

The Washington Post

'Real Housewives of D.C.' star Turner keeps it real, founding program to aid girls

By Henri E. Cauvin
 Washington Post Staff Writer
 Sunday, October 10, 2010; 8:55 PM

There's the "Real Housewives of D.C.," and then there's real life.

When it comes to real life, "Housewives" star Stacie Turner knows that her good fortune began long before she was picked to appear in the popular reality show's D.C. incarnation.

Put up for adoption as an infant, Turner was taken in before she was a year old and never had to endure the hardship and uncertainty that confronts many young people who languish in foster care for years.

So amid the life of a busy mom, intrepid businesswoman and TV personality, Turner has been trying to help young women in the District's foster-care system through an organization she created last year.

Over the summer, after raising tens of thousands of dollars, Turner's Extra-Ordinary Life took eight teenagers on the trip of a lifetime, flying to South Africa for an 11-day excursion captured on film for a new BET documentary being shown on the channel's international arm.

For many of the teens, it was their first trip abroad. For all of them, it was an eye-opening journey into the joys and hardships

of girls living halfway around the globe in a country of deep economic inequality.

"It made me grateful for what I have," said Zefer Tesfamariyam, 18, "because there are people that don't have what I have."

From a visit to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg to a safari in KwaZulu-Natal to a festive dinner with girls in South Africa's child-welfare system, the D.C. teens saw a world open up to them.

Sitting in BET's studios in Northeast Washington as the documentary's final interviews and touches were being completed, Kristin Woodland smiled easily as she explained the bond that she forged with "Ms. Stacie," who had told the teens that she also had been in the child-welfare system.

"It made me feel good, because she wanted to

Advertisement

We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox Ready For Real Business

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/10/AR2010101003346_pf.html

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

'Real Housewives of D.C.' star Turner keeps it real, founding program to aid girls

help us and to show us the world," said Woodland, 18.

For all of the attention she has drawn for "Real Housewives," which wrapped up its regular season last week and has a reunion show to come, Turner seems almost embarrassed at her celebrity turn, which she calls "just a surreal experience."

Talking about Woodland and the other teen travelers comes more easily. "This is what I love to do," she said.

Of course, when she's trying to serve as a role model for her girls off the set, she can't exactly lose it when she's in front of the camera. "I can't be flipping tables, acting the fool and then tell them to do the right thing and treat people respectfully," Turner said.

When she founded Extra-Ordinary Life, she wanted to reach lots of girls. But she soon realized that she couldn't and shouldn't try.

"It's more important," she said, "to have a deep relationship with fewer girls."

The \$70,000 trip to South Africa offered the opportunity to do that.

After the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency agreed to support the trip, social workers began spreading the word among teen girls in the foster-care system about the competition.

Anyone who wanted to go had to be doing well in school and would have to write an essay and sit for an interview. Nineteen girls applied. Nine were chosen, and eight made the journey in July, accompanied by Turner and her husband, Jason, a couple of other chaperones and a couple of CFSA social workers.

"I had never been on a plane or out of the country," Ieshia Johnson, 16, said.

About 18 hours after leaving Dulles International Airport, she and the other teens, ages 16 to 18, arrived in Johannesburg, where the experience really began.

For Ieshia, the impoverished school that the group visited was the most moving place. "The kids were very happy. They didn't have much. They didn't own much, but they were still happy," she said. "It made me think about how unappreciative I am."

Advertisement



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox 
Ready For Real Business

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/10/AR2010101003346_pf.html

Print Powered By 

The Washington Post

'Real Housewives of D.C.' star Turner keeps it real, founding program to aid girls

And it made Ieshia, who had ended up in the foster-care system after running away from home, think about reconciling with her mother.

"Me and my mother, we didn't get along, but we're getting better."

That's real life.

Advertisement



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

xerox 
Ready For Real Business

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/10/AR2010101003346_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™