

# A World Awaits You

A Journal on People with Disabilities Traveling with a Purpose



## Spotlight on Sub-Saharan Africa

People with disabilities  
venture to and from a  
vibrant region of growth  
and opportunity



National Clearinghouse on  
Disability and Exchange



# A World Awaits You This Time for Africa

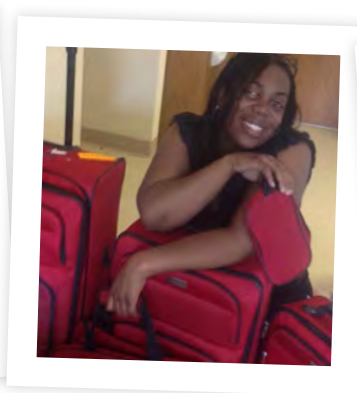
“ It doesn’t matter where you come from or how you look, you can be whatever you want to be. African young persons can broaden their mind instead of just staying in one place and accepting the status quo as it is.”

—Hilda Muluh Bih,  
Mandela Washington Fellow alumna  
from Cameroon,  
person with a disability

There’s a world to explore beyond Western Europe and Australia. Although these parts of the world factor heavily into mainstream media and popular culture, we’re less likely to get portrayals of people living and thriving in Sub-Saharan Africa. We must seek them out to create a comprehensive view, and there’s no better way to do that than to travel to Africa or to host an international visitor yourself!

So what is it about the region of Sub-Saharan Africa that is creating a buzz of international exchange travel to and from the United States, and why should people with disabilities be paying attention? Here are just a few reasons:

- **Opportunities abound, including many fully-funded programs.** The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) sponsors a variety of programs for U.S. citizens to travel to Africa and citizens of African countries to travel to the United States for overseas study, research, teaching, professional development, the arts, sports and more. In this issue, you’ll read about two of them: a scholarship for U.S. undergraduates to study or intern abroad, plus a fellowship program bringing hundreds of young African leaders to gain professional experience in the United States.
- **Africa has a thriving community of disability rights advocates.** In this issue, you’ll read about one such activist from Nigeria as well as a young American man who had the opportunity to collaborate with disabled people’s organizations in several countries, emboldening his own disability identity.
- **Stand out on scholarship applications and resumes** by choosing less-traditional destinations for international exchange.
- **This is a time of accelerated growth for Africa,** especially in the areas of strengthening democratic institutions, economic growth and development. Participating in prestigious international exchange opportunities can provide a greater platform to lead, contribute, and innovate, as two young African leaders discovered after returning home from their respective exchange programs.



- **Africa offers pathways to hone your language skills** in French, Arabic, and a host of spoken and signed local languages such as Swahili, Hausa, Amharic, Kenyan Sign Language, and more! Arabic and Swahili are both considered critical need languages, and as such, are often tied with additional funding opportunities.
- **You can enrich your academic and professional career** with experience in a wide range of subjects, fields and industries such as business, international development, public health, STEM fields, environmental conservation, and more. In this issue, you'll meet two young women whose travels abroad enhanced their careers in health sciences, post-conflict recovery, and inclusive development.

Finally, just as the disability community finds strength in its collective identity and pride in its diversity, so too is Africa made up of a mosaic of distinct identities and cultures that are stronger together—people seeking access to equal opportunities and making positive contributions to and changes within their own communities as well as more broadly.

Ready to see for yourself? We invite you to take a journey with us through this issue of **A World Awaits You** and to think about how studying, researching, interning or volunteering in Sub-Saharan Africa—or coming from this region as a visitor to the United States—will shape your own contributions.



*Our goal is to empower people with disabilities to take advantage of the same international exchange opportunities as everyone else, navigating any access barriers along the way. For over two decades, our free services and resources have been made possible by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange, a project sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and administered by Mobility International USA.*

[www.miusa.org/ncde](http://www.miusa.org/ncde)

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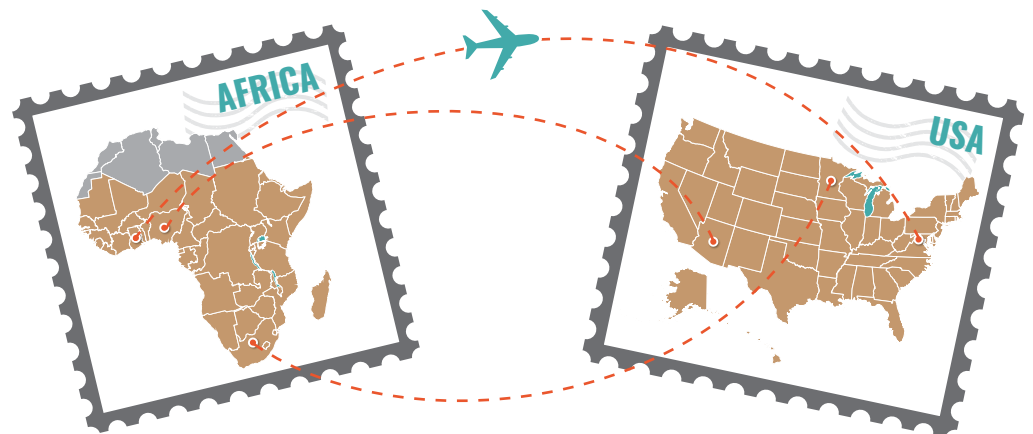
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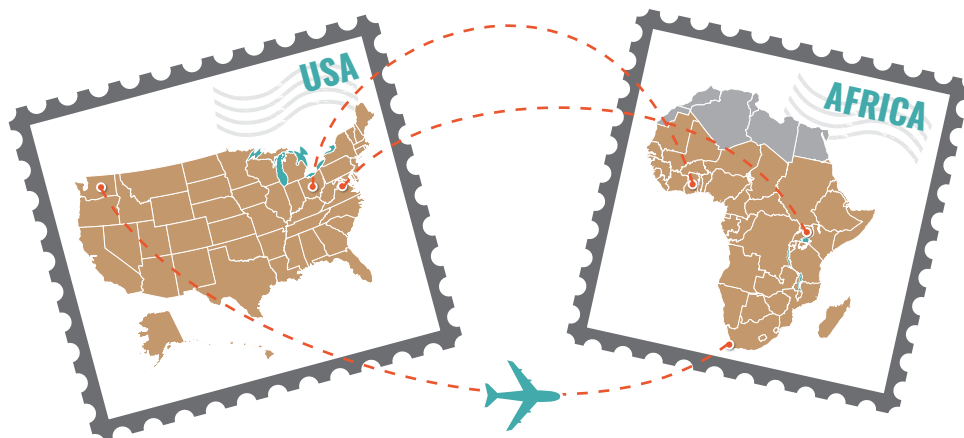
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## Ask NCDE!



# Tijani Bukari — Focused on the Purpose

By Monica Malhotra



“... a new world

I never knew existed.”



During our youth, what do we think about regarding our country, its citizens, and our own impact on society? Do we even think about these things at all? A strong sense of curiosity about the world led Tijani Bukari, a Deaf student from Ghana, to participate in the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

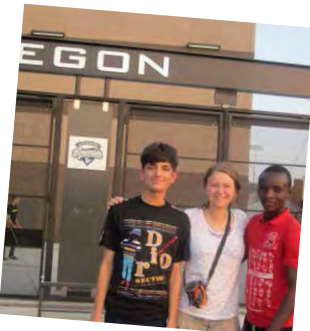
“Studying in the United States was a wonderful opportunity for me, opening my eyes and my mind to the world—a new world I never knew existed.”

Tijani attended the Maryland School for the Deaf and enjoyed learning about the history of the United States, especially Deaf history, disability rights, and the discrimination people with all types of disabilities faced through the years.

Experiences of discrimination continue to this day in Ghana. Tijani knew from studying in the United States that such



“When I return to Ghana I want to teach people about the disability laws practiced in the United States. I want people with and without disabilities in Ghana to be equal.”



barriers had been chipped away at in America; he not only learned how laws were changed to address discrimination, but he experienced equality for himself.

“In the United States, Deaf people are considered equal to hearing people. They can go to the university, get an education, and get the same jobs as other people. I want to reduce discrimination in Ghana. I will teach people at my school about the laws so we can have a better life.”

The YES program provides scholarships for high school students from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the United States. The purpose is to foster mutual understanding between cultures and share experiences. Tijani himself speaks about the importance for people from different backgrounds to understand each other. He enjoyed speaking about his life in Ghana and teaching people about his home culture.

“In order to achieve greater global understanding, it is important to learn about people and their beliefs through international exchange.”

In the summer after his exchange, Tijani was one of 22 YES alumni selected from northern and Sub-

Saharan African countries to attend a pan-African YES alumni workshop in Dakar, Senegal on Community Health Education (CHE), sponsored the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The four-day workshop offered an interactive approach to help participants learn how to approach complex health-related problems and develop community-based educational strategies and overall plans to address them. Tijani’s interest in this workshop was to gain the knowledge to educate people with similar disabilities in Ghana about the laws that can be implemented for more access in all aspects of society.

“I met many new people and learned so much about leadership and diversity. It is my wish that people everywhere can work together in unity to create a better life.”

Tijani found new purpose in the United States. He experienced an inclusive society and learned about ways he can contribute to further advancing his own.

“Many Africans flee poverty and oppression to seek a more secure and better life in new places. It is important for our youth to get a good education in order to improve their community and the world around them.”

# Magteld Smith — Propelled to New Professional Heights

By Sophia Bennett



“... a miracle that

goes beyond words.”

Minneapolis winters can be so frigid, even the locals think twice before wandering out. But snow and sub-zero temperatures did nothing to deter Dr. Magteld Smith from making the most of her Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship while placed at the University of Minnesota. Nearly every day she bundled up against weather unlike anything she'd experienced in her native South Africa and trekked to the school's libraries to study.





“I was attracted to the opportunity to further develop the professional skills, expertise and perspectives I would need as a global leader in my field.”



This level of commitment typifies both Magteld’s year in the Humphrey Fellowship program and her mission to serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing around the world. A self-described medical-social researcher on deafness and hearing loss, she helps medical professionals in South Africa understand both the physiological and emotional impacts of deafness and advises policymakers on how they can better serve people with disabilities. These are issues she understands well, having been born with profound deafness in both ears. What little hearing she had disappeared after a childhood bout with meningitis.

Magteld was already well-established in her field when she was accepted for the fellowship. Although her position at the University of the Free State’s Department of Otorhinolaryngology (a medical specialty of the ear, nose, and throat) gave her access to numerous resources, she knew research in the United States would allow her to advance further. She applied for the Humphrey Fellowship because “I was attracted to the opportunity to further develop the professional skills, expertise and perspectives I would need as a global leader in my field.”

The Humphrey Fellowship, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, is extremely competitive. Magteld was one of two South African applicants chosen in her year from an extremely competitive pool of nominees from more than 90 countries. Advisors placed her at the University of Minnesota so she could further her education and professional development as part of the university’s Interdisciplinary Graduate Group in Disability Studies.

Magteld had traveled internationally, so she wasn’t worried about living in the United States. Her bigger concern was whether she’d truly be able to communicate with her peers and professors. Upon her arrival she was immediately introduced to the Disability Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, which put her concerns to rest. The

Center included a captioning unit which provides real-time captioning (speech-to-text) services. To say they were useful would be an understatement. “It was the first time in my life I knew what was being said in the classroom, workshops, seminars, meetings, and events. For me, it was a miracle that goes beyond words.”

During her year-long Humphrey Fellowship, Magteld took a partial load of classes so she had time to attend conferences, network with her American peers, engage in professional development activities, and sequester herself in the library to read journals and reports. At the end of her fellowship she attended a four-day Humphrey Program Year-End Retreat in Washington, D.C. There, she received a certificate signed by former United States President Barack Obama, reunited with other Humphrey Fellows and made new professional contacts.

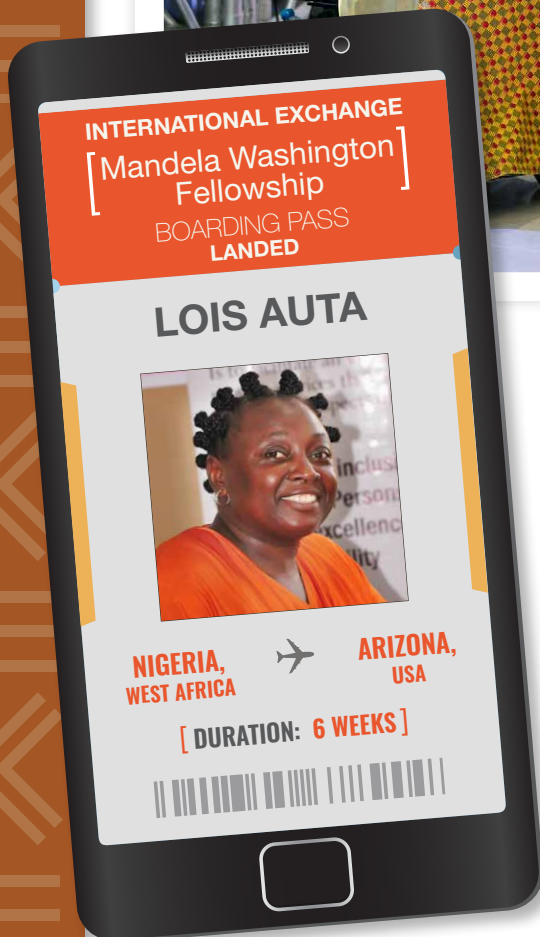
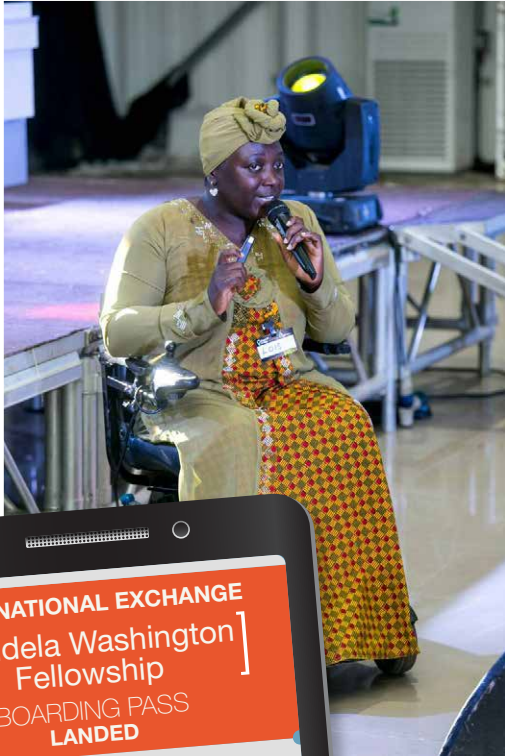
Magteld’s career has reached a higher level since completing the Fellowship. Her research has been published in various peer-reviewed scientific journals, and she’s received numerous awards, including the Golden Key International Honour Chapter Award and an award naming her one of the top three Humphrey Fellows among her class of 400.

She also received several offers to present her research at international conferences. Her lectures on “Understanding and Living with a Cochlear Implant: A Psychotherapeutic Approach” and “South African Sign Language: Progress and Challenges” give medical professionals an expert’s view—and a disabled person’s view—on how to support people with disabilities. In this way, Magteld is reaching even more people around the globe.

The sky’s the limit for Magteld’s career and personal mission now. Let’s hope those skies will be warmer in her future travels.

# Lois Auta — A Young African Leader, Transformed

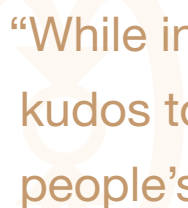
By Sophia Bennett



Lois Auta was already making a difference in the lives of Nigerians with disabilities even before she was selected in 2014 to participate in the inaugural Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). But since returning home from her fellowship, she's taken her advocacy to a whole new level.

Lois is the founder and executive director of the Cedar Seed Foundation, a youth-led membership organization that advocates for people with disabilities. It focuses on improving access to education and employment, providing entrepreneurship opportunities, advancing human rights, and giving people a voice in policy-making decisions.





“While in the United States, I shed tears for my country. I said kudos to the United States government for recognizing disabled people’s rights. I wish Nigeria could do the same.”

A friend who was familiar with Lois’s work encouraged her to apply for the Mandela Washington Fellowship, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. She was one of the first 500 young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa invited to travel to the United States for the Fellowship in 2014.

Hosted by Arizona State University and studying civic leadership, Lois received training in leadership, advocacy and other skills that were very applicable to her work in Nigeria. “I learned about volunteerism. I learned about budgeting and how to develop projects. I learned about using social media tools to spread the word about what we’re doing.”

Lois had polio as a child and has since used a wheelchair for mobility. She was one of 16 YALI Mandela Washington Fellows with disabilities in her cohort of 500, and she had no trouble accessing all the Fellowship’s activities. That stood in stark contrast to what she experiences at home.

“While in the United States, I shed tears for my country. I said, ‘Look at all the facilities [in the United States] that are provided for persons with disabilities.’ I was put up in accessible hostels and hotels. They made sure I always sat in the front row so I could see everything that was happening during events. I said kudos to the United States government for recognizing disabled people’s rights. I wish Nigeria could do the same.”

During her six weeks in Arizona, Lois met with others advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and learned about their programs. She also got to partake in some memorable recreational activities. One weekend, the Fellowship staff took Lois’s group hiking near Kartchner Caverns State Park, in Flagstaff.

“I thought I wouldn’t be able to participate fully. I know very well from back in Nigeria that mountains can never be accessible to a wheelchair user. But

I followed my coaches and colleagues everywhere they went.”

For Lois, one of the highlights of the Fellowship was the closing Presidential Summit in Washington D.C. “When President Obama was passing by, he gave me a handshake. When Michelle Obama came, she gave me a hug. Their speeches inspired me, particularly the First Lady’s. The experience has transformed my life.”

When Lois returned to Nigeria, word of her experience with the Mandela Washington Fellowship spread quickly. More Fellows with disabilities applied in subsequent years, allowing the program to include more than 140 Fellows with disabilities over the next three years. Upon her return, Lois’s visibility grew — she appeared on magazine covers, national television shows, and local newspapers and was invited to participate in important policy discussions. She was the only person with a disability invited to participate in drafting a policy document for Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in advance of International Youth Day 2015. She was also invited to be part of the group that presented it to him during a televised ceremony.

“About thirty of us were on stage, and I was the lucky one to get a handshake from President Buhari.”

Lois’s Cedar Seed Foundation is also getting stronger thanks to her participation in the Mandela Washington Fellowship. Her organization received free office space from the pastor of New Estate Baptist Church in Lagos who was touched by her story, and she’s learned about possible funding opportunities. She was named to the most recent class of Young Global Leaders of the World Economic Forum.

With the knowledge and higher profile she gained from the program, Lois will be leading the change to advance the rights of Nigerians with disabilities.

# The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders



## What it is:

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, which began in 2014, is the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) that empowers young people through academic coursework, leadership training, and networking. The Fellowship provides outstanding young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa with the opportunity to hone their skills at a U.S. college or university with support for professional development after they return home.

Fellows engage in Academic and Leadership Institutes, meet with U.S. federal, state, and local government officials, participate in community service, visit organizations to gain professional development, and make friendships and professional contacts with Americans. Reflecting the diversity of Africa, Mandela Washington Fellows include Fellows with apparent and non-apparent disabilities.

## in 2017:

**1,000 finalists** were selected,  
representing every country in **Sub-Saharan Africa**



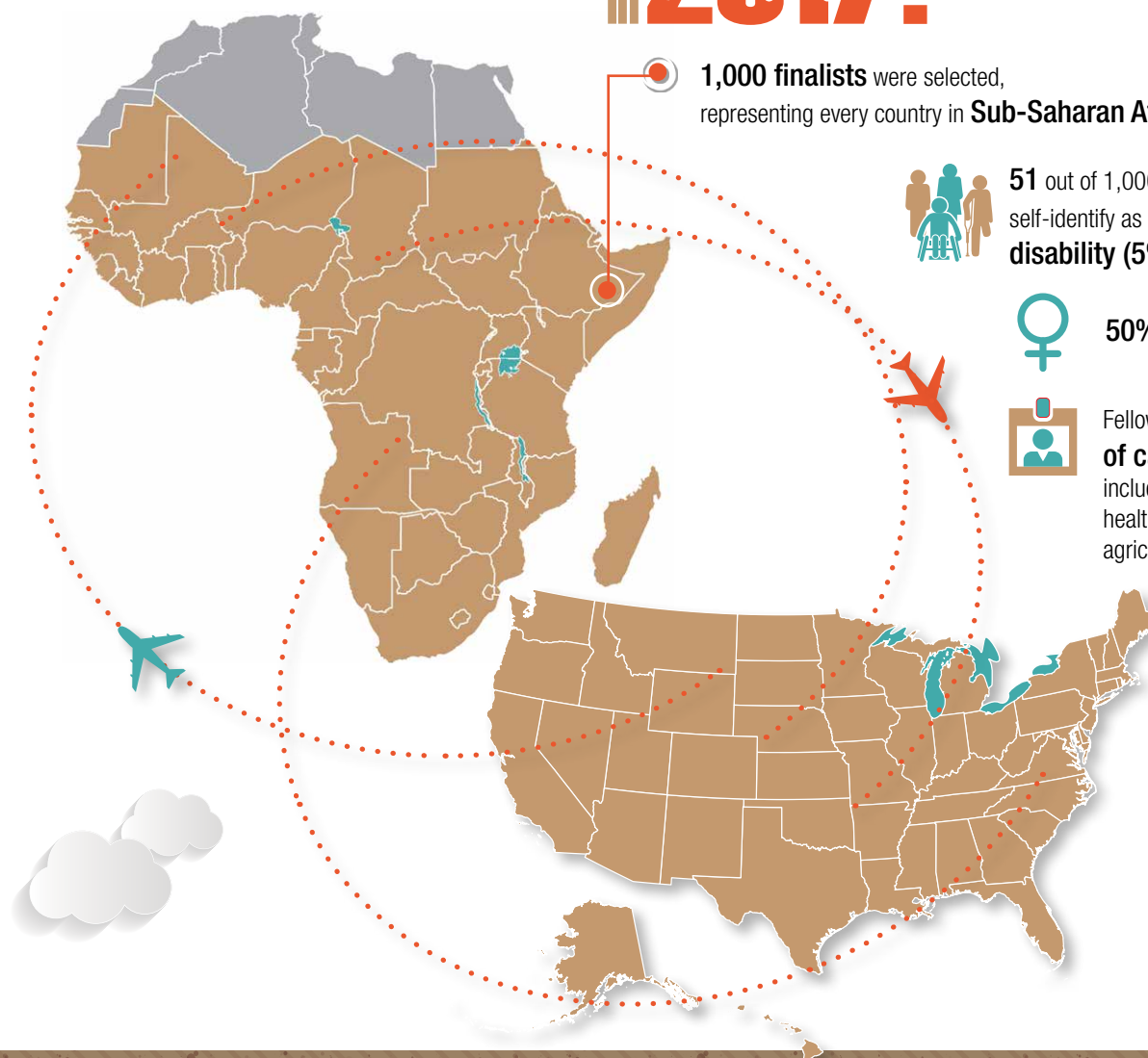
**51** out of 1,000 Fellows  
self-identify as **having a  
disability (5%)**



**50%** of Fellows are **women**



Fellows **represented a range  
of career backgrounds**,  
including government, nonprofit,  
health, business, education,  
agriculture and law sectors





“ The Mandela Washington Fellowship is committed to ensuring the full participation of Fellows with disabilities. Exchange programs are enriched when they include participants of all genders, backgrounds, abilities, and beliefs, and by doing so they are helping to contribute to more inclusive societies across Africa and the world.”

—Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders staff



## Faces of the Fellowship



### Robert Nkwangu

2014 Fellow from Uganda,  
Public Management

Mr. Nkwangu, who is Deaf, works to ensure that youth with disabilities have equal opportunities in government and civil society.



### Grace Jerry

2015 Fellow from Nigeria, Civic  
Leadership

Once crowned Miss Wheelchair Nigeria, Ms. Jerry is also a music artist, disability rights advocate, and peace promoter in Nigeria.



### Ojok Simon

2016 Fellow from Uganda,  
Business & Entrepreneurship

Mr. Simon won the Holman Prize for empowering rural blind and low-vision people with skills in organic beekeeping, honey harvesting, and wax production.

## 5 Ways the Fellowship Includes Fellows with Disabilities

1

**Outreach to the disability community** in sub-Saharan Africa

2

**Provide** reasonable accommodations

3

**Engage university and organizational partners** in supporting Fellows in the United States

4

**Highlight Fellow and alumni impact** in the United States and their local communities

5

**Communicate** with Fellows to improve good accommodation practices

Stay updated on the **Mandela Washington Fellowship** at [yali.state.gov/washington-fellowship](http://yali.state.gov/washington-fellowship)

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is a program of the U.S. government and supported in its implementation by IREX.



Jennifer Smith —

By Ashley Holben

# A Semester of Discovery in Ghana



“Anything

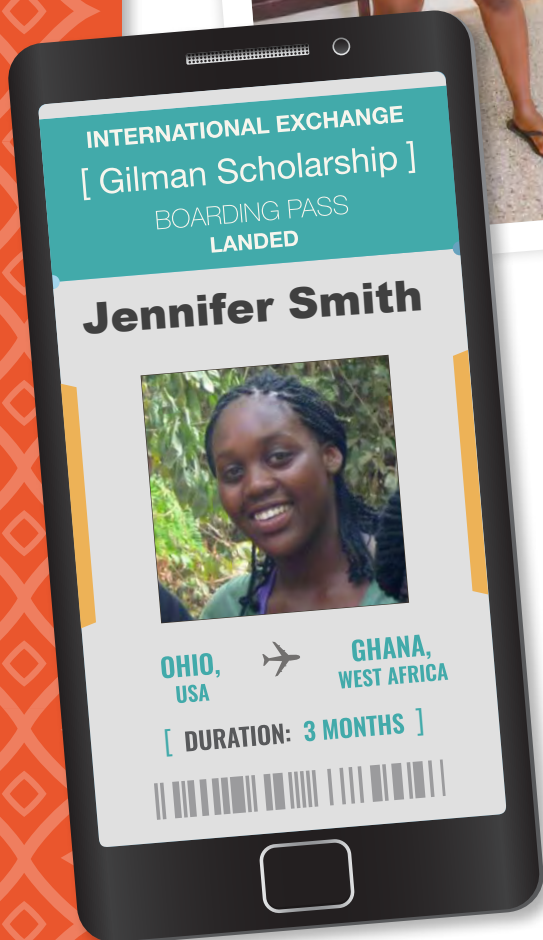
is possible.”



It was typical for Jennifer Smith to meander through different wards of the nearby hospital in Ghana where she volunteered after the day's classes. But on one less-than-typical day, in the children's ward, she saw her post-college plans snap into focus where they had once been hazy.

“I wished I could help nurture the children at the hospital back to health, and I became upset that I didn't know how. Of course, the doctors and nurses there knew exactly what they were doing, and I began asking them a lot of questions. At that moment I decided I wanted to go back to school and become a nurse. Someday, I'd like to return to Ghana and open a clinic of my own.”

It was one of several personal discoveries over the course of Jennifer's semester abroad that attracted her to leave Ohio in the first place. “I thought I'd be able to find out more about what I wanted to do after college.”



“Of course I learned a lot about the culture and demographics of Ghana, but I also learned a lot about myself. I learned that I was a lot stronger—mentally, physically, and emotionally—than I realized.”

A health sciences major at Cleveland State University, Jennifer studied at the University of Ghana in Legon on a Gilman Scholarship, a program of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Her spring semester in Ghana on a University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) program for American students allowed Jennifer to gain academic credit towards her undergraduate degree as well as a first-hand understanding of nursing. She even made Ghanaian friends from the University’s Health Sciences program and met many nurses pursuing their master’s degrees. Growing up, Jennifer had been raised on lessons and stories about African culture and history—including those of Ghana—from her mother, and she had long dreamed of experiencing it first-hand.

Traveling abroad with chronic health conditions can be intimidating to some, but Jennifer felt confident that she could manage her epilepsy, anxiety, and celiac disease (an autoimmune condition characterized by an extreme reaction to gluten) in Ghana if she gave herself enough time to prepare. Before she embarked on her trip, Jennifer worked closely with her university’s study abroad office, consulted with her doctors, and did some online research to determine how best to continue her medication regimen abroad. Though many of the medications she uses to manage her disabilities are not available in Ghana, her doctor wrote her a prescription that allowed her to order a bulk supply to take with her in her carry-on luggage.

With these preparations in place, she could devote her energy to sampling an array of fresh

experiences that she wouldn’t find anywhere else. “I had many roles in Ghana,” Jennifer says, referring to the many extracurricular activities that deepened her appreciation of her host community. A lover of languages (she had previously studied in Oman took classes in Twi, Ghana’s most widely-

spoken language. Volunteering at the West African AIDS Foundation and in the hospital’s pharmacy deepened her understanding about Ghana’s social approach to the health sciences.

## 3 facts to know about the Gilman Scholarship

1

### **Diversity among Gilman Scholars is a big plus!**

Self-identifying as a person with a disability AND choosing a non-traditional destination like Sub-Saharan Africa can really make your application stand out!

2

### **Scholarships can be applied towards credit-bearing study abroad programs or overseas internships.**

3

### **Over 1,100 Gilman Scholarship recipients have disclosed having a disability.**

Find complete information on eligibility requirements, application timelines, and more at [www.gilmanscholarship.org](http://www.gilmanscholarship.org)

But perhaps one of her most unexpected gateways into student and community life was by joining the university’s rugby team. Not only did she make lasting friendships with her teammates (“we still talk almost every day”), but as the first woman to play on the all-male team, she also made a big splash, catching the eye of the local media who covered her story. She hopes that the show of support she received from her team and the community will pave the way for other women to join the team. But she also broke the mold in another way.

“A lot of people asked me why I would play rugby when I have epilepsy. I played because I love the game.”





The same can often be said for people with disabilities who get asked why they would trouble themselves to study abroad so far from their usual networks of support, the protections of the ADA, and their preferred methods of living independently. Put simply, disability is not in itself a barrier to do the things one loves to do, and Jennifer recalls no moment in her journey when she didn't feel fully included.

That's not to say life in Ghana was without its challenges. Finding food that agreed with her gluten- and lactose-intolerant stomach was a constant concern, for instance. But whatever came her way, from power outages to fetching her own shower water when visiting friends in rural areas, Jennifer surprised herself by her resilience.

"Of course I learned a lot about the culture and demographics of Ghana, but I also learned a lot about myself. I learned that I was a lot stronger—mentally, physically, and emotionally—than I realized."

She also drew strength from her interactions and friendships with Ghanaians and American peers. "I learned that I actually do like people and started to realize that my anxiety was kind of like a mean friend that followed me around and didn't like it when I talked to others. Seeing it this way changed my outlook on life. I believe I can do anything now."

It's a mindset she brought back to Ohio once the semester ended. Upon their return home, all Gilman Scholars carry out a Follow-on Service Project to promote international education and the Gilman program specifically. Jennifer chose to speak to students registered through Cleveland State's Office of Disability Services and its TRIO program in order to reach students who might not otherwise think that study abroad is for them. "It's important to tell stories like mine and those of others who studied abroad. It shows that anything is possible."

# Justice Shorter — Experiential Learning at the Nexus of Theory and Practice

By Ashley Holben



**“Adapt!**

**That was my mantra.”**



“There’s an undeniable vibe that moves through the air,” Justice Shorter ascribes to her temporary home in northern Uganda and Rwanda. “My study abroad experience gave me the chance to encounter that time and time again.”

As a graduate student at SIT Graduate Institute, Justice chose to study on SIT’s Peace & Post Conflict Reconciliation summer program in Uganda and Rwanda to observe how inclusive development can be used to alleviate the effects of poverty while working towards her Master’s in Sustainable Development.

The program promised to provide an on-the-ground understanding of measures that have been taken toward conflict mitigation, resettlement, and prevention in the region. Justice was highly attracted to this experiential learning model that characterizes SIT’s study abroad



# Justice's advice for travelers with disabilities

## 1 Don't assume that Africa is inaccessible.

"I don't want to sugar-coat it: access can be challenging. Still, people need to get away from the idea that they won't be able to find what they need." There's also a misconception that Africa is uniform, when in fact it is a mosaic of amazing metropolitan cities as well as vibrant rural communities that have distinct approaches to access and inclusion.

## 2 The difference between a crisis and a problem is time.

To ensure that the program would work for her, Justice let the staff know in advance that she'd need materials in digital formats, electronic information in advance, and time to orient herself to new spaces and places.

## 3 Know that you are not alone.

Contact disability organizations in the area you are interested in exploring to find out what resources are available and what sorts of laws and social norms affect people with disabilities.

## 4 Learn from the experiences of local people with disabilities.

On a previous experience abroad, Justice valued the opportunity to talk to blind people in Cape Town, South Africa. Remember their experiences will not necessarily mirror your own. "You're coming from a different part of the world. They can teach you, and you can teach them. It's another aspect of cultural exchange."

## 5 People can help make or break an experience for you.

You don't always get to choose your travel companions, but your group can acknowledge that each person needs assistance at times and that each person also has strengths to offer. You're all learning together. "Fortunately, I was surrounded by really wonderful people."

## 6 Do not let anything stop you from going out and experiencing the world.

"We have a phenomenal planet with phenomenal people and places on it."



programs. "They really put you in the environment to learn hands-on. You're not just reading something in a research paper or watching a video. You're having real-world interactions, speaking to people with lived experiences."

For her program, this involved living with a host family and practicing local languages including Acholi and Kinyarwanda, but it also meant appreciating the depth of the region's hardships. Justice and her peers met with organizations and individuals devoted to helping communities recover from the conflict driven by Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, and they joined challenging discussions with people who survived an era of genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda. During visits to genocide museums, Justice, who is legally blind, asked her fellow students to describe visuals out loud to her, acknowledging that to articulate scenes of atrocity verbally can be even more wrenching than quiet observation. "It's very emotional, heavy, hard.

But you realize that if you feel this way, you can only imagine how the survivors must feel. In leading these tours, presentations, and discussions for people who want to learn, they live it daily."

In the wake of extreme anguish, Justice was inspired by the resilience of the survivors to take ownership of their history and live joyfully. Everywhere she went, she found people who were proud and passionate about their personal and family histories, their relationships, their food, their languages, their music, their dance—and, oh, did they dance!

"Towards the end of the program, we had a big celebration with all of our homestay families in Gulu, a city in the Northern Region of Uganda. We were all dancing and sweating, showing each other our best moves. I danced with the kids and tried to keep up with my homestay sister as she showed me new dances. It was an unforgettable night!"





“Adaptation equals survival” seemed to embody the spirit of her local hosts—one that she held in her own heart as she traveled. “Adapt! That was my mantra.” If things didn’t go according to plan—whether it was a power outage, someone running late, or inaccessible reading materials—Justice resolved to find ways to still get the most out of the experience. The program staff always seemed to have contingency plans in place. “Whatever happens, the whole day shall not be wasted! That has stayed with me since then.”

Justice estimates that her fellow travelers and the local people she met had had very few, if any, personal experiences with someone with a disability, and that as a result, her daily interactions with people helped to spark conversations around blindness, accessibility, and inclusion. Still, she was mindful of not trying to represent all blind or disabled people and instead allowed herself to be her own multi-dimensional self.

“Yes, I am someone who is blind, but I’m also someone who is black, a woman, a lesbian. All of these aspects are as much a part of my identity, and I am proud of them, but none of them individually solely represent me.”

“Yes, I am someone who is blind, but I’m also someone who is black, a woman, a lesbian. All of these aspects are as much a part of my identity, and I am proud of them, but none of them individually solely represent me. If you can find ways to be who you are, even when it’s difficult or not accessible, people will remember you as a whole person.”

But “who you are” is also susceptible to stretch, flex, and grow under the catalyst of international exchange. It’s a phenomenon which Justice urges travelers to embrace with open arms.

“When you study abroad, you don’t walk away the same person you were when you walked in. You can’t go across the world without gaining a new sense of appreciation for

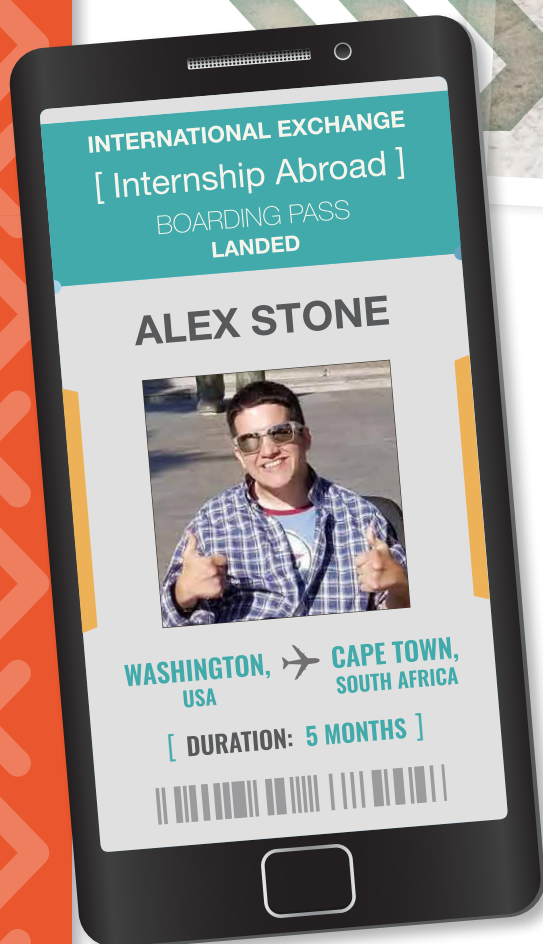
it—even if it’s that you didn’t know what you thought you knew before. Immerse yourself as much as you possibly can.”

# Alex Stone — Cultivating “Amandla” for a Global Impact

By Monica Malhotra



“Take a risk.”



As Alex stood on the stage of a dimly-lit comedy club, he smiled even wider as the laughs and cheers grew stronger. Alex never thought he would be performing stand-up comedy, and this was just one way that participating in an internship with a disability advocacy organization in South Africa altered his life and the path he chose to pursue.

Alex has cerebral palsy and has ridden a power wheelchair since he was two years old. “I was obviously disabled to everyone that saw me ever since I was very young, but I always ran away from that identity. I did not want to be labeled.”

As a student at Seattle University, Alex pursued his Bachelor's in Public Affairs with an international track. He hadn't traveled much internationally, but he cultivated a passion to understand more about the world around him, especially Sub-Saharan African countries. So he was excited that his program had an international internship component, and he signed up for South Africa.



“You cannot even begin to conceptualize the awesome things that are going to happen to you before you embark on that journey!”



He was initially disappointed that he was placed with a disability organization but set up a Skype interview with the organization to understand more about their work before he decided to accept the position.

Alex learned that it was a pivotal time for people with disabilities in Africa. His internship host organization, now known as the African Disability Alliance, was mandated by the African Union to support South Africa and other African nations to become more accessible. Alex was thrilled to hear about the role he could play with the organization and the widespread impact it could make.

Over the course of his 5-month internship, Alex worked on fundraising and several advocacy projects. This entailed reaching out to disability advocates from all across Africa, including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Swaziland, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Beyond the projects he was supporting through the African Disability Alliance directly, he was pleasantly surprised to see the ripples he was making in the community around him, disabled and nondisabled.

“Being in South Africa opened my eyes to conditions that I wasn’t used to on the ground in terms of accessibility.”

Alex arrived in South Africa with his service dog, Fraser. He realized that the only service dogs people in South Africa were used to seeing were guide dogs for blind people.

Passers-by often stopped to marvel at the duo and wondered why a man who could see would have a service dog. Many asked questions about the support a dog could offer to a person who rides a power wheelchair. Alex appreciated the questions and the opportunity to educate the community. He explained how Fraser had the ability to identify his luggage at the airport, and Alex also found himself

frequently demonstrating in the streets how Fraser would help him navigate the street and retrieve his items.

Alex always thought it was normal for all students to study abroad, but he later read statistics indicating that students with disabilities do not go abroad at the same rate as their nondisabled peers. It was then that the script was flipped for Alex. He reflected on the great experience he had and the characteristics it fostered for him.

It gave him more confidence and he didn’t have the inhibitions he had before with public speaking. He started sharing his story of his internship and traveling with Fraser, which led to his job with Summit Assistance Dogs. He performed stand-up comedy in South Africa and back home several times. He gained the ability to utilize the resources within himself and his network to get things done, even though it sometimes looked different than what he originally planned. He learned to “roll with the punches” and not focus on the small things too much when planning.

Wanting to use his experience to reduce the disparity of students with disabilities going abroad, Alex soon launched the Amandla Project to offer fellowships to students with disabilities from all across the world to participate in an 8-week internship in South Africa to gain leadership and advocacy skills. “Amandla” translates to “Empowerment” in Zulu and Xhosa.

Alex realized that making one decision to go to South Africa and leaving the familiar behind shaped his personal and professional trajectory. He now wants to encourage more students with disabilities to take that step as well.

“Take a risk! You cannot even begin to conceptualize the awesome things that are going to happen to you before you embark on that journey!”



# Thinking about international exchange?

Have questions about how people with disabilities can participate? The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) is here for you!

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and administered by Mobility International USA, NCDE is your free resource to start you on your journey. Get to know us!

## [ Can NCDE help me answer my question? ]



B/C - 15

WHERE DO  
U.S. CITIZENS  
WANT TO GO?

WHERE DO  
INTERNATIONAL  
VISITORS TO THE  
U.S. COME FROM?

B/R - 23

[ **EVERYWHERE!** ]

Sub-Saharan Africa  
East Asia & Pacific  
Europe & Eurasia  
Middle East & North  
Africa  
South & Central Asia  
Western Hemisphere

16  
598

D  
598



What kinds of  
international exchange  
do they want to do?

YOUTH LEADERSHIP  
HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE  
STUDY ABROAD  
COMMUNITY SERVICE  
VOLUNTEERISM  
ACADEMIC RESEARCH  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING  
SPORTS DIPLOMACY  
TEACHING & LECTURING  
ARTS & CULTURE  
HOMESTAY  
SHORT-TERM  
ESL PROGRAM  
DEAF OR DISABILITY-THEMED  
EXCHANGE PROGRAM

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[ How can I ask my question? ]

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