



**BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE WORLD:  
2 WEEKS IN THE PEACE CENTRE UGANDA**  
Summer 2015

DULWICH COLLEGE | SHANGHAI |  
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## Foreword

*By Anthony Reich*

I was in the very privileged position on this trip of spending time with a different student every evening and chatting with them about what they had experienced that day. These chats were the initial brainstorm of what then became the blog posts that you are about to read. I don't like the term 'blog'. It is an unattractive word, carries no feeling and sits awkwardly on a page. And perhaps that is why I don't like it. Such a word doesn't fit at all with the beautiful, thoughtful and heartfelt reflections you are about to read.

I am in awe of the students we took on this trip, of how they embraced the experiences so fully and lived each day to the max. Their writing captures



those experiences with a combination of intimacy and intensity. Due to their impact, we wanted to create this book so that these messages of hope can be shared with our community. It is only through spreading the word that change can be brought about. As Srijan, one of the students on our trip, so eloquently shared in a post trip email, "It is possible to help. I guess each of us alone will never be able to do enough to help all those in need, what matters is that we try to get as many people as we can to be aware of the realities that people in this world face. Because, as Peace and Golden beautifully demonstrated in Bukinda, everything's better when it's done together!"

These are the stories of some teenagers who went to Uganda in the summer of 2015 to give what they could, and arguably, ended up receiving a great deal more in return.



## Return to Bukinda

*By Amelia Lee*

After a tremendously long journey to Uganda, we finally reached Bukinda. Everyone, and especially those of us who went on the Uganda 2014 trip, was extremely excited to see what our hard work had created. We were not disappointed. The Peace Centre has a lively and homely atmosphere with the sounds of children's laughter coming from every corner. The rooms are very comfortable and clean. It was special to realise that what we had helped to build was now a home to 20 children who had not had one before. I guess if you have enough determination and love, then nothing is impossible.

Once we arrived and had got down from the bus, all of the orphans with big smiles on their faces excitedly ran to us and hugged us. The welcoming did not stop there as the children had prepared a short song to welcome us. Every one of them sang with the utmost passion. The way they could create such powerful music with only their voices amazed me. I will remember that song for many years. "We are here, our visitors, dancing for you..."

The rest of the day was spent playing games and bonding with the children. We ran, we chased, we danced, we sang, we duck-duck-goosed. Though we were exhausted at the end of the day, it was the best kind of exhaustion.

I'm so happy to finally be back here in Bukinda. It may sound clichéd but it's a dream come true to finally be getting to build relationships with the children, the children that I have been thinking of and imagining since I became involved in this amazing project almost two years ago in October 2013. How special to be here, to meet them, to get to know them, to hug them. I'm so excited to see what the next few days have in store for us! A dream coming true is something special indeed.

*"The Peace Centre has a lively and homely atmosphere with the sounds of children's laughter coming from every corner."*



*"If you have enough determination and love, then nothing is impossible."*





*“It’s great to be here, to be doing and not just talking.”*



*“I couldn’t help but reflect that we take our education for granted.”*

## “Thank you. You have tried.”

*By Alex Todorov*

Day two in the wonderful Bukinda was no less exciting than the first. We got started on the projects we came to do and continued to play with and get to know these extraordinary kids.

The Peace Centre children get up at 5am everyday for personal study, before they do chores and head off to school at 7. And we think the IB works us hard! We started our day a little later (!) and went for a long walk on the hills and in the valleys surrounding Bukinda. It was a tough walk in the baking heat, but very beautiful. We passed many kids on the way, some tending to livestock, others hiking to collect water from the standpipe, and others just playing amongst the banana plantations. These kids should have been in school, but their families must not be able to afford the fees... even though they are only a few dollars for a whole term. I couldn’t help but reflect that we take our education for granted.

The first task I was assigned today was chopping wood to be used as fuel for the stove. I was shown how to do it by Henry the cook and it didn’t seem too hard, but it turned out to be quite difficult and pretty exhausting. I had to choose between accuracy and power when bringing down the axe, whereas Henry didn’t have to sacrifice either and made mincemeat of the logs. The locals tried to be encouraging about our failings, and smilingly commented, “Thank you, you have tried!”

The team were then split in half and some began work on designing murals to bring some colour to The Peace Centre’s freshly white-washed walls, whilst others were hoeing, digging and evening out the land in preparation for building a chicken coop. I was in the latter. Manual labour and equatorial heat are not the best combination, making it far from easy. But it was rewarding the see the land gradually level out, and to accomplish it all as a team.

In the afternoon as the children filtered back from school we began to play various games with them. I decided to try and teach some boys Rock Paper Scissors but it was surprisingly tricky. Satisfyingly, I managed to explain it to a ten year old boy called Zion through the mysteries of non verbal communication, but I needed the translation skills of Isaac, Peace and Golden’s oldest child, to explain the intricacies of what’s actually a rather bizarre game (why does paper beat rock?!) to the rest. As I did this, other students played with the kids, chased balls, tickled, danced, sang and just continued to bond with and get to know them.

It’s great to be here, to be doing and not just planning, or talking.





# Breaking Down Stereotypes

By Sophia Foerst

Africa is very different to what I expected. First of all, in South-West Uganda at least, there is no shortage of food. In fact I'm very happy about the food; there is lots of it and it's delicious. Every meal has lots of variety, even if it is quite carb based. For lunch and dinner we have six or seven of the following dishes: potatoes (done in a many different ways - including chips!), plantain, bean stew, rice, green beans, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, groundnut sauce, tomato stew, chapatti, goat, chicken, lamb or beef stew, posho (maize meal), pumpkin, swede and carrots, and this is always followed by lots of fresh fruit. The pineapple especially is so fresh, sweet and juicy, it's delicious. Mr Reich explained to me that the locals don't always eat with such a wide spread on the table, and that they pull out all the stops for visitors, but that there isn't really a shortage of food in this fertile part of Uganda. And this leads nicely on to the second thing that surprised me, and that is how green and pretty it is here. It is a long way from the dry, dusty, arid stereotypical Africa that you see on the news. There are so many shades of green all around, with crops growing on many of the hills. It is very beautiful and a long way from what I'd imagined. Finally, I have been surprised at just how friendly everyone is. I'm not sure where I got the idea from, but I had for some reason imagined that the people here would be different, and a lot less open. I'm so glad I was wrong about this as the welcome we have received has been very special; everyone is so happy and warm and it's really lovely.

Today we needed some paint, as well as some food supplies so I went into Kabale town about half an

hour away with Mr Reich, Andrea (Chan) and Eunice, one of Peace's sisters, to see if we could get all we needed. The town itself was a little more like I imagined Africa to be, and very different from the countryside, as it was loud, dusty with very bad roads full of potholes, and all rather manic. The hardware shop we visited was very disorganised with layers of dust over everything, it was a wonder the shopkeepers were able to find what they needed in the mess. To get to the fruit market we had to pass a string of butcher's shops. There were rows of carcasses hanging up, and piles of chopped meat and innards sitting on the wooden counters. It didn't smell too good and I wondered how it stayed fresh. We then saw a live goat tethered nearby and I couldn't help but think that his days were numbered.

On the journey home, we stopped at a popular roadside market stall to buy carrots and cabbages and we were at once mobbed by a gang of at least 20 vegetable vendors, all pushing their sales through the windows of the car and bartering with us - even for things we didn't want to buy. I must have had about six people at my window alone all pushing vegetables in. It was crazy! One of them, who assumed that Mr Reich was my dad, went to the front window to speak with him and told him that he liked me and wanted to buy me for three cows! Thankfully, Mr Reich told him I wasn't for sale.

After lunch Amelia and I were assigned to teach the five young primary school children who do not go back to school in the afternoon. Their English is

very limited as they are a couple of years behind at school as they had not been attending consistently before they joined The Peace Centre. We taught them colours and tried to turn it into a game as we noticed they have short attention spans. Their normal learning style is to just to sit and listen, and then repeat everything the teacher says, so they seemed to love that learning could be fun too. We did the same for some simple addition and subtraction activities for maths. I made some paper origami boats, which we then used in a practical demonstration of adding and taking away that the children could do themselves. It was not easy as whilst some were very keen and wanted to learn, others were distracted all the time and were a bad influence on the others which was frustrating. I did feel a sense of satisfaction though, at having taught something useful to someone else, but I did think to myself, I'm not becoming a teacher. I realised that everyone has different styles of learning, and learns at a different speed, so really, it just seems like too much work! They have good holidays though...

I was just about to try and post this, but I guess I'll have to finish it tomorrow... We've just had a power cut!

*“The welcome we have received has been very special.”*



*“It is so green and pretty here - a long way from the dry, dusty, arid, stereotypical Africa that you see on the news.”*



# AIDS is for life.

By Michael Cheong

Today we spent loads of time with the local children, first at the primary school, and then at TPC. At around 11am, after a couple of hours of painting and digging, we set off for the primary school. The school consists of two long buildings with about five classrooms in each, all equipped very minimally with just old wooden desks and chairs. The floors are dust and there is no electricity. There are up to 70 students in some of the classes. They were elated at the knowledge of our arrival, and as they saw us walking through the compound hundreds of little faces crammed around the shutters at the windows and peered out hoping for a glimpse of the visitors. Visitors are widely respected in Uganda and much is done to accommodate them and make them feel welcome. It is almost ritualistic. I cannot help but wonder if we treat all of our visitors, especially people we don't know, with such respect and care.

The school's campus was dotted with rusting metal signs that are aimed to ensure the kids' future safety. Most of them carried messages of abstinence or of warnings to stay in school. The ones that I remember read,

"AIDS is for Life"  
"There is No Safe Sex"  
"AIDS is Slow But Sure"  
"Don't Accept Gifts For Sex"  
And simply, "Stay in School".

It was very strange to see these weighty signs in a playground, where kids run and chase and laugh. They all reminded me of how different our lives are. It was very sobering.

But there wasn't really time for silent reflection as the bell was rung and the kids all ran out of their classrooms - some things don't change in schools around the world! They assembled before us in a parade of happy faces and we each introduced ourselves to the 450 or so kids, before Alex and Andrea, two of our school leaders from Year 12 in DCS, shared a short message. Alex used the analogy of being part of a sport team to illustrate how we must rely on our teammates to succeed, in the world he explained, teachers, guardians, siblings and friends help get us through life. He

***"The school's floors are dust and there is no electricity."***

wanted to remind them that they are never alone and that there are always people who care. Andrea then used a practical demonstration of her rubix cube (at which she is a master!) to illustrate the importance of persistence and never giving up in school. Many students drop out of school here, and have very limited futures as a result, so this too was an important message. We then sang songs before breaking up into smaller groups with the children. I was paired with Mao and Megan and we had about 60 or 70 seven or eight year olds to look after. With no real resources it was exhausting! I take my hat off to the teachers there that do it all day, every day!

After a tiresome afternoon of hoeing, shovelling and removing bush roots for a small playground, we settled down for an evening activity of reading books with TPC children. We had brought a lot of books with us, so it was great to be able to use them with the kids. There was a power cut and we had to use torchlights and paraffin lamps to illuminate the words on the pages. Some of the children found it difficult to read. The child I was paired up with, Zion, did not know how to pronounce a number of words. I personally do not enjoy reading, but to see many happy faces illuminated by a faint glow of light reading books, I felt that we take so many things for granted, and sometimes, all we need is a bit of light and some peace to realise that we are all human.



***"It was very strange to see weighty signs on topics like abstinence displayed in a playground where kids run and chase and laugh."***





*“I’m enjoying having my eyes opened on a daily basis.”*

## Much Ado About Nothing

*By Sanraj Mittal*

In the past 24 hours I have started to become more aware of several cultural differences between the one in which I live and the one I have become a part of.

Bed time last night proved to be particularly eventful. My roommate and I were in the process of winding down when we noticed what, at the time, seemed like the biggest bug we had ever seen in our lives careering around the bedroom and seemingly relishing dive-bombing us in a frenzy of calculated attacks! What proceeded was a combination of shoe throwing, shouting for help, and hiding under the blankets. After about 15 minutes of cowering in fear, Golden wandered past the door and heard the commotion. “What is going on here?” he enquired. He walked in, saw the problem, sauntered towards our malicious (!) attacker and simply grabbed the bug with his bare hands, just plucking it directly out of the air! And of course, being Golden, he was laughing all the while. “It is harmless,” he chuckled as he left the room, and turned and added with a cheeky smile, “Do you cowards need any more assistance? I thought you were men, not boys!” I cannot imagine anyone I know dealing with such a mammoth sized bug so nonchalantly. We tend to make much ado about nothing, and that has definitely become clear here in Bukinda.

Today happened to be laundry day. After last year’s trip I thought I would have this laundry thing down pat. Sadly, I was mistaken. Washing your clothes here involves scrubbing, rinsing, scrubbing, rinsing,

scrubbing... well you get the idea... our extremely dusty clothes in cold water, all whilst trying not to waste precious water. The TPC children laughed at my every attempt to wash my shirt. Whenever I thought the shirt or the sock in my hands was clean, I was greeted by a chorus of “no!” from the kids themselves, again amidst fits of laughter. This is one of many of their chores, which include washing the dishes, cleaning the latrines, sweeping the floors of the orphanage, looking after the younger children and sometimes even digging in the field to help cultivate crops for dinner. These are things that none of us ever do. We all have our washing machines and dishwashers and on top of that, many of us have Ayis that even use the machines for us. We don’t even have to turn the switch on! When I return to Shanghai I very much doubt I will be doing any of these chores on my own and by hand, but knowing that the children here have to do this on a daily basis will at least make sure that I don’t take a clean plate, a fresh pair of trousers and a clean toilet for granted.

A final major difference between western culture and life in Bukinda that I observed today is the alcohol culture. Back home, it is normal for adults, or even teens, to have a glass of wine with dinner or a drink or two on a night out. People are able to drink to relax, to drink in moderation. In Uganda, it seems as though you either stay sober or you are a drunkard. There is no in-between. This was brought to our attention in our cultural training sessions before we came to Bukinda, but even knowing it doesn’t quite prepare you for seeing it first hand.

Today while working in the middle of the day, a drunk man noticed the muzungus (white people/ foreigners) doing done manual labour and in his excitement, decided to serenade us for half an hour. No one took him seriously. In Shanghai, it is rare to see someone intoxicated in the middle of the day, but it is normal to see people having the odd drink. It is almost like the drunkards here do not take themselves seriously. Their predilection to alcohol is what defines them in the way exceptional kindness or expertise at a particular skill may define anyone else.

There are several differences between life in Bukinda and life in Shanghai. It is clear in the little differences in daily life like dealing with a “monstrous” bug and in the noticeable differences in lifestyle. I’m enjoying having my eyes opened on a daily basis and having various preconceived notions on life challenged.

*“Hand-washing clothes is one of their many chores.”*



# The Only Playground in the Village

By Riel Beaumont-Boulanger

On Friday morning we set about flattening the ground for the playground that we had planned to build for the children. We were working in the shadow of the building that at the end of last year's trip was only a frame of what The Peace Centre is now. Providing love, care and a home for twenty kids. It is strange, yet satisfying, to see how this is now a fully fledged home and no longer rusty red bricks piled up waiting to be cemented. Putting in a playground seemed incomprehensible at the end of last year's project.

This morning, before heading off for a night's reflection at a nearby island Eco Resort, our task was to install the swing for the playground. We had to dig four holes three feet deep - not an easy task! - and then carry sand, water, cement and small rocks to make a solid base for the swing. We don't want kids flying off into orbit because the base isn't properly secured! It was exciting to see the playground actually starting to look like a playground. A place that I am sure will be frequented by TPC children and most likely other children from the village for years to come. Putting in a playground is something that is new to the area. Now instead of only playing with a football on a scruff of land, they will have a place to play and laugh and enjoy themselves.

At around 9am that morning an old man walked down the hill onto the lawn in front of Peace and Golden's house. With him he brought a small girl who we later learned was called Angela. She had been brought by her elderly guardian to be enrolled in TPC. After he had done the entrance

interview with Peace, we discovered that he, a shoemaker who works in the locals markets, had found about her wrapped up in a blanket in the market when she was a baby. After taking care of her for nearly ten years he was aware that he was ageing and would not be able to take care of her for ever. It was already proving tough for him to pay her school fees and she was already three or four years behind in school, a ten year old in Primary 2 amongst six year olds, instead of with her peers in Primary 6. (This is commonplace here though... when we visited the Primary School last week we found an eighteen year old in Primary 7!) He had heard about TPC and seen the work we were doing with orphans and wanted to see if little Angela was eligible as he did not want to see her fall behind any more in school. There will be a home inspection next week and the old shoemaker's credentials checked prior to a final decision being made.

With the swing up, we boarded a bus and drove through Kabale town to get to the dock to board a wooden boat to cross Lake Bunyonyi to get to Governor's Island and the Eco Resort. The change of scenery from the village was quite nice. The calm, cool atmosphere of the lake was a refreshing change from busy life in the village. The lake looked amazing at sunset with a nice breeze coming off of it. I went swimming with Nicky, Aisha and Courtney, and Mr Reich got some good pictures of us jumping into the lake. We caught some good air time!

That evening we all sat around a lovely log fire and shared some reflections with the group about how this trip has impacted us so far and what has



*“It was exciting to see the playground actually starting to look like a playground.”*



*“Many of us talked about the warmth of the children, the speed at which they are learning English and their innate joy.”*

surprised us the most. Many of us talked about the warmth of the children, the speed at which they are learning English and their innate joy. Others shared about the things they take for granted back home when confronted with what little many in the world get by on. It was a good time of sharing. Being in completely unmodified nature like this is something that is rare coming from Shanghai which is busy, polluted and loud, and it was refreshing to be here.

It has been a really great week in Uganda; the travelling, the building, the developing relationships, the playing with the kids and the relaxation time have all been super enjoyable.





## Tears

*By Anthony Reich*

I'll be honest, I'm writing this with tears streaming down my face. They've started flowing and they just won't stop. I'm sitting on a hill on an island in Lake Bunyonyi, South-West Uganda, watching The Peace Centre children play, and I'm crying, and I'm not even sure I can verbalise why. But I'm going to try...

I guess I'm crying at the injustice of some children being cursed at birth by being born to parents who have AIDS; I'm crying that some of these children were simply abandoned, their parents walked out of the door and went away never to return; I'm crying at lost childhoods and innocence robbed; I'm crying at years of poverty and starvation; I'm crying at families destroyed; and I'm crying that these children have never played in a simple playground before. Playgrounds that are in every park and garden and street corner in England and America and China (Shanghai at least) and so

many other places in the world and seem like such a commonplace thing... But here I am watching children, some as old as eighteen and not even children any more, playing on a simple swing and slide for the very first time in their lives. Is it fair? It cannot be. It is not.

But I guess mixed up in these tears of anger, sadness, pain and confusion are also tears of joy. Joy that for just these few children, these twenty-three kids, that life of poverty and abandonment is now over. The trajectory of their lives has been forever altered and they now know of love and tenderness; they now do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from, or even if it will come at all; they now have a future filled with education; and they have a home, a new family and a sense of belonging. I'm crying as I can hear shrieks of laughter and happiness, and



as our Dulwich students who have been blessed with a different start to life, are playing with these Ugandan kids, and for just a brief moment, backgrounds, nationalities, past lives and even wealth do not matter at all. They are all just children and young people playing, laughing and having fun as one. A slide and a swing are a great equaliser.

So I think I am also crying tears of gratitude to everyone who has helped make this dream come true. This vision of a home for orphans in Bukinda was a seed planted way back in 2001, the dreams of idealistic young adults who made a pledge in the middle of the night with their adopted African parents, Peace and Golden, that one day it would happen. It took a great deal longer than we anticipated through false starts and disappointments, but as of 2nd Feb 2015, The Peace Centre opened its doors to its first



19 children, which has now grown to 23 and will continue to grow steadily, and this would never have become possible without the help of countless people who have helped turn a dream into a reality. Some of these people have given by coming on our school trip to Uganda this year and last, others have volunteered to sponsor orphans in TPC, others have given anonymously, some have given their time or advice, others - such as the workers in the orphanage - have given their vocations and their lives to caring for these children, and others still have given prayers and emotional support. To you all, thank you. Those two simple words just are not enough, but they are all I can give to you. That, and the idyllic picture and sounds of smiles and laughter and youth reborn and innocence returned on a hill, beside a lake in South-West Uganda.

The tears are subsiding now.

*“I’m crying at lost childhoods and innocence robbed.”*



*“The trajectory of their lives has been forever altered and they now know of love and tenderness.”*



## Thoughts from children living in The Peace Centre



*“Before The Peace Centre, I had no clothes and couldn’t go to school. I had no education. Now I want to be a builder. I watched the team build the chicken coop and helped gather nails for them. I can be a builder because of The Peace Centre.”*

*“The best thing is the food here because now I can eat sweet potatoes.”*

*“The showers are nice, because now I can be clean.”*

*“Being at The Peace Centre means I can eat, play and pray together like a proper family with my new parents Peace and Golden. I now have a good bed and books to read.”*

*“The Peace Centre has given me a new chance. I feel loved. I am safe now.”*



# A Home that I Can Call Mine

By Megan Hasenfratz

My eyelids started to flutter as my body gently woke to the sounds of the island's humming. The morning sun gave off a faint glow through the windows, blending perfectly with the light chirping of the pelicans which flapped around our wooden banda on the morning of this weekend retreat. It was the perfect time and place to flood my journal with the many memories I've made so far. Shortly afterwards, I went for a light jog around the island, taking mementos and simply enjoying the fresh air. The cool wind which brushed past my face reminded me of the cool night air I felt back in the village whilst star-gazing, and the overwhelming delight I have experienced so far this trip. It is so amazing how different environments can evoke the same feelings. In that moment I realised it does not matter where you are in the world, you will always be able to remember the memories you created and the bonds you've made with others. On my jog I passed a couple of grazing zebra which were truly beautiful to see.

Later on in the day, the Uganda crew hopped into a boat and we sped our way across to Bushara Island. A palpable sense of anticipation grew knowing that we were about to meet the whole Peace Centre crew who were all arriving from

Bukinda that morning. We had arranged for TPC children, staff, volunteers and board members to all join us for the day at the lakeside for a swim and a special community lunch. For all of these children, and many of the adults, this was their first ever time at this beautiful lake, despite it being so close to Bukinda. It is always exciting seeing people experience something beautiful for the first time, and frankly, I couldn't wait! We decided to give them a special Ugandan welcome, in the same style that they would give us. So we all assembled at the boat dock and loudly sang the songs that they had taught us. I'm not sure we sounded quite as melodious as they do, but it was a fun way to welcome them and they didn't need any encouragement to join in and sing with us!

We then made our way to the swimming area. Clothes were being tossed in all directions with the Dulwich kids eager to get into the water. However, The Peace Centre children lingered around the edge of the jetty, unsure of what to do. Encouraging words from Peace and other bystanders gave the children a feeling of comfort and with our supportive arms waiting open for them they slowly entered the water. Still apprehensive about swimming for the first time, the children clung tightly to the edge of the dock or tightly to us as we held them in the water. Regardless of their inability to swim, it did not stop them from learning and enjoying themselves splashing about. There are no words that can describe the amount of joy that flowed through my veins after seeing the humongous smiles spread across the children's



faces. Can you remember the very bizarre sensation of swimming for the first time? That wonder, mixed with fear and trepidation, at the sudden realisation that you cannot stand on this strange unworldly liquid...? That was what we were seeing first hand and it was truly magical to witness.

Suddenly it was four o'clock. Our island adventure that had consisted of swimming, jumping off ropes, dining on delicious food, and playing with The Peace Centre kids was drawing to a close. I had had so much fun playing with TPC children on a swing and a slide, all of whom had never played in a simple playground before, that I just didn't want it to end. Going down the slide cuddling some of the little kids as they experienced that mini adrenaline rush for the first time was a joy and a privilege! So at four o'clock all sixty-five of us boarded two wooden boats to make the journey back to mainland. The boat journey was incredible, as it was spent singing and laughing and sharing: this is community, I thought. But amidst all the excitement, I stopped for a moment and looked

*“There are no words that can describe the amount of joy that flowed through my veins.”*



*“The bonds I have made here have ensured I have a new home.”*

around. It seemed the vibrations from the children's voices caused the waves to ripple more vigorously. More excitement bubbled up as the children sang louder and louder, trying to overtake the other boat.

The bonds I have made here have ensured I have a new home. Not a second home, but another home. An entirely different kind of home to the one I have already. But a home that I can call mine. A home where I feel I belong. Where I can love and am loved. I am overcome by everything that has happened with these children. They have undergone horrible situations and... and... and yet they are still able to open up and bond with every single one of us. And love us too. They are loving us just as much as we are loving them. What an honour that is.

Looking to the future, I may not remember the exact words they have said, or the precise experiences we share, but I will always remember this joy and this overwhelming sense of love they make me feel.



# The ‘Futurescope’

By Srijan Banerjee

Today was a special day for all of us here at The Peace Centre. The local culture encourages the community to attend church every Sunday and so, wanting to integrate ourselves with the community, that is what we also did. Although I went through this experience last year, it felt like it was completely new. One by one the Reverends clambered up to the stage, and recited an exert from the Bible or shared a prayer. As many of the speeches were in Rukiga, we could understand little, but it was a good opportunity for personal reflection. I was pleasantly surprised by the beautiful hymns sung by the choir, all backed up with resonating beats booming from the African drums, and the sweet tunes helped us to better understand the local beliefs. We had learnt beforehand that today's service would be longer than most, due to our visit, but we didn't really know what this meant until Golden came up to us with his iconic smile and said, "When you hear the word, thanksgiving, you must go out of the church and help carry the pews we are donating". We gave him a confused look, but before any of us could ask him what he meant, the service had already begun. And so we kept our ears open for the magic word, and when we did, our odd group exited the church and

*“What a special family TPC has created. I count myself fortunate to be a member.”*

within a few minutes entered again with four large benches, to a gleeful crowd. We lumbered to the front of the church with our heavy benches as the congregation sang happily. These were a gift to the church from The Peace Centre to thank them for supporting us and the children we care for.

Among the many messages shared in church, I understood one fundamental idea which appealed to all the locals: religion was an essential part of their culture, it provided them with hope, and for the most part helped them lead happy lives. I saw the exceptional role that Christianity plays to lift up the spirits of all the people, whether they were rich or poor, young or old. The local church has played an important role in supporting Peace and Golden to integrate our kids into the local community.

As I mentioned before, today was a special day. Important guests were invited to Peace and Golden's humble abode, and a "short programme" was held. Our guests included the Bishop from the Diocese (a very important local man), Mayor of the township, numerous Reverends, the local police, Headmasters from neighbouring schools, the Board of TPC, the staff of the Peace Centre and numerous others who are fundamental to our projects. The program started with a song from the children, followed by Ms. Barnard's nonsensical yet amazingly catchy "family anthem" that she's taught us all to sing. After our introduction, we had speeches from Golden, Peace, the Reverends, our teachers from Dulwich and many others. Perhaps the most memorable speech I heard today was by one of the Reverends. Although I can't recall his



exact words, I remember his distinct use of the term "futurescope" to explain to us the importance of The Peace Centre and the impact it has on the lives of the children living in it. From what I gathered, if you look carefully you can see your future through this amazing instrument, and because of The Peace Centre, the children now have a bright future, one which gives them the chance to become "lawyers and doctors and engineers and teachers" as put by the Reverend. The afternoon was drawn to a close by the soothing, grateful words of Peace and Mr. Reich who both talked of the large family that TPC has created, and not just for local orphans, but for all of us Dulwich students too. What a special family to be a part of. I count myself fortunate to be a member. Although many things were lost in translation today, one idea was clear: the local community will be forever grateful to us, just as we will be forever grateful to them.

After our program, we all went to the field to play with the children, and upon our return to the house, the children had discovered their newest source of fun: the swing that we installed on Friday was now stable enough in its foundations to be played on! The children had never even seen a swing before our trip to the lake on Saturday, so they were overcome by excitement! The children were ecstatic around the swing. Their joy brought a surge of energy, which I soon learnt was actually quite hard to control. Miss Yu and Mao had established a rule for the children, ten swings each and then they were to go to the back of the line. I think it is safe to say that this rule worked fine, but it seemed the children had turned into a crowd hyperactive toddlers,

*“What a special family TPC has created. I count myself fortunate to be a member.”*

overflowing with eagerness to try the swing! I'm not sure I have ever had such a crazy experience before, the whole time my feelings jumped from happiness to dread as the swings came within an inch of each other... all amidst cries of laughter and ecstasy. It is great to see the children so happy.

Today was a long and important day. We continued to integrate ourselves into this community as Peace and Golden showed what great hosts they are, and as I reflected on how different the future can be for some of these children now. I am keeping my fingers crossed that the 'futurescope' will be right, and that we will see these children grow into people who can make a difference in this community, and who will be equipped to pass the message of 'love, care and a home' onto the next generation of orphans who deserve a future filled with hope too.





# Soil, Sandpits and Sponsors

By Courtney McAtee

We started the day by levelling the ground beneath the swings, which was quite hard because we had to level it on a slant. Also, it was a warm day so we had to keep hydrated. So that the swing area did not turn into a mud pit in the rainy season, we were also building a large 4m by 4m sandpit to surround the swing. We managed to level the ground, build edges so the sand wouldn't spill out and we collected water so the soil underneath would be compact. For the edge of the sandpit we needed to collect large pieces of timber, each well over 3m long and quite thick. We carried the wood down the hill on our shoulders and then sawed it to the right size. It was a long day of physical labour, perhaps our longest so far. Some days we have not managed to see much difference in the land despite hours of work, which can be a little demoralising, but today was quite satisfying as we could clearly see a huge

difference with the land levelled and the new large sandbox surrounding the swings. It felt good.

After finishing all that, we wanted the soil to stay in place so we had to collect some water to sprinkle onto the dusty soil before stamping it firmly down. Collecting water was the hardest part of my day. When I arrived at the water pipe loads of people were waiting to fill their jerry cans at the local standpipe, and seeing the long line it made me realise that this is a daily reality for so many people. After they filled it, they placed it on their head and walked off. This all looked simple until I tried it! I filled my 20 litre can and then shoved half a plantain (a hard, unripe savoury banana) into the top to stop the water spilling out. Most people would carry it on their heads, so I tried this first but it put a lot of strain on my neck and head so that method didn't last

*“It was a long day of physical labour, perhaps our longest so far.”*

long. I then decided to try putting it on my shoulder, like how we had carried the wood earlier. I found that hard to balance as the water sloshed around so much inside the can that it was very destabilising and would just slip off. In the end I just carried it with my hands underneath the bottom of the can. 20 litres of water is about 20kg, so these cans are heavy! If that wasn't hard enough we had to cross over streams, jump over gaps, climb up steep hills and go through

*“Some of the children were crying tears of happiness when receiving emails from their sponsors.”*

people's back-gardens and fields to carry it back home. From the water pipe to The Peace Centre is probably around a 1 kilometre walk, so it is safe to say that by the end I was exhausted. I can't imagine how people can do this all day, every day, when all I have to do is turn on a tap to get water.

Later on in the evening there was a talk to The Peace Centre children about human rights. Some of them

knew they had a right to clean water, education and healthiness, but some of them seemed surprised to hear about it. Most of them would have come from backgrounds where they wouldn't go to school or have enough food per day. I see a lot of children around Bukinda who don't go to school but instead spend their days looking after cows and goats, or collecting water for their family. The Peace Centre children are blessed to now have access to lots of food every day, as well as an education, and I got the impression that they felt that tonight.

The last thing we all did today was to help the children to write to their sponsor families. I was with one of the youngest kids in TPC and he didn't fully understand the role of the sponsor yet, except that they are a person/family living far away who support him and want him to do well. He got his first letter



from his sponsor today and he started to understand more about it. He calls his sponsor Tata (dad). Four children got their first communications from their sponsors tonight and, especially for the ones a little older, it was pretty amazing witnessing their reactions to receiving this. The majority clearly do understand and appreciate the role of the sponsor: that of a long distance adoptive parent/family. Some of these children were just bubbling with excitement, and even crying tears of happiness when receiving these emails. If any sponsors are reading this blog, know how much of an impact your communications mean to these children. We all got to see the extreme joy and massive smiles first hand tonight and it was very special. Thank you for supporting them!



*“The hardest and happiest moment of the day was constructing the trampoline.”*



*“It just made me realise how many things, in a day, that we take for granted.”*

# A Simple Trampoline

By Priyanka Menon

Today was a day of hard work but also accomplishments. We started the day with a filling breakfast as usual. Throughout the trip we have all tried to begin the morning with a perfect hard boiled egg, meaning when peeling the shell there should be no scratches or dents in the egg, or egg stuck on to the shell, resulting in a very smooth and well, perfect egg. A perfect egg at breakfast is a good omen and means we will have a great day! Today was someone’s lucky day, Costa (Andrea) peeled the perfect egg, so I guess it was the universe wishing him a Happy Birthday!

The hardest and happiest moment of the day was constructing the trampoline - all 75 kg of it that we had transported all the way from Shanghai - but it turned out to be much bigger than I imagined. There were quite a few problems that occurred when building it. This included missing screws, missing holes in the trampoline legs, one side of the ground being higher than the other, and finally the whole thing warping! Argh! The whole process started with Megan, Isabel and I having to level out the ground and this meant using sticks with wooden panels on the bottom and hitting the ground to make it as flat as possible as it was not even. A tough job in the morning heat. Assembling the trampoline was initially easy, until we flipped the page of the manual and it told us to insert the screws in the small holes that were around the base of the trampoline. Two problems: 1. There were no holes whatsoever. 2. There were no screws. We decided we would hurdle that obstacle later and construct it anyway. This was fine, until the whole trampoline warped and bent in on itself after we had attached the springs. Not good. A short break and a quick phone call later and the local Metal Worker arrived and welded it

all together. Take that trampoline! We also asked him to make ten huge 2 foot long ‘tent pegs’ so that we could securely fasten the legs deep into the ground for added stability. We finally finished the job at 5pm just as some of the older children were returning from school. It was so rewarding just seeing the children’s bright and happy faces as they looked upon this bouncy, springy contraption of happiness. It is no exaggeration to say they had never seen one before, and the wonder in their eyes as they saw their friends bounce amidst so much laughter was super special. And then when they had their first turn on it! I have never seen such ecstasy on faces before... all accompanied with laughter and giggles and pure joy. It made me feel so lucky for what I have.

Just think that this was the first time any of the children and even the adults had ever been on a trampoline or swing before. Something so simple, something that we find very usual, but that was so new to them and made them so happy and excited. It just made me realise how many things, in a day, that we take for granted. This could be something so small as having a varied wardrobe of different clothes, a warm bed or AC in our rooms, or just having the luxury of showering with hot water, and again having a swing-set in our back yard. Or what about being transported in a car and knowing we have access to excellent health care? And that is before we even think about ‘bigger’ things like international travel and seeing the world. I know that from now on whenever I feel that something in my life is not fair or that I want something I can’t have, I will just think of all these children. I hope I never lose this sense of perspective.

For me another amazing part of the day was cutting potatoes in small strips to make chips, homemade

chips, that turned out to be delicious. It is quite amazing to think that the women start their day right after we have had breakfast for lunch and start cooking again when we have ended lunch to be ready in time for dinner. They need that much time to cook dinner as there is a lot needed especially since the children have about double our normal serving, and second of all because their cooking resources are quite basic so they have to start the fire as they don’t have any gas to cook anything, it all done with wood and charcoal. Every day some of our Dulwich team help the ladies (and Henry the cook) in the kitchen to prepare for meals and to clean up the dishes afterwards. We all enjoy the cooking, but no-one enjoys the dishwashing in cold water! Our task today was to cut eggplants, potatoes and to shell peas. We then helped Cynthia with making the chapattis and we all decided that on Friday night, our last night here, we will make as many chapattis as possible as they are amazing! Aisha, Courtney, Gracy, Amelia and Sophia decided to come and join us... as I said, everyone loves to help in the kitchen. Maybe because they feel that they have to do ‘quality control’ tests to make sure the chips and chapattis are tasty enough for general consumption!

To end a great day we all looked at the sky as the sun set for the night. We looked at it, not in the way where we just notice the fact that the sky is a beautiful mix of blue, purple and pink, but in a way where we realised that this huge, vast thing connects us all, wherever we are from and wherever we are in the world. I think that will comfort me when I have to leave here at the end of the week.

I guess the egg this morning was right, we did have a perfect day.



## Thoughts from children living in The Peace Centre



*“I am happy to be at The Peace Centre as there is electricity. Before I came here I had no electricity and it was dark and scary at night.”*

*“The Peace Centre is my family as I now have many brothers and sisters to play with.”*

*“I always wanted to be an English teacher. But I had to give up on that dream as I had to drop out of school to dig for food everyday in the field. Now that I am at The Peace Centre I know that I can be an English teacher one day. I know it will come true.”*



*“Before I came to The Peace Centre I was suffering and I saw a future of suffering. Now I want to be a Doctor.”*

*“I feel cared for in The Peace Centre. When I was sick everyone made sure I was comfortable. Everyone is loving to one another.”*







## Hugs

By Aisha Taylor

Today the whole team went to visit Bukinda Secondary School, which is the school that the older children from The Peace Centre attend. The walk was about two and a half kilometres and was all uphill along rocky roads and paths. This completely shocked me as there will be children that live even further that have to walk even longer distances, and I was already tired about 200 metres into the walk! When we arrived at the school there were groups of children sitting on grass chatting and staring at us as we went to greet the headmaster. I don't think they often get groups of 22 foreigners strolling into their compound. There was no programme arranged for our visit today, which was extremely surprising, so we just got to freely mingle around. Promise, one of the children from The Peace



*One child shared, "I have drawn The Peace Centre as I now have a home."*

Centre, ran up to us and took us into her class because they all wanted to meet us. She was very happy to have us visit her school. When I stepped into the classroom I couldn't believe that it was completely bare. There were no display boards and the walls weren't painted. There was a blackboard with a sponge as the rubber, and that was it. The complete opposite of what we are used to seeing at Dulwich and not for the first time since I've been here, it really made me think about all we have. The children loved us introducing ourselves and they would repeat all our names. Promise took us on a tour of the school and we went into the library. It was quite small, but there were a few categories of books. Although the majority seemed to be textbooks with very few novels and seemingly little emphasis on reading for pleasure.

In the evening, Andrea and Sophia organised an activity where the children drew on T-Shirts with special fabric markers that they had ordered on Taobao before we left. What a great activity! We all paired up with a TPC child to support them. It was incredible to see how such a small thing meant so much to all of them. At the end of the activity they all had to share what they had drawn and they were so proud to tell the rest of us all of their creations.



*"They have achieved so much and come so far, they have shown me how to love and loved me in return."*

Some of the designs were brilliant, and some rather funny. One girl decided to draw a goat on her t-shirt, another a table. Many drew footballs and a few drew The Peace Centre logo. One shared, "I have drawn The Peace Centre as I now have a home." There was a sense of achievement and happiness that was booming off all of the children. I think this will be a fun activity to do again next year.

In general, being with the children has been an absolute dream for me. They are all so friendly and caring. It is crazy to think that in such a short period of time I have grown so close to all of them, and I really do love them. I want to adopt them all! When I play with Joan and Moses I forget everything else that is happening in the world and I am completely happy. Their laughter gives me a warm and fuzzy feeling inside. Teaching them the word hug has been my biggest achievement because now whenever I say 'hug' they both give me lots of cuddles! When the children come home from school it is the best thing ever! From then on I lose track of time so easily and it just flies by. Even though I'm very tired at bed time, I'm also sad as it means I have to say goodnight to the children. I cannot believe we are leaving Bukinda on Saturday; it is going to be so hard to leave them all. I feel like they are now part of my extended family, so on one hand that is wonderful as I now have so many more brothers and sisters, but on the other it means that saying goodbye to them all is going to be gut-wrenchingly hard. They have achieved so much and come so far, they have shown me how to love and loved me in return. I will never forget them.



# The Joy of Reading

By Isabel Joseph

This morning, I got to build library. I am extremely fond of reading and much prefer it to watching TV, so I was very happy to see that the orphans were being given the opportunity to read. We had brought out many books with us, both this year and last, and Megan and I were given the task of categorising them so that the children can easily find a level appropriate book when choosing one to read. We had got two nice wooden bookshelves made, and whilst we were busy with this task, a couple of others in the team were sanding down and varnishing the eventual home for these books.

As I was going through the books I thought back to the first night of reading with the kids. I was snuggled up to little Joan, who can barely read. Without The Peace Centre these orphans would



never have even dreamed of being able to have so many books in their own home, and yet here I was sorting through a bunch. A lot of the books I recognised as ones I had enjoyed when I was younger and it warmed my heart to know that these kids also have the opportunity to enjoy the same books that have kept me company late into the night. As I was flipping through the books' covers I noticed some messages, for example from a grandmother to a grandchild. It is so amazing to see books that are not only being passed on from generation to generation but also from country to country.

After lunch I decided to do some more weaving with Megan. I have been weaving in the afternoon for the past four days. It is quite relaxing as we are able to weave and chat with the kids mingling around us trying their hand at it, however, it can also get quite repetitive. Not something I think I'd enjoy to do for a living. Today was the day I finished my bag, I had to finish sewing the zipper and the sling. I felt a feeling of great achievement when the bag was done as it had taken so much effort and time. I cannot even begin to imagine how people do this

for a lifetime. A local man had been coming to help us make the bags and I got to thinking about how much he earns per bag, and it's not very much at all. When you consider that just these small Palm tree woven purses take a few hours each to make, you have to ask how much this makes his time worth. Again, not very much at all. All that time and effort and creativity to earn so little. It makes me sad to think that people have many skills that are not appreciated simply because they are living in a different environment and do not have the opportunities to better themselves.

In order to better understand the predicament that the children here find themselves in, and so that we can continue to build The Peace Centre to suit their needs best, for our night activity today we helped the kids answer some questions about their lives

*“Before I came to TPC I saw a future of suffering. Now I want to be a Doctor.”*

prior and post joining TPC. I was helping Fortunate, a 13 year old girl, answer the questions. The first question was about what their lives were like before they came to live here. It was emotional when Fortunate was trying to answer the question, as she was getting quite sad and upset as she thought back to those days. She wrote, “Before I came to The Peace Centre I had to wake up at 5am and go to bed at 11pm and do heavy work all the time in between. Every day I will be digging in the fields. Now I have enough time to sleep. That is, we now sleep at 10 and wake at 5:30. Before I came to The Peace Centre I was suffering and I saw a future of suffering. Now I want to be a Doctor.” Fortunate's own words say it all. How exciting it is to be with these kids and to see the difference TPC is making in their lives.

One other thing that Fortunate wrote was that one of the best things about The Peace Centre was that it allowed for leisure time, which meant she could play, sing and read. It bought a smile to my face to know how much this small, humble library we have built, will be treasured by children thousands of miles from where these books were first treasured by others; and that they'll bring laughter and joy to where it is needed.



*I smiled knowing that these books will be treasured by the children, and that they'll bring laughter and joy.”*





# Visitation Reflections: Life Before The Peace Centre

By Andy Clapperton



Having spent two weeks in the wonderfully joyful and bustling environment that Peace, Golden and all the other staff maintain here at The Peace Centre, joking with children who seem to be constantly smiling, and who have amazed me with their graciousness, at times I have almost forgotten where these kids have come from.

But yesterday served as a sobering reminder. I went to do a couple of home visitations to learn more about two children whose guardians had brought them along to the centre in the hope that they might gain a place here.

The first was Christopher, a young lad who is three years behind in Primary School. Both his parents died about two years ago, and he has lost all his brothers and sisters to HIV/AIDS. Despite the tragic losses, it transpired that the boy was provided for by loving grandparents, who sent him to a private school rather than the cheaper government options. We strongly believe that children should not be taken away from a caring family environment, even an extremely poor one, and as such it is likely that Christopher will remain where he is.

The second visitation of the morning was rather different, however. With no name or address, we travelled up into the mountains towards a small village looking for a man known simply as the ‘crazy alcoholic’. Everyone knew who we were asking after, such was his notoriety, and before long we surely came across him on the roadside, raging drunk.

En route to his house we asked about his daughters. We already knew that Francesca, the older of the two was twenty years of age, as it was her who had brought



*Both of the girls were shedding tears as they talked about their mother’s sudden death and their father’s descent into alcoholism.”*

her younger sister Hannah to The Peace Centre in the hope that we would take her in, and they could both escape the beatings of their drunken father. The old man was not very forthcoming when we inquired about his daughters. Eventually when we asked him what his youngest daughter’s name was, he said he couldn’t remember. I don’t have the best of memories, but I was absolutely flabbergasted – for someone not to be able to recall the name of his daughter of eight years was beyond imaginable.

When we arrived neither of the girls was at home. We spoke to a neighbour and it became clear they regularly have to flee the house and she sometimes gives them a little food and a floor to sleep on. Francesca only completed primary school just before her mum died, and since then has dropped out and works the fields to provide food and clothes for her little sister. There was also a suggestion that she ‘is forced to do things she does not like’, in other words she has resorted to prostitution as a last recourse in the fight for survival. There was a lock on her bedroom door when we visited the house, which we later discovered was there to



prevent her father from pocketing her earnings and blowing them all on cheap firewater.

Talking to the girls when they returned to The Peace Centre the following morning was upsetting, with both of them shedding tears as they elaborated on their mother’s sudden death and their father’s descent into alcoholism. Their reticence belied a resourcefulness and courage brought about through sheer desperation. Francesca was anxious to set her younger sister free from the chains of a life of being neglected and abused. In fact it was only in order to protect Hannah that she herself had not already left home.

*“Though saddening, it is important to know Hannah and Francesca’s story – it reminds us that there is a way out.”*

Indeed, one of Hannah’s teachers had commented that he “would be happy to see that repulsive man dead” so that, as a total orphan, Hannah could be taken into care elsewhere. Having a father was worse, in her case, than not having one.

It shook me. Most of all it shook me when I was reminded that little Collins, Alex or Lucky, already enrolled in The Peace Centre, enjoying soft beds, electricity, running water, regular meals, and, most importantly, the loving family environment, came from similarly harrowing backgrounds. I had read all of their stories before. I had edited them and posted them on our website, even. But to see these little bundles of joy each day being playful, being cheeky, just being children, you would not know what they have been through, and that is testament to the marvellous staff at The Peace Centre.

Though saddening, it was important for me to get a glimpse into Hannah and Francesca’s story – it reminded me that there is a way out.

We have in theory accepted Hannah for a place in The Peace Centre, subject to further checks and the necessary paperwork for custody. When Gloria brought her back from her HIV/AIDS test at the Health Centre, Peace handed me the carefully folded doctor’s note without saying a word. My heart missed a beat, as the sombre expression on her face suggested it was going to be positive. I had to read it about three times to make sure, before allowing myself to breathe a massive sigh of relief – Hannah is HIV negative, and hopefully has a long and successful life ahead of her.





# Our Last Full Day in Bukinda

By Mao Nakano



With today being our last full day in Bukinda, we quickly scurried to do the tasks that needed to be finished. As such we were all deployed to various parts of the compound to get jobs ticked off, before starting the sad task of having to pack.

Priyanka and I finished off the elephant measuring chart we had painted by the bathrooms and we can't wait to see the children's faces when they see it! We were guessing that they will be measuring their heights every single day, to see if they had grown at all in the night without getting sick of it.

Another thing that needed doing was finishing painting the base of the walls outside. The paint was

*“It is impossible for me to imagine my life without Uganda, Bukinda and The Peace Centre.”*

not as runny as I wished it was, and it would take ages to spread out! Before starting the activity, I predicted it will maybe take an hour or two but it turned out to take the whole afternoon. Other students finished off organising our little library; painting and labelling our world maps; adding the names of TPC children to our ‘family trees’; creating a birthday balloon chart, and a couple even got to go on a home visit to help the Social Worker assess the eligibility of a child who had applied for a place in TPC.

To finish the successful trip off, we had a small farewell party to thank everyone for their endless efforts in supporting us, and welcoming us as part of their community and family. We had all bought some gifts for different people in the community and all the staff received the lovely hoodies that we have. I think they will look very smart wearing them and it was an evening of broad smiles as people received gifts. Peace and Golden had arranged for everyone in our team to receive a beautiful hand woven wicker basket, all personalised with our names on them. I am not sure yet what I will keep in mine, but I know it will take pride of place in my home and will always bring back wonderful

memories of this amazing trip. Although it was promised that no tears will be shed today (they were supposed to be stored up for tomorrow!) after only about a minute of the ceremony, a teardrop dropped onto my cheeks. Just the thought of not seeing all my Ugandan friends and families for a while triggered so many tears, and I had no choice but to let them fall.



Although the teardrops were mainly from sadness, I would also say that they were tears of joy. I am so glad and grateful that I was able to come to Uganda for the second time, to spend time with these beautiful children and to become a part of their lives. It was great to see The Peace Centre complete, which was only a construction site when we left last year. I feel really blessed about having been part of the team both this year and last year, in improving the children's lives, and in - unintentionally - improving my own in the process. It is impossible for me to imagine my life without Uganda, Bukinda and The Peace Centre. They have all become so linked with my own life and I know I am a lot richer as a result.

The highlight of the day, and perhaps even the whole trip, would have to be the triumphant dancing after the ceremony. Now it truly was a



celebration! Most of us had shied away from the dancing at the beginning, feeling a little self conscious I think, but then soon after, we all joined in to be part of it! Surprisingly, I had immense fun dancing up and down in Bakiga style although it was incredibly tiring... The dance is a crazy mixture of jumping, stamping, arms flailing all about, but yet it is all so rhythmic and harmonised. The joyous drum beat created by the children (even the small 6 years olds have amazing rhythm!), the energetic dance by everyone, the resonating shrieks and calls by the adults, and lastly the triumphant singing all combined to create the cheerful, ecstatic atmosphere. I was quickly taken up into a trance by this hypnotic ritual and was crazily dancing - I probably danced more this evening than the whole of my life!



*“Our last evening in Bukinda would have to be one of the best of my life – a true celebration of love and friendship.”*

The last night in Uganda was not so sad but rather exciting, with the incredible music surrounding us and drifting upwards into the twinkling night sky. It was great to see everyone enjoying their time, and our last evening in Bukinda would have to be one of the best of my life. This truly was a happy celebration of love and friendship that will last a lifetime full of smiles and joy. The tears will have to wait for tomorrow.





# Thank you for the Best Gift Ever

By Gracy Park

I woke up by the sound of Mr. Clapperton's drumming. As I climbed out of bed, I realised that it was the last day and finished up packing my bag. When I was leaving my room, I noticed Promise, a 15 year old TPC girl, tearing up because we were leaving. I reminded her that it wasn't goodbye, but my words made her cry even more. As I walked back to my room, I took a last look at the all the paintings we have done and felt a sense of accomplishment. I picked up my bag and slowly walked towards the stairs that leads to the canteen. I looked up and Amos had his little smile on, wanting to help me carry my bag. His little smile always warmed up my heart and that's when I realised I built a special connection with him and that his smile meant so much to me. This reminded me of when we were writing reflections about The Peace Centre together. Amos talked about how he was not happy about his life before he was at The Peace Centre. He said that his life was not good and he did not smile a lot, but now at The Peace Centre he is always happy and smiling. Something as simple as having a bed and the ability to go to school make their lives so much better. We think education and having a room to sleep in is normal but after being with the kids, you realise that we take so many things for granted.

After eating breakfast, we took a group photo and all the kids wore the shirts that they had made a couple of nights ago. Amos stood in front of me when we were taking the picture and I couldn't stop smiling when I saw his shirt. He drew a football, a book, himself, and me. When we took the picture,

everyone was smiling and having such a good time. I felt a sense of belonging and that The Peace Centre was now my second home. I walked up the hill, a hill that I'd crossed a billion times everyday the whole trip, with Amos by my side. He was holding my hand a little tighter than he normally did and I knew it was because he knew it was time to say goodbye. We walked up the stairs and looked down at The Peace Centre.

It was time to say goodbye and none of us were ready. Two weeks seem like such a short amount of time but we had grown a bond that couldn't be broken. Everyone was heartbroken to leave and we were all filled with tears. As I was hugging the kids and all the adults, I came across Amos hiding behind the door. The kid that always smiles was crying, and this really got to me. I tried to comfort him but he didn't seem like he wanted to be comforted. It was time to go and I gave him a big hug. Once I was in the bus, I looked for Amos through the window. He was hiding behind one of the older orphans, still crying. This precious little 6 year old boy had so many emotions in him and I wasn't ready to say goodbye to him. When I came to Uganda, all I thought about was helping the kids and changing their lives. But as I was leaving The Peace Centre, I realised that I received so much more from these kids, particularly from little Amos, and that they had changed my life. It's hard to explain how exactly, but I know my heart isn't the same as it was before.

The bus ride to Queen Elizabeth was quiet and most of us were thinking, sleeping or gently crying.

Very different to the bus journeys when we arrived where we were all laughing and singing together. When I was thinking, I came across the thought that leaving the orphans doesn't need to be sad because it doesn't have to be goodbye. I know I'll see them again, one day.

We reached the simple hotel in Queen Elizabeth National Park, had lunch and relaxed playing cards and chatting. It was a very peaceful place and a good place to come for reflection. We wandered down to the lakeside and saw more than ten hippos wallowing in the muddy water. The closest were as near as ten metres and it was a special moment being that close to nature.

After eating dinner, our team gathered in a circle and reflected on the last 36 hours of our trip. A lot of the words my fellow students said really touched me. When Mr. Reich read the letter Brian, a 17 year old boy and the first child TPC sponsored, wrote for us I started to tear up again. I did not get to know Brian very well because he sleeps at school and only comes to The Peace Centre on the weekends, but it felt like I was so close to him. He thanked all of us for supporting him and choosing him to be part of The Peace Centre. He used the word 'gift' saying, "thank you for choosing me as your gift, I love you." It seemed like the most appropriate word to use. Gift. And I guess that's how I see all of these children, and this whole experience, as a gift. The best gift anyone could ever receive. Thinking back to Brian's words of thanks, I felt like I should be the one thanking him.



*"I felt a sense of belonging and that The Peace Centre was now my second home."*



*"Everyone was heartbroken to leave and we were all filled with tears."*





## So Many Reasons to Be Happy

*By Nicky Pellegrino*

It's incredible how close you can get to a group of people in just two weeks. After having eaten breakfast, our team walked up the small hill next to Peace and Golden's house, walking past everything that we had done over the past couple of weeks. With the children by our sides it was impossible to control the avalanche of emotions flowing over us. We had all realised how life changing this had all been and the goodbyes were long and difficult telling the children and staff at TPC that we would meet again one day. My family and I sponsor a young girl called Norah, and as I looked my little sister Norah in the eye I told her I would be back as soon as possible. Struggling to compose myself and trying not to cry, I told her to work hard in school and to take care of her brothers and sisters in TPC. I never imagined it would be so hard to say bye to little Norah.

As I boarded the bus I realised very clearly just how important The Peace Centre is to me and how I will always carry it with me wherever I go. The small yellow home, with its dark red roof and many people waving and wishing us journey mercies disappeared into the background as we drove off, to be seen again in June 2016.

As we left Bukinda, I reflected on how this trip was not just about giving, but also about receiving. Receiving from the children, the staff and the whole community. Peace and Golden did everything possible to make the two weeks as comfortable as possible for all of us. Their hospitality really was incredible, and as we left, we were not just a group

of visitors who had stayed with them, but we were family.

Our tired team reached Queen Elizabeth National Park and relaxed for the afternoon. In the evening we all sat around together and enjoyed a time of group reflection, sharing our feelings and challenges from the past 36 hours. The emotions began to rise in us all again. The main ideas shared were about how special the dancing and singing were last night, and about how amazing it is to think that we have only known these children for two weeks and yet we are so close. I used the word 'family' to describe The Peace Centre team, and the word 'sister' to describe little Norah and people might think these words are exaggerations or being used incorrectly, but they truly are the words that best describe how close we all felt, how close I felt to everyone there. And because of that, despite all the sadness and tears of goodbyes, there are many more reasons to be happy.



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# Farewells Are Not Just Unavoidable, They Are Vital

By Mandy Yu

No one likes to be apart from loved ones. No one enjoys the heartache and tears of saying goodbye, especially when you have no idea when you'll see that person or those people again - or what will happen between meetings. However, as hard and painful as they are, the reality is that saying goodbye is an unavoidable necessity of life. And I dare say, an important and vital part of life too.

I had just sat down on the bus, which was unusually quiet and subdued, with none of the normal laughter and singing. Sitting there I was being forced to contemplate the fact that we were leaving Bukinda, we were leaving these precious, resilient children, and that our day to day lives of Shanghai was what soon awaited us. Seeing so many of these normally such happy and bubbly kids with wet tearful eyes was just too much for me. As the bus pulled away, the dam burst and my own tears began to fall. I wiped them away, but they continued to stream down my face. No amount of



wiping could dry my cheeks. We'd only spent two weeks together. What had happened in that short time that turned us all into such emotional wrecks at goodbye time? Being a team of expats, living thousands of miles from home nations and friends and family, you'd have thought we'd be accustomed to this.

Was it because of that night we all spent dancing and singing? It was a night without moonlight but the sky was covered by millions of stars. A power cut hit us after dinner and suddenly everyone disappeared into the dark. I started to dig for a torch in my bag when one of TPC kids started to sing. I'm not sure who it was, although my guess would be Promise, she loves to sing! "There is something today..." Suddenly more and more voices joined in. I found my torch and turned it on. With just the light of a single torch, we danced and sang. Our kids joined in too, and our teachers. One song after another our singing and dancing carried on well into the night, under the light of a single torch and millions of stars.

Or was it because of that "Goodnight"? There is a girl called Joan, she is one of the littlest ones. Every afternoon when she got home from school she would come and sit beside me and we'd read or weave bags together. Once time weaving she got a cut and came to me show me to ask for help, using the local language. I didn't understand at first, but then I saw the small wound and her Bambi eyes said everything. I gently cleaned her cut and put a plaster on. I felt that if I was too strong, her tiny

*"It is so hard to say goodbye to children who've already said goodbye forever to their own parents."*

arm would easily snap. After we finished cleaning the cut, she gave me a huge thank you smile and it warmed my heart. Later that night, I was standing on the balcony when I looked down towards her room and saw her lying on the bed through the window. I met her eyes and quietly whispered, "Goodnight". She responded with that warm smile and closed her eyes and fell asleep. She looked so happy, peaceful, and safe.

Going back to that final bus journey, we all tried to say goodbye with smiles and hold back the tears, but our resolve lasted all of thirty seconds. It is so hard to say goodbye after all those fun times; it is so hard to say goodbye after you've developed such close bonds; it is so hard to say goodbye to children who've already said goodbye forever to their own parents.

But as I said before, as hard as it is, we have to say goodbye. Why? Because we need to return to our community and tell this story, we want the world

*"We need to return to our community and tell this story – about the strength of these inspirational kids."*

to hear about the strength of these kids and their inspirational success stories. We need to continue to drum up support to keep The Peace Centre in funds. We need to return to our studies so that we can get jobs and continue to look to the future. Life goes on.

So we have to say goodbye. Just like parents have to leave teary children at kindergarten, or on their first day of school, or even their first day of University (but then it's the teary parents), saying hard goodbyes is a part of life. But we prefer to think of it not as goodbye, but au revoir, see you later.

Because we will return. And in the mean time, we will miss you, wish the best for you and think of you often, safe in the knowledge that you are under Peace and Golden's tender care. Look after each other kids, through the good times and the bad. We'll see you next year for more smiles, laughter and no doubt, more tears.





# The Value of Water

By Ben Morrison

This being the first day that we had spent away from Bukinda, the differences - both internal and external - were very noticeable. The first that came to me was the increase in insects in this part of Uganda. An amusing wake up call from the 'Clappertron' made me swiftly aware of the itching red spots covering my legs. There had been very few flies and bitey bugs in the village, and this increase was most unwelcome. I enjoyed a shower for the second day in a row. After living in the village for two weeks, trying conserve water, I took a (cold) shower only when it was essential, and so now showering everyday with hot water was the most bizarre idea ever. I think our ready and unlimited access to clean water, with a constant choice of both hot and cold, is the thing that I have previously most taken for granted. How easy it is, how commonplace. And yet that is not the case in Bukinda. It is not exactly scare in Bukinda, or in TPC at least. There they are fortunate to have a tap and a large storage tank, but it can run out (and did run out on a couple of occasions), and it does need to be used with consideration. But the majority of homes in rural Uganda don't even have taps and are forced into trekking to collect it and carry it back from standpipes - some having to go considerable distances. The idea of wasting water, perhaps running the tap unnecessarily as I brush my teeth, is something that I now feel more strongly about. I hope that when I return home, with the abundance of water around me again, I do not forget what a privilege this is.

The biggest difference, however, and what disappointed me the most, was not being able to wake up to all the kids' lively personalities and the hustle and bustle of joy and happiness that the children brought that I had become accustomed to over the days. That I dearly miss.

After breakfast, all students from Years 9, 11 and 12 clambered aboard one bus, where we lathered ourselves in sun-cream and bug repellent, to go chimp trekking, whilst the Year 10s boarded another to go on a game drive. We would switch activities for the afternoon session. Once we arrived at the lush ravine that is home to 25 or so chimps, we met our tracker named Adolf. He had a very amusing and engaging manner and went through the ins and outs of the ravine with us as well as the dos and don'ts. "No doing poo poo in the ravine so animals don't come to taste it" and "If a chimp gets irritated by your presence and decides to come and beat you with a stick, do not fight back, just stand still and accept the blows" were the two that I most remember. So with the bizarre thoughts of monkey attacks and beatings in our minds, we set off. Within the first hour of walking we saw many monkeys, yet no chimpanzees. We did not know whether we would - there is a 50% chance of finding them - so we did not feel too disheartened, but we carried on enjoying the walk and the green ecosystem of the ravine and saw many interesting bugs and hippos.

During this chimp free gap my mind started to wander, and I thought back to Robert, the orphan that always chose me for our afternoon and evening

activities, and what he had told me while I was saying goodbye to him. "Please come home again" was the phrase that rang in my head. "Please come home again." This meant a lot to me as it showed that not only did I believe that The Peace Centre was my home, but so did he. This brought a big smile to my face. I never thought that in just two weeks I would become so close to a child in TPC that we might consider ourselves 'brothers', and yet this happened. It was at this point that we spotted a chimpanzee swinging down from a tree which brightened my mood even more.

I am becoming aware that I will need to adjust back to my own culture when I return to Shanghai and this is something that I never considered before. I have never had to readjust back to my own culture after a trip or holiday, but it will be needed now as I have seen, and lived, so much that is different to what I knew before. It has challenged how I think and how I want to be. And it all comes back to love. A strong love that grew in two short but amazing weeks. Why should I waste water, or waste opportunities, when those I love don't have them? I mustn't. I must honour that love by being grateful for my privileges and by making the most of every day.

I wish the absolute best for The Peace Centre, for all those kids living there, and especially for Robert. I will return one day so that I can be a part of this family again. So that I can 'come home'.

*“Why should I waste water, or waste opportunities, when those I love don't have them? I mustn't.”*



*“Our ready and unlimited access to clean water is the thing that I have previously most taken for granted.”*





# I Will Try My Best

By Andrea Costa

I woke up hearing the wonderful bird songs just outside of my room. The nature has been amazing at Mweya Lodge in Queen Elizabeth National Park... some people had a hippo grazing outside their room last night, a warthog just wanders around scoffing down the grass, there are hundreds of birds and bats that zip all around us, and we have a stunning view of the lake where so many animals come to cool off and drink. I exited my room and walked leisurely towards the pool, where I relaxed at the edge by gently merging my feet in the cool water. Other people from the team arrived and similarly relaxed, or perhaps read a book on the sun loungers. It was very unusual to have a lot of time to relax because in the village there was always something that needed to be done, or always kids to play with. There certainly wasn't time to relax like this. I had been missing the village and its lifestyles. I had been missing the people from The Peace Centre, I had also been missing the work that always made me exhausted and normally ended with me being covered in brown dust. I guess it was very surprising to me to realise just how much I miss the hard work in Bukinda.

*“I did not think of the staff or the children at The Peace Centre as my friends, I thought of them as my family.”*

*“The truth is that I don't know when I will be back in Uganda, but I really hope it will be soon.”*

In the late afternoon our team went down for an exciting boat ride to admire the beauty of the channel that was set next to our resort which offered many animals to watch, explore and love. During the course of the boat ride we encountered buffaloes lying down on grass, mud or refreshing themselves in the chilly water; we saw crocodiles of different dimensions - some small ones just under a meter, others were over 2 meters long - who would lie on the short hot grass to sunbathe, keeping their mouths open to release body heat; there were also many hippos just cooling in the muddy water's edge too, including a protective mama and her small and rather cute baby; and mixed in with all of these were many different types of birds such as kingfishers, African eagles, egrets and marabou storks. The boat ride was a wonderful way to relax for a couple of hours as we gently cruised through this natural habitat and got to experience Ugandan wildlife in its own home.

As we took our bus back to the hotel I found myself reflecting back to The Peace Centre. I am genuinely surprised how I have made really strong bonds with the staff and children at The Peace Centre in only 2 weeks. Two weeks. Think about it, it's really not that long and yet I felt so attached to some of the people there. It's hard to explain how this happened. I had gotten particularly close to one boy at The Peace Centre, a boy called Alex. Alex and I were made to be together. He had chosen me for any reading or writing activity that Bright, the friendly and excellent teacher that helps at TPC in the evening, did with us at night. I felt honoured

that he always chose me for these activities. I'm not sure why he chose me, but I guess it meant he felt relaxed and comfortable with me, and we came to be very close during those times we spent together. I'm not really sure of Alex's background, but I did wonder if he had had the chance to relax and just make a good friend before, enjoying time reading, colouring and making t-shirts together.

As I walked up the steep slope that ran from Peace and Golden's home up to the main road on that last morning in the village, a rush of emotions ran through my body. We had loaded the bus, we were ready to go and we were saying our final goodbyes to The Peace Centre and its amazing people. I did not think of the staff or the children at The Peace Centre as my friends, I thought of them as my family. Peace and Golden as my Uncle and Aunt, and the children as my brothers and sisters - especially Alex. The thing that made me cry just as I was going to enter the bus, was when Alex came and gave me a huge hug, and then looked at me in the eyes with sorrow in his and said, "Costa, please come back". I did not know what to say. I just hugged him, hugged him very hard and told him "I will try my best Alex."

The truth is that I don't know when I will be back in Uganda, but I really hope it will be soon. I know I'll miss my friend, and that he'll miss me. I hope I can get to be a part of his life, and that he can always be a part of mine such was the strength of the bond that was made. Two weeks! It's amazing what can happen in such a short time.







*“Love, care, generosity, patience, kindness and a smile can make the world of difference.”*



## What's In Your Futurescope?

*By Kat Barnard*

Everyone has a future. What each individual's future holds, however, will of course be different. Some people meet their potential, some exceed it and some fall short of it, but what really causes these vast differences? Education, food, shelter, family, culture, religion, money, careers and materialistic possessions are the obvious answers and while these things will certainly have an impact, we must not forget about those ideals less tangible. Over the last two weeks I have noticed how the things that cost nothing can change someone's future. Love, care, generosity, patience, kindness and a smile can make the world of difference for those in the world who don't have anyone in their life to offer these things. We have all been privileged to see how the staff, children, sponsors and extended family of The Peace Centre have now changed the direction of the lives of these twenty-three children; children who not so long ago, had nothing and a rather bleak future. In most cases they had very little to eat, barely any clothing to cover them, almost no chance of a better future and no one at home to love them, care for them or provide for them.

Each and every one of us on this trip has come away having received so much more than we gave. We have learnt from our role models Peace and Golden who demonstrate love, kindness, generosity, faith and a sense of fun and good humour in all they do. They are an inspiration to everyone they meet, but most importantly they are now parents to an additional twenty-three children. They have taught us all so many qualities. They have once again welcomed the DCS team into their home,

into their lives with open arms. We owe them a big 'thank you' not only for their hospitality, but also for opening our eyes and for teaching us all how to prioritise what is really important. They helped us recognize that we should place more value on our relationships with others, to support someone in need, and caused me to reflect not to rely on devices that actually have the potential to isolate us from each other. In the majority of the blogs the students have written, they have commented on how fortunate they are to have running water, a loving family or a top quality education. But the thing that stands out the most for me is how on this trip each person has become more loving, more caring, more understanding, more reflective and more appreciative for what they have.

By living in and by being part of the daily chores in The Peace Centre, we all have a very good understanding of how these children will now be brought up. How they will support each other to get through the ups and downs of life, how they will grow up having brothers and sisters and loving parents – from all over the world – how they will have a chance of creating their own success story by being educated, and most importantly we have witnessed that each of these children are being taught how to love, care and share with one another. In other words, they are a family. Just one that is slightly bigger than yours or mine.

Through the nature of their education, the loving homes they are part of and the opportunities that will come their way, I can say with a great deal

of certainty that the eighteen Dulwich College Shanghai students that went on this trip will have a bright future. I think it is fair to say, however, that due to these life-changing experiences they have all grown immeasurably over the past two weeks, and as such, their future choices will now be made with greater degrees of compassion, depth and maturity. As such, they will go on to make a difference in the world in which we live, impacting the lives of others with increased injections of love, care and kindness along the way. I am genuinely excited to see what their futures hold.

The next time you look into your future, don't just think about jobs, experiences, holidays, places or friendships you have already established. Think also about those ideals less tangible that you would like to see in yourself and the impact you can have on others. Like our Ugandan hosts, don't do anything without love and a smile. They may cost nothing, but they give more than you can imagine. And what's more, they have the power to change futures.

*“Each and every one of us on this trip has come away having received so much more than we gave.”*



## Thoughts from children living in The Peace Centre



*“I like being at The Peace Centre as they give us time to play games. I get to play football now.”*

*“I saw a bad future for myself. A bad life. I was abused with no hope. Now, I have an education, time to read books and would like to become a music teacher.”*

*“I am grateful that I now have shoes.”*



*“Before The Peace Centre I had no food, no school, no clean water. Now I have these things. Now I am able to live in peace.”*

*“I didn’t know there would be a time in my life to be so happy as I have been with you all these days. We are family. Come again – I will be very happy. We love you.”*





# The Best School Trip Ever

By Andrea Chan

This is the best school trip I have ever been on. In fact, it hasn't even felt like a school trip, which is ironic because we have all learned so much.

It's amazing how many pineapples you can fit on a bicycle. That's what I thought as I looked out of the car window on my way to a home visit, and saw local men pushing bicycles dangling with multiple pineapples up an unforgiving slope in the intense heat. They transport these pineapples to the market everyday to make a living. Hard, unforgiving work. Sadly, this was only a small glimpse of the hardship that I was about to witness. I knew that the conditions of the homes we were visiting might be dire, but it still didn't prepare me for what I was going to see. The homes all had walls made out of dried mud, and their interiors were beyond simple, and of course with no running water or electricity which are an unimaginable luxury for the vast majority of rural Ugandans. Three children shared a dirt caked single mattress - so old that it didn't even resemble a mattress anymore, but was really just a

*“The Peace Centre is a place that allows these orphans their right to a childhood and allows them to develop to their full potential.”*



block of foam littered with holes and dents - with a fourth being forced to sleep on the dusty floor because he would wet the 'bed' at night. Between fifteen and twenty shared a tiny compound that would really only comfortably house a family of three. In their 'free time' the children would have to go on exhausting water collection runs, chop firewood or dig in the field for hours at a time... while only receiving one basic meal a day. It is heart-breaking that we cannot offer each and every one of the children living in such conditions a place at The Peace Centre, but the harsh truth is that even in extreme poverty some children are in more need than others. Quantifying poverty is an impossible task, and certainly a great deal harder than counting pineapples on an overloaded bike.

When someone says the word 'orphanage' to you, what comes to mind? Prior to visiting The Peace Centre, the word orphanage for me conjured up images of a bleak place filled with dejected children;

*“Although we can't give everyone monetary wealth, we can help make others richer in terms of experiences, relationships and through love.”*

a grey shell; a basic means of food (gruel?) and shelter until they are old enough to be able to forge their own way in the world. Something coming from the world of Dickens. It pleased me greatly to have these misconceptions proved totally wrong. On the contrary, The Peace Centre has a warm, caring and loving environment. The relationships that the children have formed with the staff and other orphans in their new home are close, tender, strong and loving. When little 7 year old Joan was asked how The Peace Centre is a home to her, she replied: "The Peace Centre is a home to me because Peace and Golden are my parents." This shows how TPC fully embodies its motto which is to provide children with 'Love, Care and a Home'. It is a place that allows these orphans their right to a childhood, gives them the love and attention they deserve, and allows them to develop to their full potential. I am glad that when I next hear the word 'orphanage', images of children not being able to ask for second helpings of porridge will be far from my mind.

"I would rather die a rich person than poor", was a comment made to me by one of the volunteer staff at The Peace Centre. My first interpretation of this comment was that the word 'rich' only referred to monetary wealth, which made me feel a bit guilty. It was a reminder that even though we were in Bukinda together our lives are very much different. Although through the two weeks in the village our lives became very much closer and intertwined, the difference between 'us' and 'them' is that after these two weeks we will get on a plane and resume our lives all over the world, whilst for them Bukinda,

is and will continue to be, their daily reality. However, upon further reflection, I believe that the word 'rich' also refers to a sense of happiness and satisfaction, that comes from within the heart, and has a great deal more to do with love, deep friendships and a sense of belonging than it does to do with anything as fleeting as finances. Based on the many comments from our new friends, it seems that bit by bit our stay here has contributed to improving that less tangible richness for not only The Peace Centre members, but the wider community too. It was fantastic to see the news





that The Peace Centre had a brand new swing set and 15ft trampoline spread like wildfire, resulting in many more kids from the village showing up to play. Specific to The Peace Centre children, we have helped to support their education, which will undoubtedly lead to more opportunities and a greater sense of self worth in the future. As the Primary School headmaster bluntly put it, we have given his 'monkeys' the chance to go to school. I



guess the reason why I was a bit shocked to hear the TPC volunteer share this statement about wealth, was because I have never heard someone poor explicitly state that they are. Although we can't give everyone monetary wealth, we can help make others richer in terms of experiences, relationships and through love. As they say, money doesn't always buy happiness, right? I feel so blessed to consider how my own life is infinitely richer as a result of the love and friendships I have built in this past fortnight, and if any of their richness has increased by even a fraction of mine, then I would consider them wealthy indeed.

Why do people do volunteer work? I always thought that volunteering was all about giving up your time to help someone else. But I now realise this doesn't account for all the things that you learn as a volunteer. On the surface you can easily pick out the

few new experiences such as using the long drop toilet, trying (and failing) to chop wood, or building a chicken coop (more like a chicken palace). However, if you look harder you will see that there have been much more significant changes within, and that our outlook on the world has undergone a somewhat radical shift. Although some of the jobs we worked during the two weeks were not easy, no one complained. For example, fetching seemingly endless wheelbarrows of sand from up the hill may have been exhausting, but we took turns and got the job done because it was worth seeing the smiles on the children's faces when the project was complete. The reward for hard work was no longer



an arbitrary grade, something that is in itself (if you are honest with yourself) meaningless, divisive and only creates unnecessary comparisons and boundaries where there don't need to be any. The reward now was a smile, was seeing unbounded joy in action. Which, I ask you, has more real value?

In addition, we learned how to overcome language barriers. When the vast majority of conversations in English with the children go as far as...

Child: "Hi. How are you?"  
Me: "I am fine. And you?"  
Child: "Yes."

...you have got to get a bit creative. We learned that non verbal communication works great, such as playing hand games, drawing, or kicking a ball around. In fact, we may have even learned



*"No school trip will ever be able to top this one."*



*"Volunteer work is about personal learning experiences, and about building meaningful relationships."*

more about them through such activities than we would've if we had tried to have a sit down conversation. This trip has taught me that volunteer work is about personal learning experiences, and about building meaningful relationships. It isn't really about helping others at all.

No school trip will ever be able to top this one, unless I am able to return to Bukinda next year - and Mum and Dad, now seems like as good a time as any to tell you that I definitely do want to come back here in 2016! Manual labour, working with kids, an inexplicably deep sense of love for children only recently met, along with rope swings, bag weaving, rope-less tug-of-war, heart-breaking home visits, counting pineapples, morning quests for a perfect egg, endless photos of beamingly happy faces, chapatti making and waterfalls of tears at our farewells... this trip has truly had it all. It has been an honour and a privilege to be part of the 2015 Peace Centre team. If only all learning could be as deep and meaningful as this.



## Comments from Dulwich Parents



*“Our son had an amazing experience in Uganda with all the Dulwich Team. We are so proud of him, he returned back full of positive energy and memories. We think it has been great for him being part of this challenging mission because*

*“This trip has given our daughter a true perspective of life and of what brings real joy. Life is so fast and changing that we too easily forget what is really important.”*



*he could really experience the importance of values that we try to teach every day. We feel very lucky to have had the chance to be involved in such an intense and life changing experience for our son and for us as a family.”*

*“This was the trip of a life time for our daughter. I can’t think of a better way for her to spend her summer holiday than doing something so meaningful.”*





