

## **Testimonial from Jo Latham, Speech & Language Therapist**

I went to KCDC in Uganda for 4 months this year, January-May 2016.

I am a trained SLT mainly working with mainstream school aged children in London UK prior to going to Uganda. Throughout training and post training I had always wanted to work abroad for a time and use my skills to train others and support those who do not have the same access to healthcare as we do here in the UK. I heard about KCDC after attending a study abroad day with Communication Therapy International and their links with MAITS (Multiagency International training and support). I contacted the founder Fiona Beckerlegge and after an initial skype conversation and then a meeting in London I was hooked and keen to go!

So after some deliberation and planning I quit my permanent job, left my flat and prepared to go to Uganda. I had previously been in Uganda in the eastern side during my gap year, some 12 years ago so I had a little idea of what Uganda was like but I soon found that a vast amount had changed since I had last been there and the west was very different to the east.

Having gone to Uganda with a suitcase full of assessments and toys and with a basic idea of what kind of things I may do I quickly learnt that planning too much may not always be a good thing. The centre had plenty of toys and locally made activities and the assessments I had been given to take were not as useful as I thought they would be. The children we also were seeing were not my usual caseload such as pre-school special needs, children with cerebral palsy, down syndrome and those with profound hearing loss. I learnt to quickly think on my feet and to re-evaluate what was needed and go back to communication basics which I found enjoyable.

As part of my being there a local nurse, Rehema had been recently employed to work with me to help interpret for me and to also be trained up as my assistant and to carry on therapy once I had left. This use of resources and skills were such a useful asset for the centre and for its continuing success in seeing children with speech language and communication needs. Rehema worked hard, learnt quickly and was very proactive often pre-empting what I was going to say to parents and saying it before I did she was a natural! I couldn't have done so much without her and the centre has a very skilled worker in her.

I loved working in the clinic with the unpredictable sessions and the ever stream of new people (unless it rained!). I also loved going to families houses and seeing how they lived and how they worked and trying to work out how speech and language could fit into their everyday lives. We also went on outreaches where families would drop in for sessions and we went into schools to help teachers support their children with special needs. We also ran training sessions in one school and highlighted what speech and language therapy was and how teachers can support all children in the classroom to access the language of the classroom. This was met with success and interest from the schools and a realisation that with some children they can communicate; it just may not be in the way that is expected i.e. through communication boards.

I was also fortunate enough to be put in touch with two visiting therapists from the UK who were dysphagia trained (difficulties with feeding and swallowing). I shadowed the therapists for 2 days in Kampala and re-learned skills such as positioning, feeding utensils and modified diets. I then took this back to KCDC and with Rachel the OT we set up a feeding clinic where we saw children mainly with cerebral palsy who were having difficulties either with feeding, putting on weight or were generally malnourished. We were able to support parents to position their children, think about the utensils they were using or how they were using their fingers to feed and to help regulate the amount of meals the children were having per day. We quickly saw great improvements with feeding and moving on from sucking to chewing and some children we saw were putting on weight and doing well.

Having spent 4 months in Fort Portal and at KCDC I was sad to leave but I knew that Rehema was going to carry on what we had started well and the centre could offer support to families and children with speech language and communication needs. I like to keep in touch with how everyone is doing at KCDC and support Rehema remotely when she needs help. I would love to go back and see how the centre is doing and would recommend anyone to go visit, volunteer and support the centre however they feel would be appropriate.