

Eshe's diary day 6: How did you spend your 16th birthday?

Headliners reporter Eshe's 16th birthday was no excuse for her not to continue her work in Jamaica - including demonstrating how to put on a condom in the middle of the street.

What better way to start my birthday than shopping? And that's exactly what we did in morning and I took full advantage of the opportunity.

After spending far too much money and convincing myself that it was OK because they were special birthday treats, we had to suffer a gruelling and physically painful journey to Portland.

Expecting the journey to Port Antonio in Portland to last only two hours, we were not happy when we were still sitting in the extremely hot minibus after three-and-a-half hours. Feeling slightly travel sick the whole time from the winding roads in the mountains and the continuous bumpy from the bad roads; it wasn't exactly the way I intended on spending my birthday in Jamaica.

But when we arrived I understood that the journey was well worth it and I had a fantastic day, probably not doing the normal things you would expect to do on your sixteenth birthday. But that was half the fun.

The coast at Port Antonio was gorgeous, covered with palm trees and white-washed seating areas; it was a perfect photo spot. So we all made the most of our photo opportunity and spent at least half an hour snapping away, which got more and more creative as time went by.

When the patties for lunch and the young people from the Portland Aids Association arrived, it was nice to have a chat before we got involved in the activities and get to know the group as just people rather than part of the Association, which doesn't happen normally.

I also got a special cake, personalised with my name, which I again have to thank Steve for. I can't even begin to describe how amazing he's been and made my birthday really special, now all I have to do is think of a way to thank him.

After a short introduction and the sixth condom demonstration of the week we headed out on our walk and talk. Originally thinking it was when the group took you on a tour of an area and talked to you throughout, I couldn't have been shown I was more wrong. Actually a walk and talk is when groups go out into the streets of the community and talk about an issue, in our case it was HIV/AIDS.

We try to find out first what the people already know and then fill in the blanks and usually lead to a condom demonstration to ensure that people are using them correctly.

Yes, we did actually have to do condom demonstrations to strangers in the street, hard to believe, I know!

We only approached adults, which I found really shocking because I thought that young people would be more interested in the topic and willing to talk about the issue. But I soon learnt that the adults were just as interested and got really involved, asking lots of questions. Generally people were well informed, more informed than I expected, but there were a few myths we had to clear up such as HIV can be contracted by sharing drinks, kissing or mosquito bites.

Then most people did condom demonstrations for us, which we then repeated back to them clarifying any small mistakes they had made, and all the mistakes were very small.

When it came to my turn I imagined being really embarrassed and awkward but actually I was so focused on clearing up other's mistakes and getting it right that all nerves vanished and I was actually completely comfortable doing a demonstration and talking about sex with six grown men! Apparently the Jamaican way of being open is rubbing off on me!

It was nowhere near as horrifying as I thought it would be and it was pretty enlightening to find out what an average Jamaican adult already knows about HIV/AIDS. However it's something that would be very difficult to do in the UK, but we definitely need it.

Then it was back on the bus for the dreaded journey to the hotel. And that's the last of the projects we had to visit. The trip is basically over; I'm finding it really hard to believe how fast the week has gone.

It was an amazing birthday and I doubt many people did similar things on their sweet sixteenth, I'm definitely going to remember it forever. And surely there's no better place to spend your birthday than in Jamaica?

3 comments

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Keep up the good work that you are doing and i am wishing you all the best for the future and continue to fight out the thing that we call stigma and discrimination. One Love

Davia (age 20) from Jamaica, 30 December 1899 00:00

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The whole of your trip sounds as if it was an amazing experience. It is outstanding how you managed to learn so much during your time in Jamaica and how much you achieved. Even reading your diary entries has taught me a lot not only about HIV/Aids but about the situation in Jamaica, something i failed to notice on my visit there. I think the work you guys are doing is great and well done!!!

Hannah (age 15) from Reading, 30 December 1899 00:00

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it sounds like you enjoyed yourself and learnt alot on your trip to Jamaica. Its great for young people to meet others who are doing similar work and share experiences.Hope you will be able to apply maybe some of the principles to your work in the UK. Also, very interesting way to spend your birthday.

Kerrel (age 22) from Jamaica, 30 December 1899 00:00



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