



EXPERIENCES OF A VOLUNTEER IN LAMU

BY PIERS BIRTWISTLE



It was a balmy 90 degrees when my flight touched down at Lamu airport off the northern coast of Kenya, just sixty miles south of the Somali border on Valentines Day just after midday. This was to be my home for the next two and a half months. I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to do down here and if indeed there was going to be enough to keep me occupied; little did I know. My lovely friend Alice Murphy, whom I had been working with at a Mother Teresa home in Ethiopia and is the First Secretary to the Order Of Malta Embassy in Kenya, had introduced me to Dr. Nurein who is in charge and one of only two doctors who works in the huge and massively under-utilised King Fayd hospital on the island. Alice also gave me an introduction to a Spanish girl called Maria who runs Anidan, a local orphanage. I quickly found myself a job at the hospital working on a food supplement programme for HIV sufferers (or clients as there are referred to here). This involves measuring their height and weight and then working out their Body Mass Index. Based on this information we work out if their weight is normal, in which case we do nothing, or if it is below weight, in which case we provide them with high energy and high calorific foods to get their weight up. They are never overweight. When you are being treated for HIV you are on a drug called an Antiretroviral (ARTs). For this to be effective you have to have a healthy body weight.

I also work as a scrub nurse in the operating theatre helping in such operations as caesarean delivery, tummy button to pubic bone cut, scrotal trauma, breast infections, torn arm ligaments and cataract removal. I feel very proud to be working with such first world machinery supplied by the Order of Malta, like theatre lights, air conditioning units, delivery tables, autoclaves etc.

When I finish work at the hospital, around 5pm each day, I walk to my house, which is about 100 metres from the hospital. It is owned by the Ministry of Housing, but is on loan to the Order of Malta who have completely refurbished in preparation for the arrival of volunteer medics to come and work at the hospital. I am lucky enough to be their first guest. Then I set off for the orphanage, which is about a 45-minute walk away. There I teach English to 11 to 18 year olds. My first class starts at 7.00pm and I finish at 9.15pm. Then a Maasai security guard walks me home across the mangroves. With the constant security threat from Somali pirates they take security very seriously here.



I get home around 10pm and am fast asleep by 10.15pm – exhausted, but fulfilled and I can honestly say I have never been happier.

BABY TREVOR



We are pleased to report that Baby Trevor continues to thrive. Our most recent visit to see him was on Easter Saturday and we were met by a healthy boy of 15 months. He continues to eat well and is growing fast. He is not yet walking, but he appears to be developing well in other areas. He is alert and aware to all that is going on about him. He no longer suffers from regular fevers and sickness and his parents are delighted at his progress.

We continue to keep in close contact with the Monegasque Association of the Order of Malta, who made the operation possible through their generosity and support.

MALTESER INTERNATIONAL



**Malteser
International**
Order of Malta Worldwide Relief

Malteser International, the Order of Malta's Worldwide Relief, continues to play a central role in providing assistance to the people of Kenya in many different ways.

The Nairobi Slums Project continues to provide testing, diagnosis and treatment for HIV and Tuberculosis in eight slums of Nairobi. With a catchment of 3million people the impact is enormous. The medical professionals in the Health Centres are greatly assisted by the team of 48 Community Health Workers who visit the very sick patients in their homes and spend much time ensuring that all the patients are taking their medication, as well as making sure that community is aware of the symptoms of the diseases and where treatment is available.

Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV. This is a new project funded by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). It is based in two areas of Nairobi, Eastlands and Langata. The work is to ensure that mothers who are HIV+ know how to prevent their children from contracting the disease. This can occur during pregnancy, labour, delivery and breastfeeding. Without treatment, around 15-30% of babies born to HIV-infected women will become infected with HIV during pregnancy and delivery. A further 5-20% will become infected through breastfeeding.

Assistance to the people of Marsabit District of Northern Kenya. This project will be based around the town of Illeret on the eastern side of Lake Turkana close to the Ethiopian border. The project is currently in the planning stages and it is hoped that it will begin in July 2012. The focus will be on markets, livelihood, transport (to connect markets and livelihood), water (harvesting of rain water, dams etc...), energy (small scale), education and schools (only one primary school in Illeret) and health awareness. This area of Northern Kenya is prone to drought and was one of the worst affected in the 2012 drought and famine that hit the Horn of Africa. The hope is that the people of the region will become better prepared to help themselves when the areas is affected by the next inevitable drought.

CONTACT DETAILS

ADDRESS: Sovereign Military Order of Malta Embassy, Box No 1556, Karen 00502, Nairobi, Kenya

DONATIONS: www.justgiving.com/orderofmaltakenya

TELEPHONE: +254 724 642 852

EMAIL: kenyaembassy@orderofmalta.org

WEBSITE: www.smomkenya.org