



BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE WORLD:
2 WEEKS AT THE PEACE CENTRE UGANDA
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Contents

<i>Foreword</i> By Victoria Lidzbarski	6	<i>Children Fighting Corruption</i> By Massimiliano Savi	30
<i>A Most Special Welcome</i> By Yi Jing Teoh	8	<i>A Sense of Fun</i> By Pier Paolo Rossi	32
<i>A Challenge to My Open-Mindedness</i> By Anne-Sophie Pierre	10	<i>Processing Death</i> By Megan Hasenfratz	34
<i>Reflection on a Lack of Rights</i> By Mizuki Ihara	12	<i>Relationships</i> By Angus Ellen	36
<i>The Horrifying Impact of the AIDS Epidemic</i> By Nicoló Pellegrino	14	<i>Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre</i> By Michelle Hoffet	38
<i>Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre</i> By Sarah Chan	16	<i>The Value of Paper</i> By Priyanka Menon	40
<i>Spare a Thought for the African Child Bride</i> By Sarah Chan	18	<i>Chocolate Guilt</i> By Freya Todorova	42
<i>A Simple Apology</i> By Jean Chai	20	<i>Going Home</i> By Isabel Joseph	44
<i>Privilege</i> By Ben Morrison	22	<i>Cry for Your Rights</i> By Anthony Reich	46
<i>Self-Sufficiency vs. Outside Help</i> By Anusri Mittal	24	<i>Quotes from Parents Re 2016 Trip</i>	48
<i>Simple as ABC?</i> By Andy Clapperton	26		52
<i>Only the Very Neediest</i> By Andy Clapperton	28		





Foreword

By Victoria Lidzbarski

Service changes lives and in the best of cases it is a two-way experience, where all parties benefit and grow. Summarising the trip to Uganda last summer, like summarising the content of the students' blogs, seems an impossible task! Where does one begin to describe an experience so whole, so moving, and yet so ephemeral? Since our return, I have been asked countless times, "how was it?" to which my response is simultaneously gushing yet unfulfilling and... incomplete.

What we do in Uganda at The Peace Centre is so difficult to explain. We spend hours, days, and weeks building relationships, teaching and learning lessons, developing a sense of community and togetherness, and encouraging strength. Malleable "soft skills" like these are complicated and time-consuming.

So, is this trip, and service generally, really impactful? Has it changed the lives of the students whose blogs you are about to read? Does it make a difference in Uganda? I argue it does in both cases. But to have a more complete understanding than I can give you, I invite you to read the students' blogs in the following pages for a conclusive answer that proves unequivocally that it is a two-way experience benefitting everyone.





A Most Special Welcome

By Yi Jing Teoh

Anticipation is a funny thing. It fully takes over! You spend days, weeks and even months building up to something, tingling with nervous excitement, and when the time is close you are just ready to burst! Think of the excited state you feel in the days leading up to your birthday, or Christmas. You just keep thinking about that long awaited day and you can't get it out of your mind. The night before can be so exciting that sometimes you can't even sleep!



Now imagine, if you can, that you don't even know exactly what it is you are looking forward to, as all you know about what you are looking forward to is from stories you have heard from others... but you are just as excited nonetheless. Can you imagine that? Well, that is the strange situation I found myself in as we finally began our bus journey from the beautiful Lake Nabugabo to The Peace Centre after months of preparations and simmering anticipation. All the CCA cultural awareness sessions and the learning about Uganda and the Quiz Night and the team building and the assemblies and the fundraising were all behind us. We were finally in Africa, in sunny Uganda. It was just like Christmas Eve: today I was actually going to arrive at The Peace Centre!

As the bus drove through the beautiful green hills towards our destination, I started thinking back over everything we'd been told about what to expect. I'd been told by the others who had been before how excited and welcoming everyone was going to be, as well as how there would be lots of smiling, and probably some singing. But the welcome we received was ten times better than what I'd been anticipating. It was so magical that it is hard for me to describe in writing, but I will try.

From the first moment of seeing the children and staff from the bus window, to the moment we got off the bus, I was filled with this feeling



“Throughout all the games, I was drowning in a sea of smiles and laughter.”

of joy, fuzziness and electricity speeding all through my body. It's extremely difficult to put into words the wave of emotions I felt as I was welcomed. Just imagine being really, really happy and then doubling or tripling that happiness, and that's about how I felt in that moment. I'd been waiting for this moment for so long, and it had finally come. That bubbling anticipation of waiting in Shanghai was now a reality, with the children beaming at us with the widest smiles on their faces and giving us the tightest of hugs. This happiness was unquantifiable. Never have I ever met a group of people this welcoming and accepting to those that they have never met before. They welcomed each and every one of us with open arms, literally, and embraced each other as if we had known each other all our lives. That is hospitality: making someone feel loved, welcomed and at home, in a place that they have never been before, by someone that they have never met. It is a gift, and one that I will seek to replicate when I meet others.



By the looks on their faces, I'm pretty sure the children and staff's emotions mirrored ours perfectly. The children were so eager to play with us, chat with us and help us settle in. They eagerly led us to the field, all bubbling with energy and excitement as we ran around hand-in-hand playing all sorts of games. Although it was difficult to communicate the rules at times, crazy hand gesticulations transcend language and we all worked it all out quickly enough. Throughout all the games, I was drowning in a sea of smiles and laughter.



Later, as the sun began to set, we were treated to some lovely welcome songs as the children all danced and sang. These were the songs I'd been told to expect, but again, the reality of the beauty of the voices drifting amongst the African hills far surpassed my wildest imagination.

It was the most perfect day filled with hugs and laughs, and I never want to forget that warm, fuzzy feeling I felt throughout today. Christmas is going to have to work very hard to beat this.



“The welcome was so magical that it is hard for me to describe in writing.”

A Challenge to My Open-Mindedness

By Anne-Sophie Pierre



We spent time today working with secondary school students on skills and techniques used in Microsoft Office. Nothing that profound or exciting, you might think, but it made me reconsider some of my preconceptions and helped me understand the importance of empathy.

In some of our interactions, I realised how different we are culturally. For example, when Byron's face lit up as he began to explore different formulae, and there was a shout of pure joy when it worked, it enabled me to contextualise the learning by rote that is so different to the education I have grown up with.

I worried that, as teaching helpers, we were telling the students that we were working with what to do too often, making them more dependent rather than developing problem-solving skills. In most western education systems, we are taught to be self-reliant and only to seek help if there really is no alternative solution that we have not already explored ourselves. As a student this is what I would have done almost automatically, yet in a more hands-on guiding role many of us struggled with our classes being too teacher focused today.

I know that if complete strangers came into my classroom, and showed me what to do, as we did at times, I would have felt inadequate at best, thinking that everyone else was smarter than me. At worst I would have totally rejected the support being offered, no matter how well-intentioned.



“If everyone was this welcoming and open to ideas, the world would be a much better place.”

Having the opportunity to experience working with students who have a different attitude to learning has really made me step back and reflect.

In some ways it can be hard to tell how the students feel about us taking over their class. Do they think that because we are wealthier, that we are better? Smarter? Superior? Of course we don't think that way, in fact quite the opposite. We learn so much from them, such as how to be more open to new opportunities and experiences, not to mention grappling with a couple of handy new formulae in Microsoft Excel!

It has been wonderful that the students have taught us so much, even in this short space of time, yet our different perspectives might potentially mean that



they didn't even realise the extent of the impact they have had on us. Although we might not always be open to change, they certainly are. Not just open, but highly receptive. The fact that we have as much to learn from them as they do from us, is something I perhaps had not fully anticipated before we went into Bukinda Secondary School today. They have shown me how to be more enthusiastic and open when confronting challenges and change. This is something we should all be striving towards, right?

The students here take nothing for granted and neither should we. In reality, does it matter where you come from? How many countries you've been to? Or how popular you are? That is up to each individual to decide for themselves, but one thing is for certain, we can all learn from one another; indeed, we should always be learning from different cultures in the hope of becoming more well-rounded individuals. Many of us have been taken aback, even shocked, at how welcoming and open complete strangers have been to us, and in class today, also to our ideas. Put in the simplest way, if everyone was like this, the world would be a much better place.



“We have as much to learn from them as they do from us.”



Reflection on a Lack of Rights

By Mizuki Ihara

Our idealistic lives in first world culture consist of the reality that we have easy access to basic human needs and rights, which we too often take for granted. For someone used to living in one of the top-ten most expensive cities in the world, being here in rural Uganda is the perfect display of how we have so much, yet appreciate it so little. We often rate our happiness according to the magnitude of our possessions. Whilst there is of course a desire for access to material goods in Bukinda, many people here seem to measure their happiness based on their love and care for one another, and this is truly an inspiring thing. However, despite the great sense of community here in Bukinda, while on three home visits today Nicolo and I had a glimpse into the dark truths of what many TPC kids suffered before being taken in to their new home.

Even though I had been expecting the worst, I cannot put into words how heartbreaking it was

to hear Josiah, at 11 years old, whisper the awful words "They beat me", with his head down, trembling, ashamed to let the utterance slip out of his mouth. These are not words anybody should be saying, let alone an 11-year-old. He must be absolutely traumatized, powerless. This was the place Josiah called 'home', the irony being that with the atrocious conditions, this was the last place he should have considered as his home.

It was clear Josiah was not going to school either, another basic right for all children. When we asked "Do you want to go to school?" he immediately nodded his head. The upsetting truth is that Josiah's most basic human rights were being violated and he did not have the education to realize this, even if there was in reality little he could do to change it.

When we further investigated his background, it became clear that Josiah was treated as a second-



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“You might never find the perfect replacement for a loving mother and father, but The Peace Centre would be the next best thing.”



rate citizen in his own ‘home’ because he was not a direct blood relative, whereas his cousin Jonathan was. The contrast between their rooms was stark. Jonathan had a mattress, Josiah didn’t. Jonathan had multiple pairs of shoes, Josiah’s were nowhere to be seen. Jonathan even had a radio in his room; Josiah wouldn’t dare dream of such luxury. We heard from a neighbour that Josiah often sleeps outside after taking a beating from his heavily intoxicated uncle.

The more questions we asked, the more we came to understand that Josiah was living in a place where he was neither loved nor cared for. Worse still, he is clearly deprived of several of the rights outlined in the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child, such as the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect; the right to an education, and the right



to an adequate standard of living, to name but a few. Last year we had a series of school assemblies on this most fundamental of conventions, but our experiences today showed me how, despite having studied these concepts before, I didn’t really understand what they were all about until I witnessed a lack of them first hand. Seeing the three homes today made us realize how blessed we are to be living under a roof where there is water, food and people who care for us.

Living inside the The Peace Centre should seem quite foreign to me, yet I have never felt more at home so quickly. I’m not sure you can ever find the perfect replacement for a loving mother and father, but if any of the children from the home visits today should end up being taken into The Peace Centre, I am confident they would have the next best thing.

The Horrifying Impact of the AIDS Epidemic

By Nicoló Pellegrino

The lives of people that eke out a survival on or below the poverty line is an issue that is often discussed in the press and in schools across first world countries. Statistics are often attached to these lives, emphasizing the extent of the problems, yet at the same time detaching the human element. One of the most devastating manifestations of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is the sheer scale of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and today, Mizuki and I saw the unspeakable as we listened to some of the most saddening stories we will likely ever hear.

One of these stories was that of Mary, a six-year-old single orphan, whose mother died of AIDS three years ago. As if that wasn't enough, when we visited her home we discovered that her father is also battling the disease and appeared to be

approaching his last days. He was too weak to move as he lay helpless in the dust outside their house, as if he had been left for dead. I felt as if he could have passed away in front of our very eyes as we watched him struggle to formulate words and sentences to explain their plight. Barely able to move and covered in sheets, he lay frail, tired and hungry as his body rejected the medication provided by the government. The open sores in his mouth made it impossible for him to eat and his poor daughter watched on, powerless as her father became weaker and weaker by the day.

The haunting sight of used drip bags dangling from the ceiling and of used needles to administer the medicine made all of us go pale, yet for many in the Kabale region this is a daily reality. Mary slept in a

“We listened to some of the most saddening stories we will likely ever hear.”

cell-like room on half a sponge mattress, alongside her timeworn grandma, while smoke billowed out of holes in the roof. They relied on hand-outs of food from sympathetic neighbours, some of whom were battling for survival themselves. You could see a small sack of sweet potatoes that had been donated by a good Samaritan in the community, although they didn't know who it was that had left it for them.

The children in The Peace Centre always seem smiley, happy, and overwhelmingly positive,





but today I came to understand how the unimaginable sights and sounds of some of their memories may well remain with them for a long time to come, perhaps forever. HIV/AIDS is the main cause of death for the parents of our children at TPC, just as it is across the country. Before today, I had learned about what the syndrome does to you physically, but I hadn't realised quite how devastating it must be for the

“I hadn't realised quite how devastating it must be for the remaining family members when their household is torn apart.”



remaining family members when their household is torn apart. As Mary stood beside her destitute father, it dawned on me how tough the daily ordeals that our children at TPC had to cope with truly were, many while at a very tender age.

Tradition here is often highly conservative, and the only acceptable type of contraception in the village, according to popular belief, is total abstinence. That is not to say this is wrong, but I have certainly been forced to question how effective it is in the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially when the responsibilities of men and women in upholding total abstinence seem so conflicting. We spent time talking to Peace about how remarkable it was that none of our children at TPC have tested HIV+ given the environment that they have come from. Mary, for instance, was very young when her mother died of AIDS and her father was already suffering, so she has been exposed to some degree of risk. Peace explained to us that doctors have been trained to take extra precautions if an HIV+

woman is giving birth, in order to avoid transfer of the virus, and it seems the government has recently been more proactive.

Yesterday's home visits really opened my eyes to the widespread impact that HIV/AIDS has had on the local community, and this is completely contrasted with the positive environment in The Peace Centre. It highlighted to me how crucial it is that the impact of the virus is not forgotten about and that we work together to support those already suffering, as well as their families and the family members left behind. In short, I dream of a world in which no one has to suffer the distressing ordeals we witnessed today.



Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

Before I came to TPC I thought I would never be able to finish school because I couldn't afford the fees, but that has changed now and I can look to the future.



When I broke my arm they looked after me and gave me a cast for a month, whereas before we didn't have any access to medicine.

I love the time we spend reading storybooks in the evening: I feel I have more knowledge now.





I used to try to go to school but they would beat me because I had no money to pay the fees. It is great to be able to go to class now and I am thinking of becoming a nurse.

I am very happy to be able to read books in the evening now.



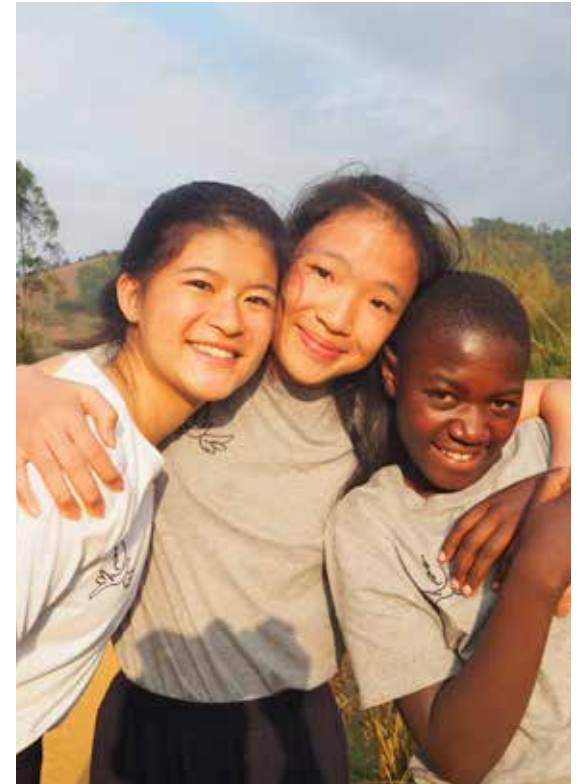
Before TPC I used to fetch water, sweep and clean the house and cook. Going to school wasn't an option then. But that has changed and I am happy.



“These children could be the next generation of leaders in Uganda, or they could be forced into child marriage.”



“Next time you read a new fact about an issue occurring elsewhere in the world, picture what life would be like if that statistic included you.”



Spare a Thought for the African Child Bride

By Sarah Chan

Today, Mass, Jean and I had the opportunity to attend the 'Day of the African Child' event along with Ms. Victoria and two of the Peace Centre kids, Zion and Doreen. While we were there, the community launched the 'End Child Marriage' campaign, the premise being to protect girls' rights, including not being married as a child.

As we sat there listening to the speeches, it hit me that the statistics we learn about child marriage in school is not just a number on a page, but is a daily reality for many girls across the world. Living in our first-world countries, we feel sorry for the children for a while, but soon after we are so busy with our lives that we forget about the statistics. Because these things are not happening to us and we do not actually see them happening, we often dismiss their importance and the devastation it may bring. Sitting amongst a community where four or five girls in ten are married off before the age of 18, the reality that half of the young girls around me were at risk was genuinely terrifying. Being in a country that is one of the top 15 African countries with the highest rates of child marriages, I knew that having one of the girls sitting near me going through child marriage was a real possibility.

Seeing so many of their smiling faces, dancing and singing, clothed in school uniforms, I knew many of them had potential to do amazing things. It really saddened me to think that these girls had little resources and limited opportunities to protect themselves from getting married too soon. Child marriage denies educational opportunities, puts

girls at risk of serious health-related dangers, as well as malnutrition... just to name a few negative consequences. Young girls are often pushed into having sex by their older and more powerful husbands, and adolescent pregnancy is a common result. Young girls' bodies are not fully-developed and not physically prepared for childbirth, and therefore there is a higher risk of death during childbirth. Additionally, child marriages regularly interrupt a girl's education. These children could



be the next generation of leaders in Uganda, but without education will they have the right knowledge and skills to help pull the country out of poverty?

The launch of the 'End Child Marriage' campaign is the start to ending this epidemic. However, while watching the entire event go on, it felt as if the performances and speeches were preaching to the choir. Each performance and speech faced toward all the important people from the local government

and NGOs, and I wondered if perhaps they didn't already support this cause. I felt as if more of the performances and speeches ought to have been directed at the children seated all around the tents, educating them on the rights of the child, on their rights. Growing up in a place where child marriage is a common occurrence, they may be unaware that it is actually violating their rights. They may be too scared to speak up in fear of getting punished, but if they know that they have the right to say 'No', there could be that chance that more of them will speak up and defend themselves.

Being so fortunate to have access to a good education, healthcare and plentiful food, I don't think I'll ever understand the struggle of constantly fearing the loss of all this to start a new married life with someone I do not or barely know. If you are a teenager reading this blog: imagine your group of closest friends, imagine looking at each of their faces and knowing that about half of them are in danger of getting married any day now. Imagine going to school tomorrow and not seeing them sitting in their favourite seat, not being able to be on another sports team, music group or in a theatre production again. All your future plans together, gone. If you are lucky, you may still get to talk to them, but only occasionally. So, the next time you read a new fact about an issue occurring elsewhere in the world, picture what life would be like if that statistic included you, your family and your friends. Then ask yourself how you really feel about it. Would that make it more real for you? Would it cause you to want to take action?

A Simple Apology

By Brooklin Dozier

Dear Mom and Dad,

I would firstly just like to say I'm sorry, I am writing this in a puddle of tears as they stream down my face and all I can think of is how sorry I am.

I know that might sound unexpected coming from me as I can be mean, rude and inconsiderate, but as we sat around the fire tonight reflecting it struck me how ungrateful I am. I have parents that do anything and everything for me, such as cheering me on at every sports match, to supporting me emotionally as we relocate to a different country half way across the world, yet I never acknowledge your love. In fact, I often reject it. As we were sitting around the fire we learned some of the back stories of the children: one of our girls had to lock herself in her room every night because she was scared of her own drunken father; another child was abandoned by the side of the road as a baby, and two days ago we met a girl who wants to join The Peace Centre - she is currently watching her father wither away and die before her, and as her mother already died of AIDS, it is only a matter of time before she is left a double orphan, with no-one to care for her.

I began to question why every time you ask me how my day was at school, an innocent question that shows your care for me, I just moan and tell you to stop bothering me. Why do I behave this way? Why do I reject your demonstrations of love? I have previously thought that cooking meals for me every day was no big deal, but actually, I think

“TPC is a safe, happy place, where the children are constantly thanking their caretakers for what they have.”



“The Peace Centre gives children such as these everything that their parents couldn't or didn't.”

it's something you put a lot of time and effort into. Mom, I'm sorry for all those times you have cooked me dinner that I have eaten without recognising your effort. Thank you for all those meals.

'Love, care and a home' is the motto for The Peace Centre, and as I was crying tonight it struck me that those are exactly the things I have taken for granted. I have taken them for granted because I have always had them in abundance, as have my friends. I've realised this week first hand that these are not things that everybody has, and in fact some children don't have any of the three. I am so happy that there are places like The Peace Centre that give children such as these everything that their parents couldn't or didn't. TPC is a safe, happy place, where the children are constantly thanking their caretakers for what they have.

Thank you for trying to help me with my homework, sorry that I respond by yelling at you; thank you for trying to cheer me up with a joke when I have had a bad day, sorry that I push you away; in short, thank you for everything you have done and continue to do for me, and I am sorry for all those times I have shown my ingratitude. I can't promise that I will never try to argue with you again, but I will definitely try to be more aware of how I treat you.

Mom and Dad, I love you so much.

Your daughter,
Brooklin



“I don’t want the brilliant and deserving children of The Peace Centre to be another generation who believes in differences between us that should not exist.”



“I want all of us to have the education, peace and future that I have been born into, and I think TPC is one step in that direction.”

Privilege

By Jean Chai

Over the course of the trip there have been a few events which have made the theme of “white privilege” prevalent in my mind. This privilege refers to the biased treatment I feel we sometimes get here due to our fairer skin, our status as visitors, or sponsors of The Peace Centre (TPC). In our expat community back home, the concept is either barely noticeable or nonexistent, due to the fact that we often socialize with people of various races and backgrounds. However, coming to the village of Bukinda, an area which receives fewer visitors than a bustling city like Shanghai, people here come into contact with foreigners, or as said in Rukiga, “bazungu”, less often.

At the Day of the African Child celebrations, with our chaperones, I along with two other Dulwich students and two Peace Centre children joined in. Upon arriving, it had been clear that we had not blended in as well as we had hoped. Attempting to avert the attention away from ourselves, we picked seats in the back. One of the organizers had noticed us, and beckoned the four “bazungu” to sit at the very front, leaving the two Peace Centre children and Rachael, the social worker at TPC, in the back row. Initially, this spurred a sense of confusion in me and it had not occurred to me why the organizer had not included the two TPC children, despite them wearing TPC shirts and clearly being part of our group. It was only when we requested for them to sit alongside us, that they were they moved forward. I felt fortunate to be able to experience the days’ events sitting next to Doreen and seeing her reactions to the dances and speeches.

Perhaps, the four of us had been placed at the front to publicize a sense of internationalism to the Ugandan crowd, suggested by the frequent pictures and videos taken directly of us. Even so, I felt that the four of us had been given special treatment, whilst the two TPC children, who were the true African children being celebrated on that day, were left at the back, struggling to catch a glimpse of the performance. This is one example among multiple occasions where I feel that we were prioritized (for whatever reason) above others unnecessarily.

Reflecting upon this, I realised how privilege, whether consciously or subconsciously, could then be passed on to the younger generation. I wondered in what other ways, or in what other places in my life I had been different or perhaps seen as “better”, and I had not noticed. In Shanghai, in my well-resourced school or in my fancy home, had I also taken other privileges for granted? How much did my parents’ wealth or my smart school uniform provide me with more stability, health, or freedoms that I was also naively unaware of?

I don’t want the brilliant and deserving children of The Peace Centre, which I have been lucky enough to begin to get to know this week, to be another generation who believes in differences between us that should not exist. Similarly, I myself want to be more mindful about what privileges I take for granted and how I can help others have what I have. We are all wonderfully made as equals, each with individual fingerprints, eyes, and ears. I want all of us to have the education, peace and future that I have been born into, and I think TPC is one step in that direction.





Self-Sufficiency vs. Outside Help

By Ben Morrison

“As outsiders, we can’t come in and “fix” the problem.”

Before I left for Uganda my closest friend, Gabriel Faylure, asked me, “why do you go all the way to Uganda when there are problems in Shanghai that also need to be solved? All that time and money could be used for the problems here.” His comment really affected me as it made me contemplate my choice to come on the trip a second time, thus sparking my question: should communities solve their problems on their own or rely on outside help? This links strongly to TPC and is a question, I imagine, the leaders of the trip are asked each year.

One of the main issues that the village of Bukinda here is trying to solve, is helping needy double orphans who need a home, so that fewer children are left without shelter, education, medical care, etc. It is difficult for the community of Bukinda to fix the problem alone because of a lack of resources, though there is certainly some degree of willingness. The community and our group from Shanghai, in collaboration, are working to improve conditions for the children locally. The result is a mixture of efforts, skills, resources, and input from

brilliant staff like Peace, Golden and Racheal, along with support from the Trustees and the rest of our team. As outsiders, we can’t come in and “fix” the problem without cultural context, as the local community here informs, guides and strengthens our efforts, and vice versa.

It could be argued that what we are doing is “voluntourism”. The term refers to people going to exotic places but, rather than just relaxing on a beach, they volunteer at the holiday location. This sounds positive and in many cases it is a beneficial thing as it improves understanding between people and encourages empathy. However, voluntourism has taken quite a bit of negative press of late because it can also have undesirable outcomes. Using TPC as an example, if we were to come this year to build a canteen, we would be taking work away from those who need it and could definitely do a more skillful job than we “bazungu” could. Moreover, at times voluntourists descend on a place without having done their





research, thus pouring their resources into organisations that are poorly administered such as, for instance, orphanages that don't put in the same efforts as TPC does to keep families together whenever possible.

I do not believe that what we are doing here is voluntourism. In fact, I feel more like I am part of the community, thanks to the warmth and care of TPC community. I think one of the strengths of this organization in particular is the relational aspect of it. By getting to know the people locally, interacting closely and regularly, and learning about Ugandan and Bukindan culture, it makes our efforts more of a two-way street in terms of learning and also serves to improve sustainability. In this trip especially, we have learned more about how the children are enrolled at TPC, how sponsors impact them, and the care and detail with which TPC is administered. For some, importantly, this trip also inspires them to do more back home, which can surely only be a positive.

One of the goals of TPC is to work towards self-sufficiency, so that the Centre does not rely solely on the help of outsiders. In this past year, a chicken coop has been added, as well as a new section of land to grow crops for a supply of food. Small steps, but eggs, chickens and vegetables can now be eaten or sold for TPC to have its own source of income, in addition allowing for children to gain experience of simple business transactions, profit margins and investment. The children are also developing skills in making handicrafts, which they hope to sell in future. Their first efforts were shown to us the other day and were truly impressive!

I can understand where some of that negative press towards voluntourism has come from: it would be naïve to suppose that you could waltz into someone else's community and solve their problems without any cultural context, awareness or sensitivity. And that is where I feel The Peace Centre shows its value: as a cohesive team with a range of different skills, a passionate and dedicated local community drawing upon outside ideas and resources in order to solve local problems.

“One of the strengths of this organization is the relational aspect of it.”



Simple as ABC?

By Anusri Mittal

This past week I have been going to the local primary school to help the students from Years 1 to 7 with English and Math. Over the course of these sessions, I have come to understand a small portion of the hard work and effort my teachers put into each class, whether it is the planning beforehand or during the actual delivery of the class itself.

In terms of preparation, for the first few lessons our group did not do much work, which, with the benefit of hindsight, wasn't a terribly clever idea! We soon came to realize this was not going to be as easy as we thought. For our first English lesson with Year 1, we all brought a simple picture book from The Peace Centre library. After about 30 minutes of reading with a small group of children, Sarah and I realized they didn't even know the alphabet. However, according to their class teacher, they were supposed to be able to read and form simple sentences. The massive range of abilities in this group posed a genuine challenge, one which I had never really considered before.

In Dulwich, the teacher to student ratio is 1:20 or less. At the local primary school here, the ratio is 1:60 for most year groups. I was struggling with only 10 kids, so I can't even begin to imagine how their teachers cope. Because of such large numbers, the students who don't understand sometimes find themselves left behind. For example, during Year 2 Math, our plan was to try out some addition in order to get an estimate of their ability before moving ahead with multiplication. There were a few confident ones who could easily do $6+7$. We

split them into groups; I wrote out equations, and most could solve them without too much difficulty. However, there was one girl who just couldn't keep up. I spent the next hour working with her on the very most basic sums. The first problem was $1+1$, and her answer was 3. Using their method of drawing circles to count, I attempted to explain addition to her. The next few questions given to her were quite simple. I checked her answers and saw that a couple were correct but for the majority, she had drawn an apparently random number of circles.

I then decided to go back to $1+1$. This time, her answer was 6, and by then the lesson had finished. I was disappointed and frustrated that I wasn't able to help her understand simple addition. My one outstanding thought was, "how are they supposed to be learning multiplication when most of them don't even understand addition?" It seemed that students often just copied what was on the board whether they understood it or not. During my Math lessons at home, my teacher makes sure that we are all on the same page so that nobody gets left behind. I think for the teachers here, catering for every student's needs when you have so many faces in front of you must be extremely challenging.

We also noticed that some of the kids have a harder time concentrating. Others cannot write properly, or they write backwards, and one particular child would hear my instructions but then proceed to draw random shapes all over his book. I wonder if and how teachers here cater for learning disabilities. Do they not care, for instance, or are they unsure of how

to handle them? One teacher I asked said that he knows about different disabilities and that there are kids at the school who do suffer from them. When asked about extra support, however, he said that he hasn't seen a teacher give extra help or specifically focus on any one of these children. It saddened me to think about how much potential the children could realise if only they were given more support.

Some of the classes we have been involved in have been extremely frustrating. Especially when we are trying to explain concepts that seem incredibly simple to us. This must be how my teachers feel when I can't grasp even the most basic pieces of information. When a child gets stuck, it is very difficult to get them to understand. It is even more challenging with a language barrier. I'm not sure how my Mandarin teacher keeps her cool when I don't understand straightforward sentence structures.

Going to the primary school every day has really emphasized the starkness of the contrast in education systems. I can barely relate to the struggles my own teachers face because I have only grazed the very tip of the teaching iceberg. However, I have a message for all of my teachers at Dulwich: I really appreciate the support you give me, including holding lunchtime revision sessions to prepare us for Math exams, or teaching me the longest word in the English language, *antidisestablishmentarianism*. You have really helped me thrive and I would like to say a truly massive, heartfelt "thank you" for everything you have done for me!

"I realized some kids didn't even know the alphabet."



“This must be how my teachers feel when I can’t grasp even the most basic pieces of information.”



Only the Very Neediest

By Andy Clapperton



Yesterday evening, just before arriving at the canteen for dinner, I was taken aside and told that the father of Mary, the girl whose home visit I had been on just two days before, had passed away leaving her as a double orphan.

During the visit we had commented that, lying destitute outside his house on a tattered blanket, barely able to string a sentence together, Mary's father probably did not have long to live, but I don't think any of us had expected it to happen quite so soon, or even while we were still around in Bukinda. You would never have wished for him to pass away, let alone in such crippling circumstances, but being pragmatic about it, perhaps it was for the best that the suffering wasn't dragged out any longer.

It made me reflect, however, on how Mary's father's death effectively cleared up a rather difficult ethical dilemma. At The Peace Centre we are highly

focused on family preservation, and throughout the process of deciding whether or not a child should be enrolled at TPC we repeatedly go back to our motto of 'Love, Care and a Home' as a reference point.

Whilst her father was still alive, Mary was a single orphan, her mother having died of AIDS when she was just a baby. The children at TPC are double orphans, with only a single exception, where keeping the child at 'home' would have meant leaving her vulnerable to abuse. So where do the moral dilemmas come in then? Well, if our organisation is striving to keep families together rather than split them up, surely Mary must accompany her father until his final hour? Mary also has a grandmother who is frail and relies on donations of food from kind neighbours, as she cannot work to support herself. She seems caring and was welcoming to us when we visited. If you believe in family preservation, then how can you possibly remove the granddaughter from this scenario?

On the flip-side, Mary is only eight years old, and is living in an environment where there are used medical supplies, including dirty needles and syringes from her father's AIDS ridden body, lying around the room they call home. Her dad used to be a raging alcoholic, nicknamed 'the Bottle' by his community, and by all accounts was far from playing the role of model father. Whilst on the surface, Mary's grandmother seems to want to care for her granddaughter, she has actually proved herself unable to do so. By way of example, when Social Services visited they carefully explained to her the dangers of cooking on an open fire next to Mary's

sleeping place in their bedroom, which also serves as the kitchen. Despite having been warned against the risks of the noxious fumes, not to mention the danger of the whole place catching fire, she continues to do so. In addition, she doesn't have any sustainable way of providing for their needs in the future. Will Mary be able to attend school? How many meals a day will she be able to eat? Will she ever have access to even the most basic of medical care? These are all questions that have to be taken into account, especially as her grandmother is already so frail.

The result of a thorough screening process, to ensure that the children enrolled in The Peace Centre are those who genuinely lack love, care and a home, is that we accept only the very neediest of double orphans, those for whom The Peace Centre really is the last resort. And perhaps this in part explains why the transformation of our kids is so dramatic after they finally get to settle in a caring environment.

Having been on a number of home visits now, I have always had the very slightest of doubts – you can of course always keep asking, 'what if...?' But I was chatting to Racheal, our Social Worker, the other day, and she commented that of the twenty-five children currently undergoing that transformation in their new home, not a single former-neighbour or relative, no matter how distant, has ever come to check on them, say hello or catch up. And I think that was the proof I was looking for, with my what-ifs, that our children at The Peace Centre really are the very neediest and the most deserving of their new opportunity. And with that, may their opportunities and successes continue long into the future.

“The transformation of our kids is so dramatic after they finally get to settle in a caring environment.”



“Our children at The Peace Centre really are the very neediest and the most deserving of their new opportunity.”



Children Fighting Corruption

By Massimiliano Savi



Before this trip to Uganda I had only ever heard about corruption in school or on television. But last week we were invited to a celebration for the Day of the African Child, in the Kashambya sub-county. The most surprising thing for me during the whole day was how passionately some of the children, the ones performing the "Bingwas" in particular, felt about corruption, a topic more commonly

addressed by adults. Bingwa is an organization that fights this form of dishonesty by building integrity in the children of Africa, in part through the distribution of magazines.

Inside one such magazine, that we were given before the performances, was an article about corruption in Africa. The children were also singing and dancing to a song directed at the parents and government officials present. Parts of the lyrics were very direct: "stop corruption in our homes, stop corruption in Uganda, stop corruption in Africa. Protect us and keep us safe". It felt very serious and real, learning about the problem with a group of people that experience it first-hand, in a country that scores below 50 on Transparency International's Corruption Index (100 being least corrupt).

I had the chance to ask a local resident a few questions about the topic and his definition

was cutting: "Corruption is greed, corruption is diverting funds that are supposed to be used for external benefits and instead using them for selfish reasons or one's own satisfaction". When I asked who he thought was corrupt in Uganda, he pointed his finger at "some government officials, some NGOs, and even some doctors". He gave an example noting that if you go to the public hospital you can bribe some doctors to serve you first to avoid the long queue. So even some doctors, whose whole career is, in theory at least, devoted to helping others, apparently sometimes only help patients fortunate enough to have the money to bribe them. What must the doctors deal with to feel the need to act this way? I wonder how often these kinds of bribes affect the most impoverished people in this rural part of Uganda where we are working.

Another example that was discussed is bribing for child marriage in communities where government

"When I was their age, I wasn't thinking about anything nearly as mature as the messages these kids were putting across."





10 years old and yet they were singing about stopping corruption in Africa. When I was their age, I wasn't thinking about anything nearly as mature as the messages these kids were putting across; even now I barely contemplate anything that mature, let alone participate in any activism. This made me wonder how much childhood here is different from our own: while these children are spending their time fighting for important causes, many of my classmates are more concerned about watching football and gaming, and this is certainly food for thought.

“Stop corruption in our homes, stop corruption in Uganda, stop corruption in Africa. Protect us and keep us safe.”

or municipal officials are illicitly paid off in order to turn a blind eye to unlawful, underage marriages, even though it directly violates the Ugandan constitution. Child marriage has always felt to me like something very distant, and it has opened my eyes to hear that it is such a reality in an area I have now become attached to. I couldn't help but think whether, by living in TPC, some of the girls here might have avoided such a fate...

Sitting at the Day of the African Child event, watching the performances, I was amazed by the children's maturity, as they were only about





A Sense of Fun

By Pier Paolo Rossi

Did you know that 'echinyampo' means 'fart' in Rukiga? That is one of the many things I have learned in my time here in Bukinda (though perhaps not the most important, of course). Something that has genuinely impressed me about The Peace Centre is the overwhelming sense of FUN I have felt from the moment we arrived, whether it's the laughter I can always hear (even at 1am), or the constant smile on everyone's faces. It is important to reflect on some of the 'heavier' topics while here, of course, but I believe that this one is no less significant.

A few days ago, we were reading with the kids, and I was paired up with two boys named Alex and Daudi. In the middle of the story, the high-fibre Ugandan diet of beans and peas got the better of me, and for the rest of the session, the two boys were debating over which one of them let out the 'echinyampo', while I sat in the middle trying, and failing, to contain my laughter. They eventually came to an agreement that I was the one at fault! This joking and the never-ending laughter have made me realize how happy the kids in TPC are,

and I'm amazed at how quickly they have adjusted to their new home considering the traumatic circumstances they have come from.

Another very entertaining moment happened when a cheeky eight-year-old boy named Amos and I were talking. Suddenly, the hugest hornet (or was it a butterfly?) appeared out of nowhere and I sprinted into my room screaming at the top of my voice like a silly Mzungu who has never seen an insect before. We laughed it off and put the joke to bed. However, late in the night, Amos came knocking on our door, and when we looked at the floor, we saw that he was trying to slide a wasp under our door, continuing the pranks, laughter and fun. The next morning, I thought again about how this little joke Amos tried to play on us indicates that he is indeed very happy here at TPC, that he has fully settled in. That it is his home.

This is very different to what I had expected; I thought that the kids would be less cheerful than they are and that the atmosphere would be more serious, due to the fact that they had lost their parents and many of them had found themselves in quite depressing situations before they were enrolled at TPC. I imagined that the kids would still be heavily affected by the intense distress many of them had been through, and yet, despite the many challenges, they are all very joyful.

I think that there are many reasons why the kids feel so at home here, starting with the roles that Peace, Golden, Racheal, Gabriel, Gloria and the other



“This joking and the never-ending laughter have made me realize how happy the kids in TPC are.”

“I have thought about how small and unimportant my childhood problems were...”

staff play so brilliantly as parental figures. Another reason the kids are happy to joke around so much is because they are surrounded by peers, ‘siblings’, so they can all play, read or study together, thus sharing and often delighting in that sense of fun. I would like to think that our presence here as older kids and as a high-spirited (even “banterful”) group has helped too.

This trip has definitely been eye-opening in that I have realized how lucky I am not to have experienced such a traumatic upbringing like so many here have. I have thought about how small and unimportant my childhood problems were, because before coming to TPC, the children would often go to sleep on an empty stomach, or would lock their rooms in fear of being abused by drunken parents. Food, play, and holidays, amongst others, were just things I expected. Now I will think more often about how lucky I am, and I will be more thankful, especially to my parents for all of the things they have given to me, including the fun, the jokes and the laughs, which I took for granted for so long.



Processing Death

By Megan Hasenfratz

She sits on the ground, slowly smoothing out the creases on her black and white dress. She stares blankly at her father, and pays no attention to the hot sun spilling onto her neck, nor the trail of ants making their way up her legs. Her eyes remain dry and unmoving, yet I wipe tears off my cheeks. My fingers continue to trace along the side of my face until I find myself digging my nails into the back of my neck, a nervous habit when I am anxious. My swollen eyes wander over to her and I contemplate how an eight-year-old girl could possibly fathom and process the death of her own father.

Mary, a beautiful girl, was accompanied by one hundred or so villagers at her father's funeral. She remained silent and made little eye contact with anyone there. Some sat, and others stood,



surrounding the coffin draped in purple cloth and bright flowers. I constantly found myself looking over at Mary, to find, every time, her eyes fixated on the same spot on the coffin.

The time soon came to bury the body. Mary made her way over to the grave with slow, leaden steps. Sweat began to trickle down her face as the sun continued to paint her head and neck. Her arm extended upwards, seeking comfort by enveloping her hand in Ms. Maria's. The lowering of the coffin was made more bearable for Mary with dynamic and vibrant gospel song that filled the hills.

This may read like a story, however, it isn't. This is real life. (Or should that be real death?) It's a series of events which I witnessed yesterday. I have endured death prior to this, but this is my first





“I couldn’t bring myself to think about what it must feel like to lose a father.”

indelible impression with a funeral in all my sixteen years. I can’t help but wonder how many deaths Mary has encountered, how many funerals she has attended, how many loved ones she has buried in her much shorter life span?

I tried my hardest to analyze what she might have been going through, but I couldn’t bring myself to think about what it must feel like to lose a father.

Mary’s father had been HIV positive, and had been laying on a straw mattress outside their home for two years, barely moving. So naturally, the death of her father didn’t come as much of a surprise to everyone. However, people still came to mourn, to pay their respects; some even travelled as far as four hours by foot. This shows me how much of a community Bukinda is and how much respect they have for the passing of life. As the old African proverb goes, “it takes a village to raise a child”, but I think it also takes a village to mourn with one.

You can lose a loved one in a blink of an eye. You never know exactly when, or maybe even how, but the end result is always the same: it hurts. Mary will never

hear her father’s voice again, or feel the warmth of his touch. She will never see him smile, be comforted by his reassuring scent, or even share a paternal glance.

Putting myself in Mary’s shoes was hard, because realizing all of those things aforementioned means that I too, will never be able to witness my own grandfather do any those things ever again. The weight of my grandfather’s recent passing, whose funeral I could not attend, was cathartically expressed through an excess of tears.

I am grateful to have gone to be with Mary, to remind her that she is also not alone. I went to the funeral because it is likely that Mary will soon come to live in The Peace Centre, her mother also having died of AIDS five years ago, and the village chiefs having approached Peace and Golden on her behalf. This is something that she seemingly wants too, having taken Ms. Maria’s hand at the end of the ceremony, wanting to walk away with us. I wanted to help Mary know she will be well cared for and loved: having been part of Peace and Golden’s adopted family for three years, I smile now, knowing that Mary will soon be a part of this family too.

“I wanted to help Mary know she will be well cared for and loved.”





“The kids now know that all of us care about all of them, just like the relationships in a family.”

Relationships

By Angus Ellen

I know this sounds really lame but every night when I'm at home, I get tucked into bed by my parents... and I love it. There's something comforting about getting tucked in by your Mum and Dad that is really special. It seems like so little but it provides a feeling of safety and security that cannot be underestimated. This stability is a major part of the relationship that children have with their parents because it develops trust and models future healthy relationships.

When I first came to Dulwich, the 2014 team was just getting ready to set off for their first trip. Ever since then I've always wanted to go to Bukinda. I wanted to go because I've never done something so... life-changing. I also wanted to go because I wanted to make a difference. For the most part, The Peace Centre is what I expected. I did not, however, expect the people to be so loving and welcoming, and for the relationships to be so strong. As soon as we got off the bus I was greeted with smiles and given many big hugs, which was strange for me because I did not expect such warm affection from people I had never met before. I expected TPC to be more... stern. I imagined there to be someone walking around the corridors simply turning off their lights every evening. On the contrary, the children have Racheal, Gloria, Happy, and Gabriel (how can you not feel joyful with names like these?) helping them with homework, singing songs with them, giving them a plaster or a pep talk when necessary, and seeing to so many more of their needs.

The relationship that I have with my parents could not get any better. We love each other and have a close bond. My relationship with my parents truly helps me to be close with TPC kids. I can still remember when I was just a small boy, my Dad and Mum always playing with me on the swings, our trampoline, and just generally messing about. I have used these memories to aid my interactions here. I have been pushing the kids on the swings and joining them on the trampoline for crazy bounce sessions. Last week one of the boys hurt his ear and a few nights ago the pain was too much for him. He started crying, as he had no idea what to do and neither did I, but I stayed by his side, trying my best to calm him until an adult came to help. I lent him my pillow so that he could have a good night's sleep just like my Dad would have done for me.

I am very thankful for the relationship that I have with my parents and I am happy that it helps me interact with TPC kids who may not have been as lucky as I certainly am. I don't know if I've made a huge difference in anyone's life, like I perhaps naively hoped to do when I came here, but at least some of the kids now know that all of us care about all of them, just like the relationships in a family.



*“Every night when I’m at home,
I get tucked into bed by my
parents... and I love it.”*



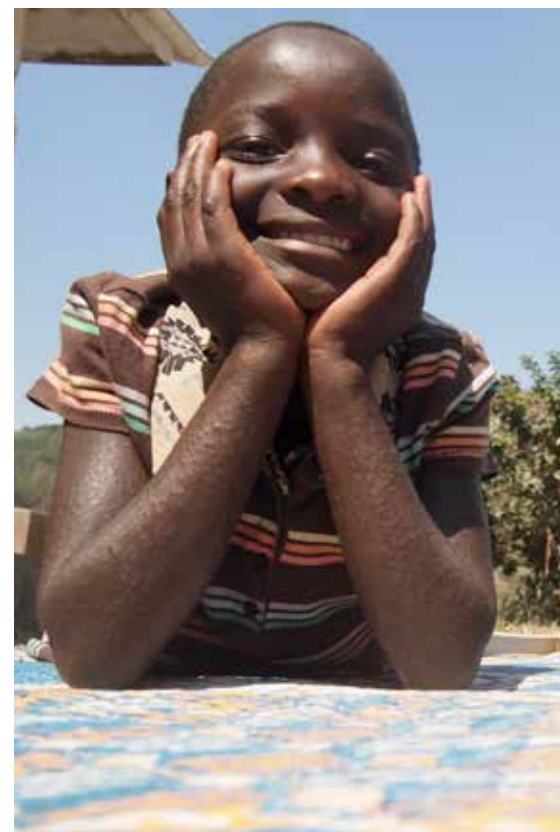
Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

I like the fact that I now have a school uniform - it makes me feel confident and I hope to become a businesswoman when I am older.



Before TPC I thought I would become a street boy because I could not go to school.

When I think about TPC the first things that come to mind are love, education and netball!





I love having a teacher in the evening who does activities and games with us.



I had dropped out of school and used to be alone in the house with my sister and we would dig the field to get our food. Now I am in Year 4.



When I think of TPC I think of safety.

The Value of Paper

By Michelle Hoffet

How much is a piece of paper truly worth? You are probably thinking the same as I did before – very little. However, I was proven wrong when, not long ago, I stepped out of the classroom, after an hour of working with Primary 5, and was overrun by children because they all wanted the piece of paper I was holding in my hand. For some kids here, white, clean paper is a more precious commodity than I had ever imagined it could be. This experience made me realize the value of even the simplest things in our daily lives.

Whilst I was interacting at the Primary School I also noticed how some of the kids were writing in their books with pencils as short as a centimetre, or even sharing their pencils because they didn't have any at all. Unfortunately, school materials are only one of the many resources that the children here lack. Indeed, many kids in school don't even have shoes. In The Peace Centre, every child has



about three sets of clothes, plus school uniform and sports clothes. To teenagers of my age who often have a whole cupboard full of clothes and an infinite amount of shoes, that will sound like nothing. Yet, if you compare this to the amount of clothes other children in the village have it will seem like a lot, as I noticed myself in school. There, some students cannot even afford to buy proper uniform so they come to school not only barefoot but in their dirty, old clothes which are often the only ones they own. Can you imagine wearing the same thing every single day?

In TPC, the kids, in addition to clothes and school supplies, are also provided with three meals a day. Even though for people living in the first world the daily portion of rice, beans and posho that the children get might seem repetitive and boring, the value of this food is almost inestimable for some children here, as many of them, before coming to TPC, would sometimes only have a single meal in a whole day. As you read, I would like you to think of a time when you felt hungry, knowing your next meal would be no more than five hours away. Compare this to the hunger that some of the TPC children

must have felt when they had to wait a whole day for a simple meal, or even longer.

TPC has its own land where sweet potatoes are farmed, as well as a chicken coop, and seeing this food being grown and raised has made me very conscious of how much a warm meal is worth. During my time here I learnt not to put more food on my plate than I could eat and instead of just carelessly throwing away what I didn't eat, to ask others if they would like to have it first.

Like food, water is also incredibly precious. I have now, for the first time, experienced what it means to run out of water. Upon our arrival we were told to save as much water as possible to prevent using up all the water in the tank. In spite of this, we ended up with no water coming out of our tap in

“Washing machines are about as common here as penguins.”



the second week, simply because the amount of water we used was probably several times more than local usage, even though we tried our best not to waste. An empty tank meant having to get water from a well some distance away, using the long drop instead of the toilet and washing the dishes of the entire Peace Centre community with only one bucket of water. Carrying 20kg of water from the standpipe is certainly not a chore I would relish having to do on a daily basis. Moreover, showering was out of question, as was washing our laundry.

When we do wash our laundry, it is always by hand. A washing machine or dish washer at TPC? Unthinkable. Washing machines are about as common here as penguins. Even in the kitchen there is no stove but only an open fireplace on which the food is cooked. This lack of technology is also the reason why all children jump all over me whenever I take my camera out to take pictures. It is something they are not familiar with and therefore it fascinates them. As a group of students, we all handed our phones in as an attempt to experience a life without any contact with 'the outside world'. Personally, this enabled me to connect more with TPC kids and to understand their way of living. I am thankful that every day I spent here at TPC was eye-opening and let me realize how privileged we are to have water in our taps, power in our sockets and food in our fridges. The next time you are about to write something on a nice clean sheet of white paper, I would like you to just take a minute and ask yourself: how much is this piece of paper really worth?



“Carrying 20kg of water from the standpipe is certainly not a chore I would relish having to do on a daily basis.”



The Privilege of Brushing Teeth

By Priyanka Menon



Frère Jacques is a song I have sung to myself twice a day for as long as I can remember, to make sure that I brush my teeth long enough so that they're as clean as can be. I just can't fathom a world where I don't begin and end every day with this ritual. And yet yesterday I met two 11 year olds who had never held, let alone owned, their own toothbrushes before.

Thomas and Laura are 11-year-old twins, left in the care of their only living relative, a great aunt, after the death of their parents. Their ailing aunt is fast losing her memory and seemingly suffering from Alzheimer's. I was one of the team that went to carry out a home visit for these children and witnessed the severity of the poverty in which they live. Their home is a tiny house with no light, clouds of dust, and no beds for the children, leaving them to sleep on the floor on an ageing mattress. They had no financial support, meaning that when Thomas cut the top of his thumb off three weeks ago - whilst helping in the field - they couldn't afford stitches. On top of this, both twins are suffering from a skin disease that covers their skin in white blotches and causes them to itch all the time.

After spending a little time at Thomas and Laura's home, we decided to take them to a hospital in Kabale to see about treatment for Thomas' thumb, which still looked like something out of a horror movie. Entering the hospital, a few things were buzzing through my mind, the first being whether or not they were going to amputate Thomas' thumb as the referring doctor from the village



“Yesterday I met two 11 year olds who had never held, let alone owned, their own toothbrushes before.”

had suggested, or whether or not they would discover a more serious, more threatening blood infection as it was some three weeks after the accident had happened. And what would be the results of Laura's HIV test? The second thing being the bizarre smell, an initial wave of disinfectant followed by the overwhelming stench of stale sweat, something I still hadn't gotten used to by the end of the day. There were also the early 1900's nurse's uniforms, the type with the little hats on their heads. But what stuck with me more than anything else was the sight of ten sad faces waiting for one doctor, and ten worried faces waiting either for results or for loved ones, like us.

Wherever you are in the world, whatever the state of the hospital, the feelings and emotions you experience when waiting for someone or when waiting for test results are always the same: worry, anxiety, heated anticipation, maybe pain and sadness, relief, and at times even happiness. Today I felt a mixture of worry and happiness. Worry, waiting for the doctor to tell us if Thomas' thumb was coming off or not; waiting for the nurse to tell us if Laura was HIV positive or not, and waiting to



see how serious the twins' skin condition was. I experienced happiness finding out that Thomas' thumb was staying on; learning that Laura was HIV negative, and discovering that their skin disease was curable and not contagious. The relief at getting such good news was overwhelming.

“In my opinion, it's unfair and, put simply, it's not right.”

On the way back from the hospital we stopped to buy them soap to help heal their skin infections, and it was then that Racheal (The Peace Centre's Social Worker) asked Thomas and Laura if they had ever brushed their teeth before, and their answer was a quick and simple, 'No'. This came as a big shock to me; how can you get to the age of 11 and never have brushed your teeth before?! This may seem like a dream to little children, not being nagged twice daily by parents to brush brush brush, but the reality is that far from that. It is a shocking wakeup call that not all children receive basic hygiene and medical care.

As you grow older, the memory of opening and using your first tooth brush starts to fade away, as it doesn't seem as important as other memories. However, when you see 11-year-old twins opening boxes containing toothbrushes for the first time, when you see them picking the colour they want for the first time and the huge smiles that appear on their faces, that distant memory comes flooding back. A memory that was once called boring no longer seems as unimportant.

So as you sing Frère Jacques, or whatever your preferred nursery rhyme is, tonight as you brush your teeth, remember that there are children who have never owned toothbrushes before, who have never experienced the basic medical care that we receive daily. In my opinion, it's unfair and, put simply, it's not right.

What are we going to do about it?



Chocolate Guilt

By Freya Todorova

It's crazy how well you get to know and start to care for someone in just two weeks. Saying goodbye to all my friends at The Peace Centre was harder than I ever thought it would be, and I miss them very much already. They are not just a group of kids that I played with, they're individuals, each very different to the other, and I'll remember them as such.

After we waved goodbye and had had all our tearful hugs, the bus was the quietest it had ever been. I started thinking of the girls I had gotten to know best, and an incident three nights ago came sharply to my mind. I was in the girls' dorm, just chilling with Promise, Fortunate and Novias, when Shanita entered with a tightly clenched fist. After sitting on the lower bunk, she cautiously and slowly opened her fingers to reveal a small mound of Cadbury's cocoa powder sitting in the palm of her hand. The girls all rushed towards her, took a pinch of the powder and eagerly sucked all of it off their fingers. Cocoa powder is not a normal part of their diet, but something that Golden had bought to make his guests feel more at home. Learning that something so common to me was such a treat for these girls

“Saying goodbye to all my friends at The Peace Centre was harder than I ever thought it would be.”



was a big eye opener, and I am glad that I was able to witness such a scene.

My brain being what it is, sitting in the departing bus, I then started thinking about chocolate. To those that know me well, this is perhaps not a surprise, as I am something of a chocoholic and truth be told, my supplies that were supposed to last two weeks were gone in three days. Whoops! I began to imagine the amount of chocolate I could buy at Dubai airport, particularly Maltesers. They have these massive buckets full of chocolatey heaven! I was craving them, and knew that it was only three days until I could get my Malteser on. It then struck me that the money I was planning to blow on this bucket of Maltesers could send a TPC kid to Primary School for a term. I started feeling very guilty.



I was feeling guilty not just about chocolate, but about all that I have such as my family, the food that I have, my home, my education, my clothes and holidays, even the endless supply of clean water. I then started to think of my TPC friends again, and having gotten to know them fairly well these past two weeks, I was fairly sure they wouldn't wish for me to feel guilty. After all, I can't help the life I was born into. Guilt doesn't create anything positive; guilt paralyses.

What I think my friends would want me to do, what I know I would want them to do if our situations were reversed, would be to make the most of what I have been blessed with. I am grateful for my family and I should tell them more how much they mean to me. I perhaps need to be more grateful for the amazing food I am given, for my lovely home, and I need to

“When we waved goodbye and had had all our tearful hugs, the bus was the quietest it had ever been.”

be absolutely certain that I don't waste the amazing opportunity I have going to the school that I attend. I need to honour my friends in doing the best I can in everything I do.

And if I manage to achieve that, then I don't think I need to feel guilty about buying some chocolate at the airport. My only regret will be that I cannot share it with them. This time.



Going Home

By Isabel Joseph

“It all adds up to create the atmosphere of a home.”

I was something of an anomaly in terms of being accepted back on the trip this year as I'm not currently a student at Dulwich College Shanghai; I moved to America last summer. While I do keep in contact with some friends I don't really have any ties to the school anymore. For me, when I move I let go of the place and prefer not to travel back to visit. This is because everyone moves on and the place will have changed beyond recognition. I find it awkward going back because I feel like I have to relearn the people and the place as it has changed so much. The question "Where are you from?" is also hard for me to answer as I am a third culture kid. My father grew up in England, my passport is British, and I was born in London. Yet I am not



really English as I have never lived there and I don't identify as a Brit. My mother is Singaporean and we visit there almost every year. But I don't share their culture, especially as I dislike both seafood and spicy food, which, at least for my family, is a major part of Singaporean life. Both my grandparents are Sri Lankan. However, I have only visited once as a tourist and I don't have any family living there anymore. I currently live in America but I have only been there for a year and am treated like a foreigner there too. So I don't really have a place I am able to call home or "go back to". Except The Peace Centre.

Although The Peace Centre has changed drastically over the last three years, the underlying friendly and welcoming attitude has forever remained a constant, creating a homely feeling. In the morning, if I forget to greet Golden he will

come up to me and demand a good morning with a big smile on his face. During meals there is always a loud, almost chaotic atmosphere, like a huge family dinner. Every day, when I come back from helping in the school, Peace will be there asking how my day was. Golden will come up and tease me about anything and everything. As part of evening activities we do stuff like Games Night, another 'family favourite'. I am a massive fan of games, particularly when I win! It was great to have the friendly yet competitive attitude that Games Night creates. At night, before going to bed I will go and say good night to everyone. It all adds up to create the atmosphere of a home.

As a Dulwich team member who has come to Bukinda all three years, I have met many people before and they therefore treat me as a lifelong friend. A particular person that I remember from all three years and have gotten closer and closer to is Sarah. Sarah is Peace and Golden's youngest child. She is currently 10 years old, the same age as my younger sister, Lianna. To me, Sarah is my Ugandan sister. Because she goes to boarding school, the first time I saw her on this trip was at Lake Bunyonyi, halfway through our time at TPC. One of the first things she did when she saw me was 'boop' my nose, which was a game we had started the first year. For us it was like the months apart didn't exist, almost as if time had stood still and when I came back here time simply resumed.

Another thing that is the same every year I come back is the stars at night. Having lived in Shanghai for seven years the most nature I saw was the occasional tree strategically planted to beautify the streets. In Uganda, however, there is so much natural beauty everywhere. Whether that may be the many lakes with a perfect sunrise backdrop, or the greenery by the road contrasted against the red-orange dust kicked up from the



vehicles on the road. But a favourite scene of mine in Uganda is definitely the night-sky. At around ten, most of the lights will be off and you can appreciate the encompassing dome of the sky spotted with stars. Almost every night, Megan, Mass and I would roll out a mat and talk under the stars. Some nights we'd talk about the day, others about life in general. Every night we talked about something different under the same stars. I know that no matter where I travel, when I look up and see the stars I will be reminded of The Peace Centre.

When I tell people that this is my third year going to The Peace Centre, some ask me why I 'waste' money going again. Firstly, because no matter where I live this will always be my home. So in that respect it will never be a 'waste of money' to



come back. Secondly, each year the trip has been a collection of different experiences. The first year was only on construction of The Peace Centre, there were no actual orphans since there was no actual orphanage. The second year was more of a mixture of construction and interaction with the people. It was pretty amazing to see The Peace Centre fully built and occupied. Mornings were dedicated to construction and afternoons and evenings set aside to spend time with the kids. Coming back this year, a lot more has changed: the chicken palace is completed; one of the cooks collects eggs every day; and extra buildings have been added, like a Canteen and a Guest House. The content of the trip was also extremely different. This year we spent the mornings assisting the teachers in the Primary and Secondary schools that TPC kids go to. It was insightful to see how the kids learn and the typical structure of their school day. This trip has helped to bring me closer to the kids themselves and develop stronger relationships with them.

The children themselves have also changed a lot. Compared to the last year the kids are more open, and are more comfortable approaching us. For example, this year, a lot of the younger kids would

come up and tickle us indicating that they want to play tag. A particular kid that has blossomed since last year is Collins. Collins is one of the youngest at The Peace Centre, and was one of, if not the, shyest last year. Previously, Collins seemed to have a permanent frown on his face. During evening activities Collins was very reticent and acted as more of an observer rather than a participator. This year, however, Collins is much more lively. He is constantly smiling and joining in activities. Collins is also one of the children who would run up to us and tickle us before running away expecting to be chased. A highlight of this trip has definitely been hearing Collins giggle. He has this high-pitch squeal that bubbles out whenever he plays tag. It is incredibly heart-warming to see his crooked, teasing smile. Another child who I have really seen grow since last year is Joan, as then she was very quiet and held-back during group activities. This year, on the other hand, Joan is a regular chatterbox. When we were playing Tumbling Monkeys her competitive side came out. She was shouting and laughing. She would try to bend the rules in her favour or sneak her monkeys into our piles so that she could win. It was both hilarious to watch her play and uplifting to see the changes she had undergone. The Peace Centre has been, and is, a place where these amazing kids have flourished and grown; surely this is testament to them feeling safe, loved and at home.

Leaving is always sad but I know I will be back. After all, no matter where you travel to and what you see, you will always go home: it's where your heart belongs.

“Leaving is always sad but I know I will be back.”

Cry for Your Rights

By Anthony Reich

Is there anything more heartbreaking than seeing a child's coffin?

On our first day in Uganda, over two weeks ago, I noticed a startling number of child and baby sized coffins adorning the side of the main road as we drove south. Seeing coffins is always sad, and reminds us of the fragility of life, but there is something particularly poignant about the small ones made for infants. Those images have not left me, and have come back to my mind at a number of times throughout our fortnight here.

As is perhaps understandable on a trip to volunteer in an orphanage, the UN's Rights of the Child have been constantly in my mind. We have experienced firsthand children whose rights have been taken away, and I cannot help but be affected by this. We have met children who have been malnourished; children who have not been provided with the most basic medical care; children who have been robbed of an education and instead of sitting in a classroom learning their

“I noticed a startling number of child and baby sized coffins adorning the side of the main road.”



1-2-3s, are made to work in the fields or tend to cattle; children who have alcoholic parents; children who have been abandoned; children who have been abused; children who have been starved of love and care... The list, sadly, goes on.

In preparation for the Day of the African Child celebrations, a retired teacher from the Bukinda area, wrote a poem for the children she had once taught. I was so moved by this poem, that I asked if I could have a copy, and would like to include a section of it below.

Cry! The young world, Cry!
 Maybe, oh! Maybe!
 Somebody, someday, somewhere;
 Someone is listening!
 And, if no-one is:
 - The stones will bear us witness,
 - The trees are nodding 'Yes',
 - The wind will take the message.



Children all over the world,
 Children of Africa,
 Children of Uganda,
 Join voices and Cry!
 Cry for your rights:
 - Your right to eat well,
 - Your right to education,
 - Your right to gender balance,
 - Your right to good governance,
 - But most of all... Your right to be heard.

And maybe, oh! Maybe!
 Somebody, someday, somewhere;
 Someone is listening!
 And, if no-one is:
 - The stones will bear us witness,
 - The trees are nodding 'Yes',
 - The wind will take the message.

How adult man can easily forget what he learnt yesterday?

Adults, use your life experience and listen.

Listen to us children...

Oh! Don't deafen your ears,

We are fed up and tired,

We are tired of all forms of abuse:

- Of child labour and child sacrifice
- Of corporal punishment and corruption
- Of defilement and gender inequality
- Of poor learning environments
- Of rape.

And maybe, oh! Maybe!

Somebody, someday, somewhere;

Someone is listening!

And, if no-one is:

- The stones will bear us witness,
- The trees are nodding 'Yes'
- The wind will take the message!

The heartache and pain so readily apparent in this poem is real. This is not mere fanfare written to drum up hype or hysteria. Despite, for example, corporal punishment being illegal in Uganda, children are regularly beaten at school. Enter





a classroom and there are often sticks lying around. I remember only too vividly when I lived here in 1999, the head teacher came into my classroom as he had heard that some children had not done their homework. He got all the culprits to the front of the room and admonished them for what seemed like an eternity. Once he was done, he pointed at a diligent boy on the front row and said, "Go and find me a good strong stick as these children need to learn a lesson. If you are not back in two minutes, I will beat you too." I've never seen anyone move so fast. And when he came back, the students who were still standing at the front of the room, were beaten - eight stokes each. One child was hit so hard the stick broke. I didn't set homework again after that.

But this post is not just one of doom and gloom. It is also one of hope. The Peace Centre has twenty-five children living in its safe walls, it supports a further three in school sponsorship and it has three more children who will likely come and live there once their paperwork is complete. Thirty-one may not seem like a lot, but it's a start, and make no mistake, to each of these children it is huge. Despite being a small organisation, work is being done and The





“The Peace Centre is managing to change the trajectory of these children’s lives: they are smiling, happy, talented children with exciting futures.”

Amos and the twenty-six other kids going to school and eating three times daily and wearing new clothes and receiving love thanks to The Peace Centre.

Size doesn’t matter, except when it comes to coffins.

Peace Centre is managing to change the trajectory of these children’s lives: they are smiling, happy, talented children with exciting futures.

We have spoken with our students from Dulwich at length about ‘What next?’. We have discussed their experience in Uganda this summer and asked them how what they have seen and learnt and digested is going to be applied to their lives. We have discussed what small changes they are going to make. And we ask you, our readers, that same question: what changes will you make? The temptation when we read distressing statistics

about poverty, or when we see the daily news full of bleakness, or when we read chastening poems such the one included above, is to say, “I can’t make a difference. I am only one person. I can only do something small. It would be like putting a small plaster on a torrent... what is the point?” And I challenge that. The smallest acorn grows into a mighty oak.

Next time you are concerned about the size of your commitment, donation or pledge, do not be put off, but please plough ahead. It does make a difference. Just ask Promise, Joan, Junior, Bosco,



Quotes from Parents Re 2016 Trip



This trip has made a lasting impression on our daughter. I think she benefitted hugely from it. She has many little personal stories to tell about each child and she can't wait to go back.

Our son definitely came back more mature and more appreciative. Thank you, thank you and again thank you for providing him with this wonderful opportunity. It was truly unique.



It was a tremendous experience for our son and we very much like his new perspectives on our world.



Our daughter had a great experience in Uganda. When she talks about this trip, her eyes fill with delight and smiles. I love to listen about her experiences. It was difficult to decide to join this trip at first, but now I am so thrilled she went.



Our daughter had another amazing experience at The Peace Centre, and it meant so much to her. I think she dared to do more and to really explore the culture and stretch her own boundaries and at times shyness. It is too soon yet to say how these experiences will shape her for the future, but I know that it will have a tremendous impact on the adult she is becoming.









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