

FROM THE HEART

MAP associate provides aid around the world

I said I would no longer use the phrase “someday I’m going to....”

That’s the promise Tina Houchin, an associate in Production Services at the Marysville Auto Plant made to herself during a birthday several years ago. Since then, the world traveler has visited more than 12 countries. But Houchin does more than just visit far-away lands. She makes an impact through volunteer work.

However, it didn’t start out that way.

“One of my early trips was to the Dominican Republic,” she explains. “While I had a good trip, I was limited to staying at the resort for safety reasons caused by poverty in the region. I wanted to find a way to safely experience the local culture and make a difference in my own way.”

A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Houchin did some research and found a company that offered volunteer visits to countries. In 2007, Houchin visited Cusco, Peru, for a trip she says changed her travel focus forever.

“Some would say I am making a positive impact on their lives, but I would say it’s the other way around,” Houchin said. “They are the ones who have had a profound positive impact on my life.”

“I worked at a facility that provided education to kids from the nearby mountains, where the opportunity didn’t exist,” said Houchin.

Houchin spent her afternoons teaching conversational English, but her mornings in Peru were filled with manual labor like hand-mixing and pouring concrete and digging rocks. She admits that at times, she was worn out, but it was the most rewarding thing she had ever done.

CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT

For the next few years, Houchin carefully turned Honda plant shut-downs and vacations into volunteer trips to Crete, Greece; Taupo, New Zealand; and Kenya, Africa. Along the way, she found a good fit with an organization called Global Volunteer Network (GVN). GVN supports charitable organizations throughout the world that assist women, children and the environment.



Tina Houchin, who works in Production Services at MAP, listens to songs with kids at a shelter in Kenya.



Houchin serves vitamin-enriched porridge to displaced kids in Kenya.

During her trip to Kenya in April 2011, Houchin helped distribute goods from GVN’s “Eat So They Can” campaign.

“We took goods to orphanages, schools and refugee camps,” she said. “The camps were for people displaced from their homes due to political unrest, many of them still live in those tents today.”

When asked, Houchin admits that she often gets emotional during her trips.

“It’s when I think of the life they live and the things we take for granted,” she said. “They have a daily struggle just to get food.”

Upon her return from Africa, she accepted a position on the Board of Directors of the GVN Foundation. During her two-year term as treasurer, she will manage donations and deposits for the organization.

She doesn’t know where her next trip will take her, but she does know that she wants to get more people involved in helping others and give them confidence to make trips like hers.

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