The Educational Experiences that helped shape her future culminated for Stephanie Bickler Thomas at an orphanage in Zambia.

A member of the UW Bothell Human Rights Club, Stephanie chose to research how HIV/AIDS affected street children on a study abroad trip to the African country. There, a nun at the orphanage led her to the medical wing and introduced her to Jonathan.

“He was 7 or 8 years old, but he was so small and sick he didn’t look any older than a preschooler,” she recalls. “He was screaming in pain. Both his parents had died of AIDS. I held his hand and cried and talked to him, but he couldn’t even respond.”

Stephanie made a small donation and kept in touch. When she returned to campus, she helped organize a march for World AIDS Day. After she graduated, she co-led another study abroad group to Ethiopia, and her first full-time job was with a nonprofit that promoted international education.

Months later, she received a photo in the mail of a healthy, happy little boy she didn’t recognize. It was Jonathan. A note from the nun said they’d saved Stephanie’s donation to treat Jonathan to an outing after he recovered.

“I think I learned more life lessons on my two study abroad trips than I did by going to class or by working,” says Stephanie (society, ethics and human behavior ‘11), who works for United Way of Snohomish County. “The person I am today stems from the UW Bothell experiences that reaffirmed my passions.”

These life-changing experiences, often made possible through donor-funded scholarships, exemplify the experiential education and career preparation that UW Bothell is known for. A recent Washington Post article noted that “one in three U.S. mid- and large-size companies have international operations or serve multilingual clientele. Job candidates can set themselves apart by showcasing the global assets they bring to the table.”

And, most UW Bothell students don’t even need to leave campus to benefit from global experiences. We are leading the way to incorporate innovations like collaborative online international learning (COIL) into the curriculum, says Natalia Dyba, director of global initiatives.

Because they cannot afford the cost or have family or work responsibilities, only one in 11 UW Bothell students are able to study abroad, Natalia explains. COIL brings other cultures into the classroom through technology, such as one course that paired UW Bothell students with conservation ecology peers in Peru via Facebook to examine parallels in the ecosystems of the Cascades and the Andes.

“The experience of engaging with other cultures is not only powerful to help you learn about others, but equally powerful to help you learn about yourself,” Natalia says.
“The person I am today stems from the UW Bothell experiences that reaffirmed my passions.”

STEPHANIE BICKLER THOMAS, SOCIETY, ETHICS AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR ‘11

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