

About Our Residents

Young Fallers in Africa

1st in a series by Lara Lechtenberg sharing her experiences with Explorers Sans Frontières in West Africa this past summer

For Fallers Christina Spino and Lara Lechtenberg, this past summer was no break: it meant taking MCATS, finding first career jobs, and generally facing adult life after college. And, of course, a life-altering trip to Senegal, West Africa.

Spino and Lechtenberg are charter members of local non-profit Explorers Sans Frontières (ESF), founded 9 months ago by Shonta Collins, RN, BSN, MPA. ESF spent its first few months in existence collecting basic medical supplies and donations for their volunteer trip to Thiès, a small city about two hours outside of Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

Once in country, Lechtenberg, Spino, and fellow members Chiara de Leon and Tri Huynh were struck by the poverty and vast inequality surrounding them. While a

lucky few live in Western-style mansions and houses comparable to the comforts found in the US, the majority of Thiès' population lives crammed into tenement-style apartments and even huts similar to what many think of when they hear "Africa." These were not, however, the stereotypically quaint little homes dotting a beautiful savannah—they were tiny, inadequate shelters, crammed tight into a walled-off shantytown less than a two-minute walk from a large mansion and estates.

Despite the overwhelming poverty of the town, the ESF volunteers were the lucky recipients of enormous hospitality, both from their generous host family, Madame and Monsieur Diouf, and the numerous residents of Thiès who helped ESF navigate the markets, helped them avoid being taken advantage of by wily taxi drivers, and allowed them unfettered access to the hospitals and schools in which they volunteered.