

Solidarity Article – April InTouch magazine.



It's so hard to put the whole volunteer experience into words. It was all-consuming, inspirational, uplifting, exhausting and eye-opening. Without a doubt one of the most worthwhile things I have ever done and I would certainly love to go again.

I am teaching in St.Finbarr's Boys N.S. in Bantry, [Co. Cork](#) and I gave all the classes a short presentation about my time in Africa- slideshow of photos, songs, a display of local crafts and instruments, a football made from banana fibre. The children seemed to love it. The contrast could not be greater, as St.Finbarr's is a school very much in the 21st century, having embraced the use of iPads and has every resource one could wish for.

Nurture Africa's aim is to nurture the mental, physical and emotional growth of Ugandan HIV/AIDS infected and affected orphans and vulnerable children by providing health care, education, food, clothing and shelter. During my July placement I taught in three different schools. We went to the schools in teams of six and throughout the day taught English, Maths, Science and P.E. lessons with a teaching partner. I learned so much from my teaching partner, a wonderful trainee teacher, Róisín Kelly, from Sligo. Each Friday we gave a workshop to the Ugandan teachers as part of "Making Corporal Punishment History Campaign". Corporal punishment in Ugandan schools has traditionally been commonplace. It

was banned by government circular in 2006, but has not explicitly been made illegal under statute. We certainly had some lively debates and discussions during these workshops. The Irish teachers demonstrated positive reinforcement strategies as alternatives to corporal punishment and promoted "best-practice" teaching methods in the different subjects.

We also visited other schools doing library outreach, presented First Aid & Substance Abuse Workshops and got to do some building, which was great fun.

We, the volunteers, were given the amazing opportunity to go on home-visits, with a Nurture Africa staff member and meet families who are on the HIV Community Healthcare Project. It was such a humbling, humanising experience to sit with these families and listen to their stories. I will never forget them and since returning I have continued my connection with some of the families by partaking in the sponsorship programme.

We got to relax a little during the weekends and explore some of the stunning Ugandan countryside. We went white-water rafting on the Nile, visited a rhino sanctuary and went on safari. I was overwhelmed by how lush and beautiful the countryside is and I could understand why Churchill called it "The pearl of Africa."

As you can imagine the experience was such an intense one that I formed a very close bond with the other volunteers, especially the group that I lived with. We had plenty of laughter after a hard days work. My room-mate was an absolute tonic- Erica Grainger from Douglas, who has been living and teaching art in Tokyo for the past number of years. We had a little routine going when we'd wake around 6am and one would say to the other, "Another day, another dollar...Oh wait, we're not being paid!" In a way we had to have plenty of laughs to counteract the challenging, difficult moments. We were constantly stimulated by all the new sights and sounds around us.

In August all the volunteers on the July placement met up in Dublin for a debriefing. It was great to see everyone again. I felt the whole thing was so well organised and we were given such support from the Nurture Africa co-ordinators.

I feel so grateful to all those who enabled me to go on the trip and supported my fundraising. My schools that supported me greatly with fundraising were St. Marys and Ballinacarriga N.S. Dunmanway, Co. Cork. It was certainly not an individual endeavour, but a team effort. I will treasure my experience in Uganda and hope one day to return.

Breda Herlihy.

2-3 week placements are available in July and August.

For more information on volunteering please go to www.nurtureafrica.ie or call Kevin @ 01-5424177