

**Inspiring**  
Challenging  
Learning  
Discovering  
Transforming

**Supportive**  
Passionate  
Caring  
Understanding

**Trustworthy**  
Reliable  
Responsive  
Experienced

**Connecting**  
Sharing  
Familial  
Bonding



**Interculture**  
*South Africa*



## About AFS in South Africa

AFS Interculture South Africa, formed in 1958, is a volunteer, non-profit organization which promotes and facilitates intercultural learning and awareness through exchange programmes and other intercultural learning activities; to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

Each year we make it possible for South Africans to welcome into their homes and experience the friendship of hundreds of participants from around the world. The same intercultural learning opportunities are provided to South African citizens to live in a foreign country, learn a new culture, a new language, and, in short, to learn 'a new way of seeing the world'.

The number of participants taking part in our programmes has increased significantly over the past few years. In 1995, AFS Interculture South Africa facilitated high school exchanges for 35 young people. Today more than 200 people a year – high school students, young adults, and teachers – participate in our programmes.

**Why Intercultural Learning?** When asked to sum up in one word "what does your AFS experience mean to you?" returnees, host families, volunteers and current exchange students came up with over 350 different words, such as:

Life-changing      unforgettable  
                                 awesome  
                                 transforming  
                                 growth  
family                                   perspective  
                                 learning

**A Just and Peaceful World:** The AFS ambulance drivers returning from the Second World War understood the need for society to overcome the conflicts between cultures and to build a more just and peaceful world. Today, we see more need than ever to achieve peaceful solutions to conflicts between cultures. And, more than ever, we believe that AFS is part of the solution.

With peace as a starting point, we believe that our programme educates individuals about cultural differences, and helps them overcome judgmental, polarized reactions to other cultures. Tolerance is critical to overcoming conflict. At the same time, we

believe that real understanding of other cultures is important, and it is much more than just co-existing without conflict. It involves an acceptance, an adaptation, an appreciation of and an engagement in the other culture. It means building real relationships of trust, respect and affection with people from other cultures. Young people also gain leadership skills that encourage them to promote further collaboration in their communities.

**The Business World:** In 2012, the British Council produced a report, "The Value of Intercultural Skills in the Workplace", which surveyed more than 360 employers in 9 countries (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Jordan, South Africa, the UAE, the UK, and the USA). The report highlighted the following as important intercultural skills:

- the ability to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints
- demonstrating respect for others
- knowledge of a foreign language

Employees with these skills were seen to benefit organisations through their ability to bring in new

clients, work within diverse teams, and support a good brand and reputation for their organisation.

Most employers reported that they encouraged their staff to develop intercultural skills through in-house training, meetings and events. However, employers also said that educational institutions could do more to equip students with intercultural skills.

## Some Key Facts and Figures

**Global:** In a typical year there are **11,000** participants on AFS Youth Programmes and **1,300** on AFS Adult Programmes; placed in **110** countries.

AFS has organisations and representatives in **60** countries; with programme activity taking place in over **110** countries.

Around the world there are **50,000** active AFS Volunteers and **500,000** AFS Returnees.

**South Africa:** AFS Interculture South Africa has been facilitating exchanges since 1958 and, during that time, hundreds of participants from around the world have been hosted in South Africa, hundreds of South African participants have also been able to take part in exchanges in other countries.

Each year we host approximately **140** participants in South Africa, and around **40** South Africans travel to other countries.

Our main programme sponsors over the past years have been the US Department of State's Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study programme and BP's Global Citizens of Tomorrow programme.

South Africa has **200** active volunteers based in chapters in **20** communities; from Cape Town to Hazyview, from Durban to Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria.

## Funding Opportunities

**Sponsorships:** Currently, for every three or four participants hosted in South Africa only one South African is able to experience the culture of a different country. With flight costs, medical insurance, visas etc. exchange programmes can be very expensive. It costs approximately R50,000 for a short exchange programme and R100,000 for a year programme. We are always looking for sponsors who will enable us to send more South Africans on this life-changing experience.

**Community Grants:** Returnees are encouraged to contribute to their local communities in South Africa. Currently we have access to some

small grants to assist returnees in setting up community projects. For example, setting up a community library - which brought together the energy and enthusiasm of an AFS returnee, book donations organised by his host family in the USA, the provision of space in a community hall, and external grant funding. We would love to be able to offer more funding to these young people who are dedicated to making a positive change in the lives of others.

**Regional Programmes:** AFS in Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Egypt and Tunisia) have begun to offer short exchange programmes that bring together participants from the five countries to work together. The programme focusses on leadership capacity building and changemaking, sharing insight about cultures and traditions.

The programme is designed to build future leaders within their communities who share an African identity, with the aim to develop positive and lasting relations and social cohesion between citizens of the African continent.

## Student Stories



**Bongani Khumalo**  
Account Manager  
Industrial Development Corporation  
Year Programme  
(Paraguay 2000)

I was 17 years old when I boarded a flight to Brazil en route to Paraguay. I had just been awarded a scholarship to go on exchange through AFS Interculture South Africa.

I had been a volunteer in Soweto at the time, supporting young people from around the world hosted in South Africa for a cultural exchange programme. I was a dynamic curious young person, convinced

that there was more to life than my little existence in Soweto; and one needed to seize opportunities as they came along.

At that time I had also been accepted at Wits University for a degree in Geology on a full bursary from AngloGold Ashanti.

I remember not knowing what to go for and a good friend of mine said to me "Bongani you will never be 17 again and get to spend a year in a foreign country." It was the best advice I have ever been given, and what a year it was. I was in a group of 45 teenagers from around the world, the only one from South Africa, to be hosted in local families around Paraguay.

Having lived in apartheid South Africa and seen the transition to democracy; I had assumed that all white people were racist. It was liberating to be in a country where the colour of my skin was a fascination rather than a reason to discriminate. People would rub my head to feel the texture of my hair, they would gather around me to listen to my native language; they would be interested in hearing stories about how we lived back in South Africa.

As much as it was a chance to teach about where I came from, it was also a journey of self-discovery.

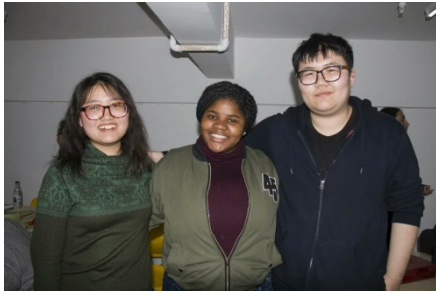
When one immerses himself in the culture of the other, a curiosity to want to understand why people behave the way they do emerges, you even start to question what influenced your long held beliefs. One also develops an appreciation about what influenced their being. That who they are is also an offering to the diversity that is the world around us.

Mahatma Gandhi sums it up beautifully when he says "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

AFS took a chance on me, and gave me a life-altering experience.

I do believe that I am a better human being due to my experience with AFS.





**Mohau Mofokeng  
High School Student  
Year Programme  
(China 2017)**

I will start by greeting my readers in Chinese “你好” as I am currently in China for my exchange year. My name is Mohau and I am 17 years old and I am an extrovert. I am a very enthusiastic person and I am most happy when I am around people and communicate with them. I would like to consider myself as someone who can relate to anyone with any culture and background, which allows me to make connections anywhere. I make friends easily.

I am also an extremely determined person. No matter what, I will push through limitations and adversity to try and get what I want and what is best for me and the people around me.

I was motivated to choose AFS because it has been a trusted school exchange programme for a long time and it also has the longest school-based exchange time. I would most certainly love to learn Chinese as a language and to learn the Chinese lifestyle and fit in well with it whilst also teaching them about the South African way of life.

My host family is so great they make me feel like part of them and they spoil me, a little too much at times, but I'm loving every second of it. Because I strongly believe in the saying “it takes a village to raise a child” when I talk about my family it will most probably include everyone in the community and friends. I would like to believe I get along with everyone very well as the community members are also very curious about South Africa and its cultures too.

What I like most about my town is that it captures the essence of true China, there are markets everywhere, people care about one another and almost everyone knows each other and when you greet someone you may end up talking to them for as long as 2 hours and not even get bored.

I like it here in China. What I think is most similar about China and South Africa is the sense of “UBUNTU”. This is a Zulu word for humanity to

others, it also means “I am who I am because of who you are”.

The biggest difference is that in China the races and cultures are not as diverse as South Africa (which is known as the “Rainbow Nation”). People here are often surprised and amazed at seeing someone of a different skin colour or race, but I like it because I never run out of someone to talk to.



**Silungile Kekana  
High School Student  
Year Programme  
(Japan 2015)**

Being on exchange is a test of independence and courage; it broadens one's understanding of global cultures and the importance of exploring different cultures.

The language and cultural barrier is huge. Not many Japanese I've met thus far speak English, that's because they learn to memorise English and they are not encouraged to speak it publicly. In South Africa (at least where I come from) a stranger can just walk into your face and start a conversation in a blink of an eye, but here in Japan, a stranger will probably bow two-three times, stare at the ground or smile a lot before speaking; in addition, the Japanese are very shy and private (which is why it takes them a while to warm up to a conversation).

I have been trying new things since I've been here like kendo and tennis; and I tried out a public speaking competition (I'm not much of a talker but it was worth it). As much as this is supposed to be fun, it's supposed to be educational too. All my classes are in Japanese and it's pretty hard considering that I don't speak Japanese, yet!

I have seen a change in the way I do things, like I've disciplined myself. Usually, I plan on doing something and actually don't, but something clicked in me and I've been disciplined. My practices have

changed. I'm open to more change in my life.

Someone once said to me, 'An opposite culture is not wrong or immoral, it's just different'; I can say exploring differences is actually good for inhabiting a new mindset and setting new goals.

I've had many people ask what am I going to do after this, I'm not sure about that yet; but, moving back to Japan might be a possibility. I think I could study teaching English and empower more Japanese people to speak English.

I believe I will emerge from this exchange as a complete individual, who knows what they want and where they want to be, because I believe I was far from finding myself in my 'comfort zone' back home. I'm thankful for all the people who are helping me make this exchange a success and for a wonderful experience.



**Nathan Swartz  
High School Student  
Year Programme  
(USA 2013)**

On the 27th July 2014, I had the privilege to attend and stand as a representative of the youth of South Africa at Freedom Park in Pretoria, to celebrate the Great Father of the Nation, the late Nelson Mandela and the continuing legacy he left for the people of South Africa.

The day included a “Passing the Flame of Ubuntu” ceremony, where a torch was passed down to a representative from each cultural group in South Africa. Each representative had to give a reason as to why they were accepting the torch as a representative of the youth within South Africa – my message was fairly simple, as I took the torch I said “We as the youth of the Republic of South Africa have the power to create a legacy, a

legacy that has the potential to leave footprints of change for generations to come, as we change the world, not in one instance, but one person at a time". I felt honoured to represent the youth of South Africa as we hold the future and it is important that youth realize the responsibility we will have to take South Africa forward.

Never be afraid to share what you believe in or what inspires you, because it is the only way we will see a change in the world, by being the change we would like to see in the world, as Mahatma Gandhi said. Let us as youth all around the world unite in our differences to help one another, inspire a shared vision and dedicate ourselves to being change makers.

## Sponsoring a Student

Before I go any further, I would like to say a big thank you for considering sponsoring a South African student. While we are able to welcome hundreds of participants from around the world into South Africa, fewer South African students are able to benefit from such a life-changing experience.

Your support will be greatly appreciated both by AFS and by any students that you are able to sponsor.

Dennis Lane - National Director

## The 'Package'

Each opportunity for sponsorship is different, and we would welcome the chance to discuss the particulars with you. Broadly speaking, as sponsor of an exchange student, you would be provided with:

- Biographical information of the prospective exchange student.
- Information on the likely school to which the student would be placed.
- An update with the final information on the school and city/town of placement.
- During the selection and orientation process, AFS would inform the student of the sponsorship and would request that the student write two letters to you; one around the time of their mid-stay and one once they have returned to South Africa.
- The AFS national office would provide a short report outlining how the exchange went from the perspective of AFS.
- AFS would be happy to publish details of the scholarship on our website and in our annual report.

## Contact Us

If you would like more information about how you can support AFS Interculture South Africa in our aim to create a more just and peaceful world, for example through sponsoring changemaking clubs, funding small-scale community grants etc. please contact:

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Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures