

## Universal Communication, a Smile : by Saskia

Two youth ambassadors share their experiences interacting with the locals in Botswana.

We've mostly crossed sandy roads through scraggly bush or crunchy Salt Pans, but we've also shared smiles and gestures with several Batswana. Our convoy of conspicuous, canvas-roofed safari trucks attracts attention whenever we pass people, as if a magnifying glass is held to us.



Over the course of our stay, we've entered several scattered villages. When we pulled over for gas and ginger beer in an expanding mining town, a gas station attendant left her pump for a moment to join a game we invented as we waited for our guides to finish. We played musical sewer caps to the chorus of "Waka-Waka" belted out by all of us. Her synthetic, redheaded wig somehow stayed in place despite her bouncing feet. As we drove away, we each high-fived her from the open sides of our trucks. Kids in flip flops wearing school uniforms jumped forward to wave at us every time we passed dirt huts, stucco houses, or shacks advertising haircuts. Beside our only campsite within a settlement, we raced a young boy with calloused feet to a telephone post. He won by far. Another boy excitedly showed us his steerable car that he built out of twisted wire for a frame and bottle caps for wheels. Every time our guides drove past a farm, they made sure to slow and greet the wandering workers. These moments, though brief, are stuck in my memory fondly.

In rural Botswana, many of locals didn't speak English. But in each of these interactions, a hand motion and a grin were all we needed to communicate. Ultimately, the Batswana showed me that friendliness is much more important than words and that this method of interaction is as universal as the creases around our smiles. We should try to remember this when travelling our streets at home as well.