

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CO-OP

'It taught me a lot about who I was an individual'

LINDA WHITE
SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NETWORK

From a high school co-op with a family doctor and a year-long Rotary exchange in Germany to a university internship in Uganda, experiential learning and international experiences forced Christina Hassan outside of her comfort zone and helped shape her life's journey.

"I've definitely grown," says the University of Waterloo graduate, pointing to her decision to pursue a master's degree in public health — something she never imagined when she first began university.

INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP

But her decision to co-create a social enterprise to purchase supplies for hospitals in Uganda is perhaps even more reflective of the transformative power of co-op. Hassan travelled to Uganda to work with Save the Mothers, an Ontario-based not-for-profit organization that teaches a master's in public health leadership program.

She worked in administration at the university and delivered care in hospitals while raising awareness about the importance of maternal health. But the death of a pregnant woman left her "completely broken. The nurses couldn't do anything to help because they didn't have the proper equipment or supplies," Hassan says.

"I knew maternal mortality was a huge problem but I was learning the difference between statistics and see-

ing it unfold firsthand." (In Uganda, expectant mothers are expected to arrive to the hospital with their own supplies. Those arriving empty handed may have to pay for supplies or are turned away. A shortage of supplies means disposable items get reused, potentially spreading dangerous infections.)

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Hassan was faced with two decisions. "I could go home, which is what I wanted to do because I was heartbroken ... But I also realized I had a responsibility to use the gifts I've been given to help others who may not be as lucky as me."

Upon her return to Canada, Hassan co-founded Full-Soul Canada (www.fullsoul.ca), which raises money to purchase medical kits. "A lot of work needs to be done but medical kits are one step in the right direction in increasing the morale of health-care workers so they can help moms deliver babies more safely," she says.

Hassan credits co-op with opening her mind to new possibilities. She began her high school co-op, for instance, with thoughts of becoming a doctor but the experience made her curious about other career opportunities in public health and health care in general.

CO-OP PROPONENT

"I chose the University of Waterloo because of its co-op program," Hassan says. "I was excited to work for four months and apply the knowledge I learned in my educa-



Christina Hassan (third from left) completed research at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto and worked in public health work at the Region of Peel before travelling to Uganda to intern with Save the Mothers. Below left: Hassan in Uganda.

tion then go back to school and build from there."

Her high school exchange to Germany was another strong influence. "It taught me a lot about who I was an individual, where I wanted to go and showed me more of the world. I wanted to make sure my university career had an international component."

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