Education graduate, sportsman and teacher Mr Pat Webster, 24, held throngs of school students spellbound at the University's annual Social Justice Youth Forum at the Brisbane Campus earlier this year, explaining how and why he delivered second-hand cricket gear donated by Brisbane schools, to children in Bangladesh.

He has launched a documentary he made of the experience, Happiness is a mindset, to be used as a teaching resource. “It has a clear social justice theme, but is also about personal growth, showing that it is important to get out of your comfort zone and explore the world,” said Mr Webster, pictured above with students in Bangladesh. “It is about sharing a love of cricket. For me, it also shows the insignificance of material wealth in comparison to spiritual wealth.”

Mr Webster, who recently completed a tour of the UK with the Australian Universities Rugby League squad and has begun teaching at St Augustine’s College in Cairns, said his visit to Bangladesh was inspired by fellow ACU National graduate Mr Rob Thiel-Paul who left an excellent job in Brisbane to coach cricket at the Bangladesh Institute of Sport.

“I couldn’t for the life of me work out why he was even contemplating this option,” Mr Webster told forum participants. “I ended up dropping him off at the airport and it was there where a conversation with him totally changed my outlook on life. He told me how he wanted to make a worthwhile contribution to the world, and how he imagined seeing ‘50 kids playing cricket on a dustbowl, using a stick for a bat and a rock for a ball’. He then suggested that if I wanted to, I could organise for some second-hand gear to be sent over.”

Inspired, Mr Webster collected 20 kits of used gear from many generous private schools in Brisbane, and $2,000 from ACU National to help transport them to Bangladesh.

“As we went from school to school in Bangladesh, I was constantly blown away by the friendliness and warm hospitality of the locals, and the kids’ enthusiasm for life. The conditions seemed shocking in contrast to what I knew, but strangely, these were some of the happiest people I had ever met.”

“The cricket gear was a big hit. It was of little value to us, but it meant the world to these kids. It made me realise just how insignificant some of the things that I, and plenty of other people in Western countries worry about. The Bangladeshi people seemed to value the important things in life. Too often, we let fickle issues like looking good and having to have the latest high-tech phone or iPod worry us and get us down.”

“In Australia, we can follow our dreams. The reality is that we unknowingly choose mediocrity too often, settling for second-best. Unlike people in developing countries, we have opportunities to control our destiny and improve our way of life.”

“Unfortunately, the people of Bangladesh don’t have this luxury, however, my experience of seeing them living with virtually nothing, but perhaps happier than some of us, was mind-blowing.”

Proceeds of donations for copies of the video, Happiness is a mindset, will go to Melanoma Patients Australia. Please email websterpa@sac.qld.edu.au for more information.

Wider worlds

Mr Rob Thiel-Paul, 26, who inspired Mr Webster to donate second-hand cricket gear to schools in Bangladesh, completed a Graduate Diploma of Secondary Education and Graduate Certificate of Religious Education at ACU National in 2005.

“Bangladesh is a massive cricketing nation,” said Mr Thiel-Paul. “You grow up watching England play India, and everybody wants to go to England to play, but going to Bangladesh was an opportunity to see a really different world, to live in a 99 per cent Muslim country.”

He described life there as “chaotic” and “crowded”, punctuated by quiet times of reflection during blackouts, and warm, welcoming, friendly people. For someone born in the rural NSW town of Tamworth, it was “mind-bending”.

Now back in Brisbane, married and working as a physical activities officer for Queensland Police, Mr Thiel-Paul remains philosophical about Bangladesh. “You do something today that leads you to tomorrow,” he said. “I’m really glad I went.”

Countering apathy

Queensland Governor Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC also addressed ACU National’s 2007 Social Justice Youth Forum, which included workshops with the St Vincent De Paul Society, Rosies Youth Mission, Lifeline, Caritas, Amnesty International and many other charitable organisations.

Ms Bryce welcomed the opportunity to take part in the forum “for the expression of ideas and aspirations for the engagement of young Australians in the operations and complex questions of social justice”. She urged participants “to look towards the untidy, uncomfortable corners; to face the ethical and humanitarian crises at society's margins; to counter our apathy and fear of the big issues” and to urge others to do so with them.