

Volunteer driven to help, increase awareness



By Mark Pavilons

A Bolton woman has turned another page in her ongoing chapter of international volunteer exploits.

Alexandria Hesketh-Pavilons recently returned from a week-long volunteer mission to Guatemala. Working through International Volunteer Headquarters, Hesketh-Pavilons spent her time hard at work, in the working class village of Ciudad Viejo, south of Antigua.

There, she rolled up her sleeves and helped put the finishing touches on the exterior wall of a medical clinic that will soon be open for business. Working together with her supervisor, the duo made quick work of the chiselling, spackling and painting.

"I learned a lot about teamwork and perseverance," she said. "There were times where the work got hard, but I pushed through anyway because the job needed to get done and the clinic needed to be ready to use. Now the clinic is finished and patients can be taken care of, and will hopefully be in good hands."

Travelling for the first time with International Volunteer Headquarters (IVHQ), a New Zealand-based organization, Hesketh-Pavilons said she learned a great deal about teamwork, adventure, and cultural awareness on this trip.

The values-led IVHQ, established in 2007, has grown to become the world's leading volunteer travel company, working in over 40 destinations around the world and placing thousands of volunteers abroad every year.

Volunteering is a habit for her, and ultimately a career choice.

Hesketh-Pavilons said she feels the "need" to go on missions abroad.

"I really enjoy the whole adventure aspect of leaving a place I am comfortable in, and learning about other issues and cultures in other places. I gain awareness of other cultures, a greater perspective of what other people all over the world go through first hand, and what can be done to develop ideas on how we can identify potential solutions to some of our world's problems."

Lexie also enjoys sharing her experiences with others, and local groups.

"All I want is for people to be cognizant of the fact that there are people and things out there that are different, and that no matter how far a problem may be from us, that does not mean we do not have the power to make an impact and help with those problems."

Hesketh-Pavilons is entering her third year at Western University, enrolled in the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts & Humanities, with a minor in transitional justice and post-conflict reform. She's also getting a major in global development.

She said she hopes to one day work with a leading NGO such as the Red Cross, World Vision, or similar aid organizations.

Hesketh-Pavilons spent three weeks in July 2016 working with indigenous peoples in Kenya, through Me to We.

While at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Bolton, Hesketh-Pavilons participated in the annual mission trips to El Seibo, Dominican Republic, all four years.

The group assisted native Dominicans as well as the Haitian community there, staying at a missionary centre run by the Daughters of Mary (les Filles de Marie).

This summer, she is volunteering at Raising the Roof, a Toronto-based charity that provides national leadership on long-term

solutions to homelessness through partnership and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, investment in local communities, and public education.

During her academic year in London, Ontario, she also volunteers at Rotholme Women & Families Shelter.

Rotholme Women's & Family Shelter primarily accommodates families (two parent and single parent families, both male and female led). There is accommodation for approximately 20 families. Twenty-four hour emergency admission is provided for families and single women age 16 and over, who are homeless or in personal crisis and in need of temporary emergency accommodation.

For her next spring break in 2019, Lexie won't be hitting the beach.

Her next mission will take her to Trinidad and Tobago and the experience involves learning about gender equality, employment fairness, economic growth, and reducing inequalities.

It's part of Western's Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program. Coordinated by the Experiential Learning team at Western, they work with partners to engage student participants, student team leaders and staff and faculty team leaders in meaningful opportunities defined by the community, while supporting students' academic learning, developing their sense of civic engagement, and personal development.

In Matelot, the last village on the coastal highway of northeastern Trinidad, Lexie and her peers will be involved in projects related to sustainability and community development. The projects are identified by community groups in Matelot.

Next summer, Hesketh-Pavilons plans to spend several weeks in Rwanda, through a university-led program that takes a small group to Kigali, Rwanda.

This is an interdisciplinary experiential learning course offered at Western. It provides students with an opportunity to learn about Rwandan society, and about themselves by engaging in an international social and cultural setting. The course involves typical academic requirements centred on Rwandan history and culture.

Five weeks of active and interactive community service in Rwanda will be required for the completion of the course.

The main community partner in Rwanda is The College of Medicine and Health Sciences, located in the capital city of Kigali. This group will be 'ambassadors' of not only Western University, but of Canada.

None of her mission trips are subsidized or come cheap, and Lexie has to rely on fundraising and donations. She works part-time at Shoppers, largely to help offset her university and her travelling expenses.

Luckily, thanks to some very generous donors in King Township and Caledon, she's been able to reach her goals.

She extended her heart-felt thanks to King City Firefighters, Trisan Construction, Peter McCarthy, Joan Kelley Weisshaar, Sue DelPlavignano, Susan Elliott, Sam Morra, Beverley Richardson, Gavin Watt, Simon Lloyd, Luigi Carinci, Lori Halloway, Jennifer Simpson, April Zamernik, Nader Nowzari, Victoria and Amanda DelPlavignano, Maria Lorini, Carolinne Aleman, Carol Anne Trabert, Stephen Lecce, Anna Raeli, David Boyd, Brent Morning, Steve Pellegrini, Cleve Mortelliti, Keely Masson, Len Mizzoni.

Lexie has a big heart and a whole world yet to 'save.'

But we can all make a difference.

She urges everyone to simply 'get involved.'

'If you don't know why the world isn't at its best place right now, that is the first hurdle. If you know already, take action.'

She stressed that some of us are merely bystanders, and feel we can't 'fix' anything. That's a mind set that needs to change.

'It all starts by making a contribution,' she said.