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SOGenUin Social Impact Summit 2015 Report

By

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INTRODUCTION

The Generation Unified (GenUin) Special Olympics Social Impact Summit gathered 120 youth leaders from 30 countries to develop Impact projects focusing on ideas that will make their communities more inclusive for people with intellectual disabilities. The youth leaders worked with 14 mentors to develop their social impact ideas, shared them through project pitches, heard from inspirational leaders that offered motivation and advice, and finally, earned project funds to realize their dreams. I left Zimbabwe for LA, California on the 21st of July. I passed through South Africa and Dubai and the journey lasted close to 36hours. I was travelling with my fellow countryman, Chris, he made the journey bearable. We got to LA around 2pm on the 22nd of July. We got shuttled to Westin Bonaventure Hotel and I must say, Los Angeles is absolutely gorgeous. I tried to take in as much as I could but half way to the hotel I had given up, figured I needed to take time and back up my memory, there's just so much a brain can take. It took us about an hour to get to the hotel where we had such a memorable welcome expo with the Summit Volunteers and mentors. Had the awesome privilege to meet SO Africa Regional Director, the amazing Mashane Nthutang. I spent the rest the afternoon recovering from my jetlag readying my mind and body for the very eventful 10days that I knew were to follow.



Chris and I aboard Emirates airbus from Dubai to LA



Chris and I arriving at the Hotel



View from my room

SUMMIT OPENING AND TRAINING

The first two days of the Summit focused on providing youth leaders intensive training and mentorship to further develop their impact project proposals. We had mentors with youth empowerment expertise lead us through a full curriculum on project planning, implementation and evaluation. Furthermore, I gained an in-depth look into the challenges facing people with intellectual disabilities, and was equipped with brilliant ideas on how to influence change, drive impact, and create results. Thursday, July 23, we had the official opening of the summit at the Mattel headquarters and received keynote addresses from Mr. Tim Shriver(SO), Jenny Zhong (SO), Stephanie Cota(Global Communications) and Kim Samuel (Samuel Family Foundation). This was followed by several breakaway sessions on how to improve our projects. We got into teams with Dream Directors from The Future Project. The criteria used to group us was our projects. So we had people with similar projects grouped together. In our teams, we got to know one another, the projects they were spearheading and also came up with a team name and chant that we presented to the other groups.



POP presentation with
Dream Director Brandon

I also got to interact with leaders from all over the world and hear about the amazing inclusive projects and movements they are implementing in their respective countries. It was such a huge eye for me and made me realize that there is still so much that needs to be done in Zimbabwe.



Left: with Gaser and Mohamed from Egypt. **Below:** with Mahmoud from Lebanon.



Far Left: with Potter Kai from Malaysia, a fellow Leo. **Middle:** with Elvis from South Africa. **Right:** with Jenny (SOI)

When we done with the day's presentation we were treated to an amazing Social gig at the Mattel grounds. We spent our night outside by the Mattel headquarters eating out of food trucks, hung out with The Miz, WWE wrestler, and listened to him give a motivational speech. Ultimately, it was such a fun day.

PITCH PIT

We had more sessions on project implementation. We listened to presentations on how to use social media to get the word out and improve the impact of our projects. This was also the day that all of us presented our project proposals to a panel of judges. I was super nervous for my turn to go, but I went in there and just went for it. I walked out of there feeling so liberated and confident about how I had done. We spent our afternoon in more sessions and team building activities.



Building a structure from a marshmallow, uncooked spaghetti, tape, and string to see who would build the highest structure. With Cherish (Philippines), Brina (Philippines), Sasha (Philippines)



My fellow countryman Chris and Mohamed from Morroco helping me rehearse for my pitch pit.

Afterwards we had the judges announce the top ten projects from the pitch pit sessions. These were to present to the whole group during dinner and we were then to vote for the top 5 projects which in turn would get mentorship from celebrity judges.

SPEAKER SERIES AND OPENING CEREMONY

Saturday was a speaker series with key speakers drawn across the Special Olympics and its partners. Included was the Lions Foundation IPP Joe Preston who highlighted how the work the Leos and Lions have done is creating a more inclusive world, leadership through meditation and awareness. I was greatly

honoured to share the podium with Joe Preston as I also delivered my speech during the speaker series. I felt compelled to share with the leaders how Lions Club has impacted my life and helped me realize my dream(s). It truly was an opportunity of a life time.



Speaker Series: Delivering my speech whilst Joe Preston, the Immediate Past President for Lions club International, looks on.

At the top of my list was Tim Harris, owner and founder of Tim's Place and Big Heart's Foundation and many others who have gone beyond their challenges to create positive change in their lives and inspire many athletes.

During the evening, we went and watched the Special Olympic World Games opening ceremony, which was really exciting! The turnout was amazing!! We had performances from Avril, Steve Wonder and several other singers, speeches by inspirational people with and without disabilities. It really was such an

awesome experience to listen to all of them. We had the 1st Lady, Michelle Obama, officially opening the Special Olympics Games and her speech was concluded with an intense, blistering display of fireworks.



DOHA FORUM

Doha Gathering of All Leaders in Sport is a premiere platform for world leaders, with the express intent of empowering stakeholders to create a roadmap for social improvement through sport, and launch cross-border initiative. We had an opportunity to be part of the Student ambassadors program where we learnt sport, sports management and managed to make new connections. With the current state of sport in my country I so wished our leaders had attended, they would have been greatly impacted. There was progressive deliberation towards changing the business of sport, making players and teams global brands, the ability to increase our reach and sport as an instrument for tourism and culture. Other sessions dwelled

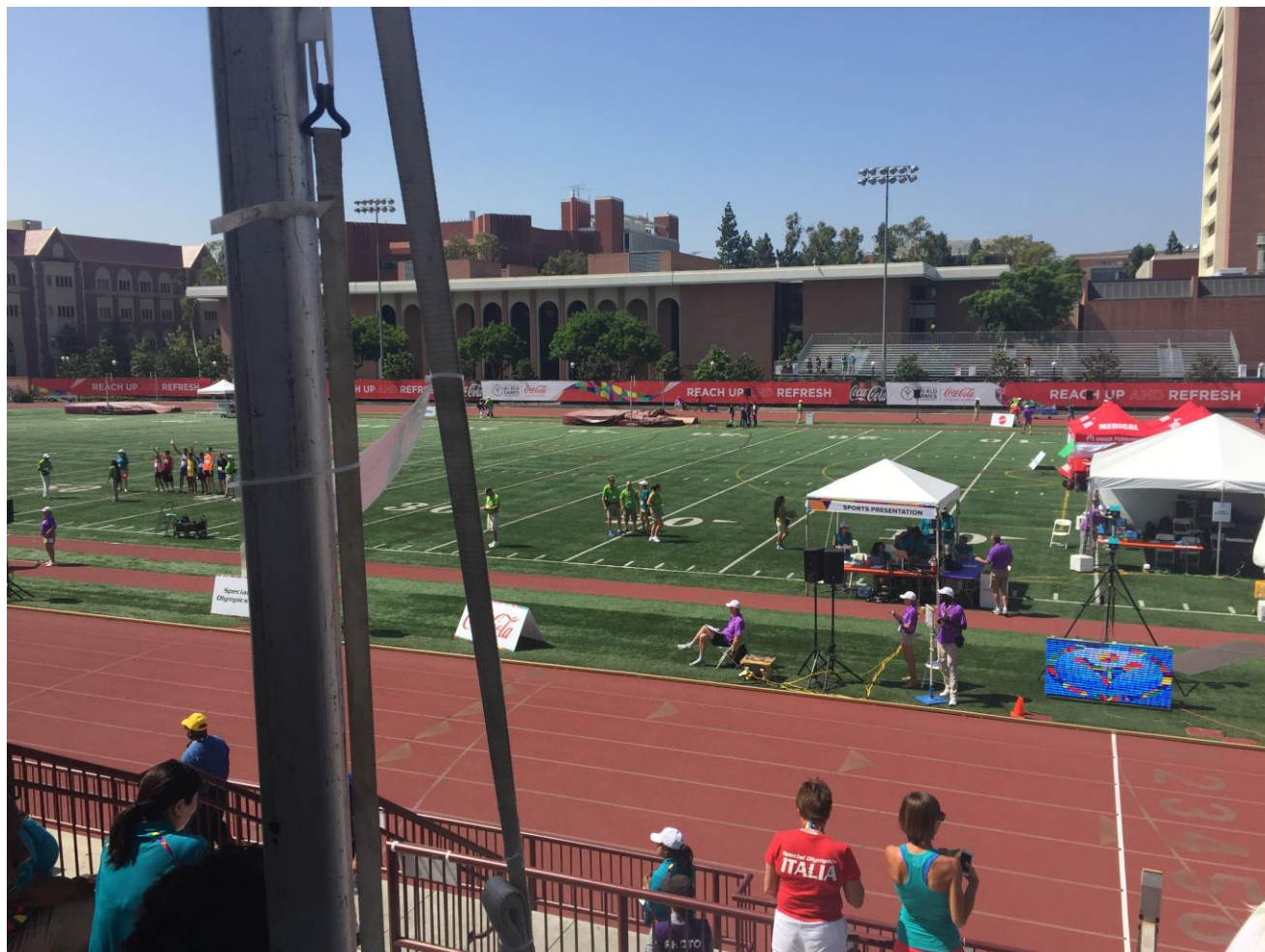
on nature of partnerships. Attendees were widely encouraged to sell solutions not sponsorships, the ability to tell our story and sell what's marketable not what needs funding. I learnt that it's important that our projects present a business case, win-win situation. I was quick to network and make connections with people I got a chance to talk to among them Lesa Ukman and Jared Melzer from Sponsorships.com who will assist in funding strategies and packaging of my project, Dallas from Indigo Movement-a skateboarding movement in Durban to mention a few. I think I really enjoyed the forum because of the in-depth understanding gathered.



With Francis (Malawi), Abbie (Indiana, USA), Cherish(Philippines)

THE GAMES

Tuesday, July 28th, was set aside for the Special Olympic World Games. I got the chance to watch track and field, aquatics, and basketball before we took off for the hotel to prepare for our culture night.



Track and field events at the University of Southern California

Our final event together was our Culture Night where the summit attendees dressed up in their cultural attires. We had dinner together at the Santa Monica pier. The food was amazing. We exchanged many gifts we had brought from our respective countries. I handed my cultural beads, earrings and bracelets to everyone and in turn took a sack of gifts back home, all so different from each other. We also had talent

show where many of my summit leaders performed their cultural dances. I was really inspired by a special flute piece on Amazing Grace which was performed by Iwasaki, a Special Olympics athlete from Japan.



Above: with Mahmoud (Lebanon), Tanvir (Australia), Cassie (NH, USA), Zarki (Dream Director, USA), Mitch (Ill, USA), Laura (NH, USA), Cherish (Philippines)

Left: with Farhan (Indonesia)

CONCLUSION

I am thankful to SO Zimbabwe, Special Olympics International, Lions Clubs International, and LEO Clubs District412 for believing in me and making my dreams and aspirations a reality. I am grateful to my fellow attendees for the wonderful learning curve we shared. You each impacted my life in a very unique way. I will forever cherish the moments we spent together. I am expectant of the deliberations going forward in creating an inclusive community in my country. I hope with the support I have in all of you I will be able to steer positive change.