Wentworth welcomes US students

Eight American students will be sharing their knowledge and gaining experience over the next eight weeks, after partnering with local NGOs in Wentworth to drive community upliftment projects, empower youth and render meaningful assistance to the community.

The students from Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, are all participating in the DukeEngage programme, which is a Duke University initiative, with sites in countries all over the world, including the US.

Most of the students are from America along with some based at the university, from countries such as Pakistan and Kenya and range between the ages of 19 to 21. They have been actively involved with respective NGOs and offer direct service at the children’s home, resource development at the Victim Friendly Centre, and youth leadership workshop facilitation at We Help Our Children (WHOC) to name a few.

Jenni Owen, director of policy initiatives at the centre for child and family policy at Duke University, said, “I started thinking about the possibility for a Wentworth DukeEngage programme when I was first here in 2007, on an Eisenhower Fellowship programme. I returned in 2008 to conduct some formal planning with members of the community and the programme was approved by Duke to begin this year. We have nine students placed in eight different NGOs who are staying at eight different homes in the community. They arrived about two weeks ago and will be here through to mid-August. They are having a wonderful experience thus far and they hope to make a real difference in the community. The goal of the programme is to address challenges in various ways in a range of communities’ world wide.”

Annie Kozak (21), a student from Duke University who is living with a family from Wentworth, said, “The South African experience has been wonderful so far. The people here are lovely in every way and they have welcomed us so warmly into their lives and homes, continuing to go out of their way to make sure we are comfortable and happy. I work at the Wentworth Victim Friendly Centre, or the Trauma Room at Wentworth SAPS. Though I have only been there for two weeks, yet it feels like I have been there for much longer. I think that there are more resources available for people in need than they realise, but often they need help to take advantage of them to ensure their safety, security, and well-being. This is where our organisation comes in, serving an average of 250 clients each month to help them achieve the above mentioned goals.”

According to Kozak she enjoys the local cuisine, even though she has never heard of some of the dishes before. She added that it would be difficult to endure the winter when she returns home, after experiencing Durban’s winter.

One of the organisations working with the students is WHOC, an independent, volunteer, non-profit organisation that was established in 1993 and offers leadership and life skills training for children and youth, mainly exposed to vulnerable and high-risk situations.

Karl Linderboom, project manager of WHOC, said, “The NGOs are benefiting greatly from these students, who have the ability to exchange the knowledge they have gained at university, with the NGOs and local students. It also gives the local students a chance to meet and interact with others from different countries, learning about different lifestyles and cultures.

In the past month, millions of tourists had flocked to our shores because of the 2010 FIFA World Cup however, not every flight coming into South Africa was packed with soccer fans. A group of undergraduate students from America had also flown in for a programme called DukeEngage and was based in Wentworth, to help assist some NGOs.

DukeEngage empowers students to address critical human needs through immersive service, in the process transforming students, advancing the university’s educational mission, and providing meaningful assistance to communities in the US and abroad.