A Letter to Future GYD Students

First of all I say Congratulations! Welcome to the Global Youth Development program. I encourage you to reach out and support your cohorts because they may become some of your best friends. Each of them shares an incredible passion with you and together you all are a force to be reckoned with.

You have officially entered your studies and upcoming internships as designated cultural learners. This next academic year will prepare your mind, perspectives, and opinions to enter this world as innovative open-minded volunteers. However, this is just your training manual. The ride truly begins the day you step foot into your chosen country. I encourage you to realize at that moment as new sights light up your eyes, as your ears are overwhelmed with new sounds, and as your body senses it unpreparedness for this new climate—that the first success will be within yourself.

Celebrate these successes: the day you properly introduce yourself to others in the host country language, the day you enjoy or for some successfully pretend to enjoy the food on that abounding plate filled with foreign tastes, the day you take public transportation on your own and you actually end up in the right spot, the day you first feel a sensation of home in your community or host country, and most importantly the day you successfully kill the unwanted “guest” with your shoe, without even a flinch!

I included all of these examples, because I want to tell you that your internship will be hard. But if you begin to celebrate and notice the small things, you’ll begin to see changes everyday, as you grow stronger in your position. So forgive your mistakes, celebrate your small victories, and above all else be patient because everything is new. Let’s be honest, adopting this mentality is not
easy. We all yearn to be doers—but get comfortable in that chair just sharing coffee with your neighbor, because that is where it all starts. Change first must start within ourselves.

Yes, you can still dream big. But be inspired by the success of reaching one little girl, one young teenage boy, one mother, and one grandfather. I want you to think about your favorite teacher, youth group or club leader. These people were not perfect, they were just passionate about their work and cared for their students. Yet they still made a difference or an impact that carries on in the world. This is the key to success in this field, just be passionate about whatever you choose to do and show your youth that you care.

Finally, do not compare yourselves and your internship successes to others. Your successes are a blend of your own personality, your community, your program, your opportunities, your youth, your family, your friends, your neighbors, and even your host family. Your experiences overseas will never look like anyone’s because they can’t. And that is awesome because no one else could experience this beautiful mosaic of influences that will shape your work and long-term impact in your community.