

I unloaded my suitcases from the matatu and stepped onto the dusty red clay road, taking in the view. All around me, Olympian and world-record-holding runners casually trotted down roads, while primary school students sprinted past each other in imitation. I was an aspiring professional distance runner who had earned the opportunity of a lifetime to teach in Iten, Kenya – the mecca of distance running – where I could train with the very best. As I rolled my luggage into the High Altitude Training Center, I was excited to set new personal best times and immerse myself in a deep-seated running culture. I did not yet know, however, that my time in Kenya would unexpectedly shift my perspective and propel me into the world of social justice.

After only a few weeks of teaching and training, I was struck by the realization that Iten's storied running culture, which I had assumed was the product of pure passion for sport, was actually borne out of the city's long history of inequality and marginalization. I learned that most of my students – all of whom were training to become professional runners – privately dreamed of becoming doctors, engineers, and entertainers, but did not have the means to pursue these goals. Structural barriers, such as a legacy of colonial exploitation and ongoing economic disempowerment, left my students with schools that either lacked resources or charged excessive fees. As a result, running had become their only pathway towards escaping poverty, preventing them from following their true passions.

I left Kenya that summer feeling unsettled. Eager to learn more about the educational inequities I witnessed, I joined my university's highly-selective Research Intensive Bachelors Certification Program. Through intense research and graduate-level courses on civil wars, terrorism, and national disasters, I learned how children in developing countries were facing barriers on education that were beyond their control. Although students in Kenya were not able to control outside factors such as the ones I realized and researched, they were able to take

ownership of their goals once they were provided with the opportunity to obtain an education. Hungry to fight the educational inequities I researched, I returned to Kenya in the summer of 2018 and became the Development Director and Scholarship Manager for the nonprofit organization, Cross World Africa, Inc. Through educational workshops and multiple fundraisers, I partnered with local principals and nonprofit organizations to provide scholarships for the primary school students who were interested in pursuing various career pathways. Although this work was deeply meaningful, I knew that the majority of Kenyan youth – along with millions of children worldwide – were still being deprived of an education, let alone an equitable one. Instead of letting these injustices defeat my efforts, I was empowered to further help dismantle the pervasive systems that were limiting the futures of children across the globe.

Returning to the United States, I joined Teach For America and directly served students in my hometown: Orlando, Florida. As a public school teacher in a low-income, marginalized community, I quickly noticed how similar the other side of the world was to my own backyard. Just as in Iten, structural barriers prevented my students from achieving success. After the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, my city adopted racially-motivated zoning laws, limiting integration within the school district. Orlando's tourist industry also fostered gentrification, forcing communities of color into clustered neighborhoods in which youth had no option but to attend resource-deprived public schools. Hesitant to rely on an educational system which had already failed them, most of my students turned to sports as a means of escaping the cycle of poverty. Just as in Iten, pursuing a field outside of athletics was rare and unfathomable.

Every child deserves an opportunity to pursue their true passion. I hope to continue fighting against the oppressive systems that have deprived students of an equitable future, this

time through the field of law. The ever-expanding educational gap between privileged and marginalized groups will not close until barriers, such as excessive fees and zoning laws, are eradicated and replaced with laws that provide equitable opportunities. With a legal education, I aspire to continue learning how certain laws have manifested throughout marginalized communities – drafting legislation breaks the systemic barriers in marginalized communities while advocating for oppressed community members in the courtroom. Internationally, I hope to use my knowledge as an educator and a lawyer to create a pipeline program that focuses on eradicating educational barriers in Kenya. By eliminating state laws that negatively impact schools, advocating for policies that would help fund schools, and researching effective strategies to make secondary school an option available to all students, this program would break the institutional barriers in Kenya that are preventing children from obtaining various career pathways. Eventually, I hope to effectively manage this program so that Kenyan residents can independently continue these efforts and provide their children with the education that they deserve. Overall, pursuing a Juris Doctorate would best prepare me to implement legislation that can provide equitable educational opportunities for children who live in marginalized communities, and the Terry Bryant Scholarship would help alleviate some of the financial costs associated with law school.