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CNN reports kids' 'Journey for Change'

by Warren L. Maye

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CNN Correspondent Soledad O'Brien and Malaak Compton-Rock encourage 'Journey for Change' students during a 'bon voyage' event at the South African Consulate in New York City.

Thirty kids from the Brooklyn (Bushwick) Corps neighborhood recently had the adventure of a lifetime, thanks to Malaak Compton-Rock, a long time supporter and friend the Bushwick Corps. Their trip to South Africa was captured by Soledad O'Brien, correspondent for CNN's "Special Investigations Unit."

Rock took the community kids on a "Journey for Change" that involved visiting Salvation Army centers in Johannesburg.

"I just had a premonition to bring the youth from Brooklyn to [Johannesburg]," Rock said during the CNN report. "To introduce children to global travel. I believe that by traveling, you open your life to thinking globally and internationally rather than just locally. And I think it gives you a sense of confidence."

Several kids, ages 12 to 16, demonstrated their newfound understanding of life outside Bushwick in comments posted on O'Brien's CNN blog.

"I am really happy that I came because this trip has changed me a lot," wrote 15-year-old Jeremy Baker. "I learned how to do better service work, and I also learned how to stop cursing."

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CNN reported that on the day following the trip, nearly all 30 of the kids showed up at the corps to discuss how they will share their experiences in their community and continue to do service work in the U.S.

Captain Travis Lock, Bushwick corps officer, explained why it is imperative that the kids experience such journeys of change. In an interview posted on Rock's Angel Rock Project website, an organization of which she is founder and director, Lock said, "Bushwick is a neighborhood with startling statistics. There is a population of 100,000 people. It has consistently struggled to overcome obstacles, such as drug trafficking, a high incidence of child neglect, rising crime rates, and broken families.

"Over half of its population lives below the poverty line and receives some form of public assistance. Only a little over 50 percent of the students of its largest high school, Bushwick High, graduate in four years." Lock said his goals include providing visual and performing arts experiences for the kids as a way of offsetting the effects of declining public school budgets.

"It is important for the [corps] to pick up where the schools are leaving off. We cannot leave our children behind."

Despite the challenges in Bushwick, seeing even greater ones for children in Soweto, a township in Johannesburg, helped Tasheema Walker appreciate better her opportunities in the United States.

"I couldn't believe my eyes in Soweto," she wrote for O'Brien's CNN blog. "First we went to the Salvation Army orphanage. They take care of children from the ages of [1 day] to 3 years. All these children were abandoned in all types of places you can imagine: garbage bins, toilets, abandoned homes, and so much more.

"I had to cry when I heard all of this. It makes you think about how much of a great life you have. There was a little boy named Blessing and to me he is a blessing. I love these kids so much. I just wanted to take them home with me."

Rock, an advocate for volunteerism, social responsibility, and sustainable change, said on CNN, "In the United States of America—in Bushwick—we have certain services that I want the children to take advantage of. And that they understand that 'to whom much is given, much is required'—that you must give back to the next person."

That next person was Wakey W. Anton, a South African who was touched by the "Journey for Change" visit. "Please tell my 'Journey for Change' family that they are always in my mind and prayers," he wrote in an e-mail. "The photos of the group hang in my house so I can see them every morning. Thank you Captain [Lock] for your friendship and for the whole 'Journey for Change' family."



Captain Travis Lock, corps officer at the Bushwick Corps, greets parents.



Malaak Compton-Rock (center), wife of comedian Chris Rock, enjoys a few laughs with 'Journey for Change' students from the Bushwick community.