

Code for Humanity
Madagascar
Claremont McKenna College
Nora Evelyn Studholme, U.S.A., Claremont McKenna College
www.cfhinternational.com

At Code for Humanity, our mission was to empower individuals in Nosy Be, Madagascar – particularly younger community members – to create their own opportunity for economic, personal, or community growth. Our strategy to accomplish this was to provide computer education that is practical, affordable, and relevant; we provided courses in technology and web development, which allow new organizations to build a foundation and existing organizations to grow.

Our pilot program began with an enrollment of 11 students living on the island. Students ranged in age from 22 to 50, and around two-thirds of our graduates were women. Classes were held five nights per week from 6:30 to 9 p.m. in a donated space in Hellville, the capital city of Nosy Be. The program commenced with basic bureaucratic computer skills such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, in addition to basic computer usage (several of our students had never used computers before the course). Over the next eight weeks, we completed a curriculum that included these skills as well as basic HTML and CSS, usage of five different web platforms (WordPress, Wix, Weebly, IMCreator, Yola), and fundamental web development skills such as photography, copywriting, and user interface.

By the end of the eight weeks, each student had created and presented their “final project,” a complete and published website for an organization or business of their choice. The final projects ranged from entrepreneurial endeavors such as new restaurants and boutiques, to educational sites supporting the environment, to community clubs to provide young people an alternative to drugs and alcohol.

Ten students graduated from the first class with practical skills, completed websites, and a sense of possibility and accomplishment. In one of the poorest nations on earth, finding work is difficult and engaging in community-oriented entrepreneurship is even harder. Our graduates gained great personal benefit from the project by acquiring marketable skills and supporting entrepreneurial endeavors. In addition, the community of Nosy Be as a whole gained several new businesses and organizations that would not otherwise have been brought into existence.

The only major budget constraint we encountered was an incidental one: Air Madagascar is a notoriously unreliable airline, and cancelled our flight out of Madagascar the night before we were meant to leave. This meant we had to spend considerable time and money finding new connecting flights in order to get home. In addition, we had a minor unexpected budget challenge in regards to a reliable internet connection. Once we learned how internet worked in the country and invested in our own router to bring to class each day, these costs were soon inconsequential. By the suggestion of our community partners, we implemented a very small and affordable fee to give the program the gravitas it would need to be successful. These fees (20,000 Ariarys per person, around \$8 for the eight weeks) went directly into covering the additional costs of internet for the program, and ensured the continued attendance and success of the program.

These inscription contributions also set a precedent for future courses. Our community partners in Nosy Be will continue to provide classes in computer skills and web creation in the future, supported in part by these small payments. In the last weeks of the course, we were able to conduct a teacher training program for three community leaders who are continuing the coursework.

The community support for Code for Humanity and interest in future courses has been overwhelming, and we have received messages from various cities across Madagascar requesting a program in their community. We are also in the process of coordinating a new program in partnership with a women's organization in Rabat, Morocco, and hope to be able to gain enough funding and equipment donations to begin this program within the next few months. To continue to support Code for Humanity Nosy Be, as well as expand on possibilities in other locations in Madagascar and around the world, we have launched a fundraising campaign through IndieGoGo, and are in the process of acquiring 501(c)3 status.

In one sense of the word, "peace" is nothing more than a willingness to share this earth with our fellow humans while supporting collaboration, justice, and mutual respect. The massive inequalities of opportunity in Madagascar have made such inter-cultural cooperation increasingly difficult. Tourism is the country's only growing industry, yet foreign organizations capture the majority of the money from this sector of the economy. This has led to increasing resentment of foreign organizations and tourists in Madagascar, and has even culminated in violence between the local population and foreign visitors.

In the short term, Code for Humanity has helped create a stronger, more collaborative community in Nosy Be by allowing individuals to influence their own economic and personal futures and minimize the reliance on—and thus resentment of—foreign organizations and tourists. In the long term, we hope that Code for Humanity will continue to empower entrepreneurs in Madagascar to create businesses that will help their country become more economically stable and socially just in terms of equality of opportunity.

The program was, therefore, an incredible international exchange. I learned as much from my students as they learned from me, if not more. Not only will this project continue to have a lasting impact on the Community of Nosy Be, it has had an incredible impact on my life as well.

I am forever indebted to the Davis Projects for Peace committee for believing in this vision and entrusting me with the support to make this dream come true. This has been perhaps the single most transformative experience in my 22 years, not only because we were able to create a program that will continue to positively impact the community of Nosy Be or because I plan to continue to dedicate myself and my time to Code for Humanity to bring its programs elsewhere in Madagascar and around the world; but also because I have had the opportunity to become a true part of the community of Nosy Be, which will remain, in the most sincere sense of the word, a family for the rest of my life. Undertaking this program has reminded me of how interconnected we all are as a global community. Even if we live on different continents and lead very different lives on a day-to-day basis, we all have similar hopes, friendships, and dreams. This, I have realized through my work in Code for Humanity, is the power of the internet. Learning to use the internet conveys the sense that *anything is possible*. The world is not so unfathomably huge after all, if it can all fit here on this computer screen. Having a medium to share our ideas and our dreams proves that they might just be worth listening to.

It is with deep gratitude that I submit this final report to the Davis Projects for Peace committee. Thank you for giving me the chance to live my dream, and thank you, too, from our wonderful students on Nosy Be who are now more empowered to live *their* dreams as well.

"This program has given us a way to communicate about ourselves, and to learn about others around the world. It's about sharing." -Elias, student

