian ceremonial celebrations, travelling to different regions of the country, visiting and volunteering in community schools, practicing Cinyanja (just one of Zambia's 72 languages) with a tutor, attending funerals of colleagues' family members, welcoming new babies into the world, and making lasting friendships. My husband, daughters and I are ever so much richer for our time among the people of Zambia. We are grateful to the Fulbright Program for making it possible.

Mary M Wagner