



**FASfacts**  
We speak on their behalf



## ***MY FIRST TRIP TO THE USA – CONNECTICUT***

***4 MAY 2018- 20 MAY 2018***

I hereby want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Rotary International club for the opportunity to travel to the United States of America to learn more about Substance Abuse and to exchange information regarding this epidemic. The kind gesture of all the Rotarians and members who were part of the two (2) weeks journey was priceless and the way you made us feel cannot be easily forgotten. The generosity towards me overwhelmed me and therefore I am forever very grateful for this wonderful experience.

At first, I was not interested in this exchange group, because I was not familiar with Rotary International and the services they render, therefore after several requests from the office manager and CEO, I decided to “give in”, whereby I completed the application form and motivational letter as to why I would be the perfect candidate. After submitting my documents, I went for an interview during October 2017. A few weeks after the interview we were called to say whether we were successful or not, and to my amazement, I was the successful candidate chosen to travel to the USA. Initially the news did not excite me at all, but after a few months the reality kicked in and I could not get enough of telling my family and friends about this trip and I started looking forward to be in the Big America as it was my first time travelling there.

During the time abroad I learned much more than what I anticipated.

Out of everything we were taught, the topic that resonated most with me was the importance of non-stigmatization. When we attended the workshop at the Central Connecticut Hospital which focused on the attitude of nurses and service providers towards substance abusers, I realised how we tend to judge people based on their situations and the substance they are using. It was such a big eye opener for me and it changed my inner self and my perspective towards human beings overall. At that point in time, I told myself, that this is the one “thing” I want to take back home and educate our people on and that is exactly what I did. As a social worker, I know that we can only bring about change if we address the root cause of problems, rather than address the symptoms. All types of services can be rendered to a client/ patient based on what we see or what we diagnose, but if we don’t give attention to the WHY and WHAT, it will be difficult for us to bring about change into the lives of those people.

May times we tend to give up on people who are addicted to different substances, because according to us: “those people will never change or the addiction of those people has reached a level form which they will not be able to recover”. Recovery is possible, no matter who you are and your circumstances. You CAN, if you WANT to and if you have the necessary SUPPORT and RIGHT services.

Also, what I have learned is, that substance abuse is not an addiction, but rather a mental illness which requires treatment with a multi-disciplinary team.

Treatment can be successful if all the necessary resources and services are being provided to the people suffering from the mental illness.

I also learned that forming partnerships and working in collaboration with other organisations is very important to ensure positive change in the life of a person suffering from the mental illness. At our organization we believe in Taking Hands Towards a FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) Free Society, and therefore I also learned that taking hands together as a society will most definitely bring about positive change and impact, rather than one person or organisation trying to address the situation on its own.

I am in awe of the fact that we have met such a lot of kind and generous people. Everywhere we went people made me feel at home and welcomed me without having to do “much”; Sometimes all a person need is a warm heart and big smile in order to change or to be better

people than what they already are. Being MORE generous and kind is another learning factor which I brought home with me.

Family Based Interventions is a very important factor in the recovery process of a person suffering from the mental illness. It is all good and well if my intervention strategies focuses on the individual client, but more important to involve the family, because as soon as the individual is going back into the community, a strong supportive structure is needed to sustain the client.

Early detection is a chance for teenagers as well as parents to get support for substance use problems, as it will definitely lead to a decrease in the possibly that these teenagers may need more intervention at a later stage.

The single most important thing that I have learned is that Recovery is Possible and addiction can happen to anyone, no matter who you are. More important is the supportive and caring structure with a positive attitude and mindset that will bring change into an individual, family, community, the whole of a society, and globally.

After my experience and all of the new information I gained, I will most definitely be interested in taking part of another journey similar to this.

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL, thank you so much for this opportunity to learn and to share. To all the Rotarians who hosted us, thank you for opening your homes to us, it was a great honour meeting all of you and being able to build friendships!

After returning from America, I felt hopeful and energetic to do more in my community to bring about change. This experience did not only broaden my knowledge about substance abuse, but it also spoke to me as a person and the change that should occur within me.

I am grateful for this opportunity given to me.





























