

# TARRA HOPWOOD

## Tarra Hopwood '11

In the summer of 2010, I travelled to Rwanda as a volunteer with a non-profit organization called Hope Shines. This organization mentors children living in the local Kigali area, while partnering with different camps, one of which is an orphanage. As a volunteer, I worked with four summer camps that provided artistic and athletic activities to help empower and inspire kids to reach their maximum potential. I also taught lessons on the importance of staying in school and trying to make the most out of one's education. Hope Shines even had an event called "college day" where volunteers spoke about their educational journeys and the children shared their own aspirations.

One of the greatest aspects of the trip was to witness the developing partnership between Hope Shines and the Kigali Business School. Three to four of the top students were employed by Hope Shines as translators. Connecting with these students made the experience of trying to understand a culture different than my own much more lucrative.

Overall, this experience gave me an appreciation for the will of the human spirit, particularly since many of the children still deal with the legacy of the Rwandan Genocide. It is absolutely incredible how people have the strength to move on. I was also profoundly impacted by my experience in Rwanda when coming to the realization that children are children anywhere you go; and no matter the language barrier, you can still feel and exchange hope, love, and happiness.

