

Up & Coming

Harriet Cochrane - Cotswolds to Africa

My own ideas on aid to developing countries have been shaken up after talking to Harriet Cochrane, who, as an aid worker based in Africa, is able to talk at first hand. Harriet, 26, enjoyed a very happy, childhood here in Shipton-under-Wychwood followed by four years at Edinburgh University studying International Business. Between school and university she took a year out to teach in Zimbabwe and that was how she became 'hooked' on Africa.



the nomads in the Sahara desert to provide them with food.

Projects are funded according to what has been contracted, i.e. feeding a number of people for a period of time, digging a certain

number of latrines, repairing a certain number of wells. It is a juggling game to ensure that the money does not run out before the project is completed and equally that there is not too much money left over at the end of the project.

Working for an NGO

Whilst in her last year in Edinburgh, Harriet started working for a small American charity, Mercy Corps, fund-raising and producing newsletters. She was eventually offered a full time salaried position with this NGO. After more than a year with them she decided to go to Paris, as an au pair, to improve her French language skills. Once more she took on voluntary work with a French NGO called Solidarites. Apparently, the route into a permanent job with an NGO is to get a foot in the door by working as an unpaid volunteer for a period of time and once again Harriet was offered a job.

She has since co-ordinated two aid projects in Africa. In Sudan, the project distributed food every month to 150,000 people living in eight camps and towns across Darfur. In Niger, she worked with

Under The Stars

When working on a project Harriet can be 'in the field' for three weeks, sleeping under the stars with just a mosquito net as cover. After three weeks she returns to town for a rest and lives in a rented house or flat with other aid workers, often with servants to look after them; after the camps this feels like real luxury. The thing that she misses most from home is having her personal space, time just to spend alone and think; there is always someone around and it is difficult to be alone.

Harriet talks enthusiastically about her work, she finds the under-funding of the UN World Food Programme very frustrating. Food aid should be a last resort as it is very difficult to manage and Harriet feels it would be better to encourage increased local production where possible.

Christine Halliday