

Beginnings of Strathmore Community Service Centre (CSC)

Mr. Martyn Drakard, born in England, studied French and Italian literature in Birmingham University, taught for two years in Italy and finally joined Strathmore College, summarizes the beginnings of the Community Service Centre (CSC).

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His desire to see change in the lives of disadvantaged members of our society gave him the idea of helping out through sustainable projects and funding. This is a core aspect to the university's mission of being of service to society. CSC has been in active operation since then. This year we mark its 10th anniversary.

Strathmore University geographically stands between two large slums; Kibera and Mukuru. This location offers the university great responsibility and challenge to ensure that it does not remain ignorant of, or indifferent, to the problems people are facing around it. Mr. Drakard, a very gentle and passionate man, took time to take us through CSC's inception;

- **What inspired you to start CSC?**

There was a time I drove through Kibera slum and the sight of poverty

in this area saddened me. Seeing the dilapidated state of people living in shanties and naked babies crying made me realize that we need to do something to help these people, and not just a one-off thing. With the approval of the university's Vice Chancellor, Prof John Odhiambo, who also had a similar idea, we decided to start CSC.

- **Greatest achievement of CSC so far?**

It is difficult to pinpoint one great achievement, but here are some that stand out for me:

The work camps are great. Having the students' partner with donors and communities, towards helping the lives of the needy in various parts of our society is great. Seeing them give of their energy and time, while at the same time sacrificing their comfort, all for the good of the

needy in our society is very inspiring.

The connection with SlumCode Group (a slum-based enterprise development organization founded on building strategies for community driven development since the year 2006) has also been a great success.

Finally, the Prisons programme has also been of great value, not only to the inmates, but also to the students who get to visit the prisons. Some prisoners do not deserve to be in prison, but with the programs we offer to them, they get to improve before they are released back to society.

- **Greatest challenge CSC has faced so far?**

Lack of funds: with more financial muscle we can increase our capacity to serve more people in our society.

- **Where do you see CSC in the next 5 to 10 years?**

Depending on funding a lot more can be done. More work camps should be encouraged and also projects within Nairobi County should be on the increase.

- **To the students thinking of joining CSC but who are hesitant or are yet to make their minds up, what would you say?**

Doing these projects is self-fulfilling. You not only do well to others but also to yourself. You build your own sense of responsibility.

Mr. Drakard summarized everything well, when he stated: “Students who join Strathmore University are highly

privileged and may not realize that they are surrounded by extreme poverty and misery. Yet from these extreme situations come great and inspiring stories of people who make great sacrifices for their families; from men who walk for long distances each day in search of jobs and women who set up small kiosks with the aim of earning a few shillings so as to ensure their children do not go hungry, to grandmothers who look after twenty grandchildren whose parents have died of AIDS, etc. These stories can be best understood and appreciated when one is part of the Community Service Centre.”

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