



BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE WORLD:
2 WEEKS AT THE PEACE CENTRE UGANDA
Summer 2017

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Foreword

By Andy Clapperton

Having now led four trips to The Peace Centre Uganda with Dulwich students, there is one very striking moment on the journey, a moment that has been identical in each of the four years: the sudden quiet as we pull away from the crowd of waving children and leave Bukinda on our last day. It is a pensive silence: an hour, sometimes more, of pure contemplation, as we all look back on everything we have experienced and learned over the last fortnight. As a teacher, it is quite telling how 20 normally vivacious teenagers can sit together on a coach for such a long time without making a sound. And it says a great deal about how much of an impact living for two weeks in The Peace Centre community has on their lives.

This book is a collection of written reflections composed over our two-week stay. It is a rollercoaster ride that will take you through instants of unbridled joy and of deep sadness. Most of all, it is an insight into some of the learning that went on during our fortnight at The Peace Centre Uganda, and as such I hope it will give you a glimpse into the tangle of thoughts inevitably going through the minds of our students as they sat in complete silence on the bus heading out of Bukinda.





An Undeserving Welcome

By Cherry



I want you to imagine a perfect place. It's not difficult. Just take the world but rid of all issues. No inequality, no conflict. Just peaceful. Peaceful and happy. A place where every person feels accepted. A place where everyone is united as one community, loving and respectful of one another. A place where we would never have to fear what others might think or do because we know they will never intentionally harm us. A beautiful place, full of smiles. That's my perfect place.

But enough about that for the moment. Allow me to talk about our arrival at The Peace Centre yesterday afternoon.

Simply put, the welcome we received was surreal. It felt a bit like something from the movies. In films, when the hero returns home, they are always greeted with an overwhelming welcome where everybody rushes forward to greet them with hugs and smiles and blaring trumpets and waving flags. They have

fought battles, stood up against tyranny, done great deeds, and now they are home and it is cause for great celebration! Well, that's the welcome we received upon arrival at the Peace Centre. But I am not a hero, and we are not heroes. So why the welcome?

It was especially confusing for me, as a newcomer to The Peace Centre myself. I didn't know anyone here. Yes, some students have been here before and returned to see old friends, but I have never met anyone here before in my life. And still, the kids and adults showered me with hugs and smiles as I stepped off the bus. Everyone was treated the same. There was a large flood of people, rushing forward to greet us. I'll be honest, I was confused. A girl walked up to me and hugged me tightly, as if we were long lost friends. But I had never seen the girl before. I didn't even know her name. And yet, there she was, her arms tightly wrapped around me, her firm grip grasping onto me as if her life depended on it. It took me a while to react, as I was shocked by the warm embrace,

"A place where everyone is united as one community, loving and respectful of one another."



*“It was just a blur of
cuddles, smiles, laughter
and shouts of joy.”*

The welcome was undeserving. But it was special. Very, very special. And it was that which made me start dreaming of my perfect place. A place where everyone is caring and loving, everyone is respectful of one another, everyone is happy, smiling and full of joy. In just a few minutes I felt that I was part of that community, a large family. My first few hours here have shown me so many of the ingredients of my perfect place, and I cannot wait for it to be my home for the next two weeks.

but I put my arms around her and squeezed back. After a while, she let me go, gently sliding her arms out. She looked up at me, her mouth stretched into a huge smile, her eyes gleaming with excitement. She laughed and shouted, “Welcome!” I smiled meekly in return, still not sure how to take this all in. Before I knew it, another swell of hugs hit me. From that point on, I enjoyed a blur of cuddles, smiles, laughter and shouts of joy. It was just a sea of faces, wave after wave of warm embraces. I was so in awe, it felt dreamlike; unreal.

When I paused to consider why it felt so unreal, I realized: they were welcoming us as if we were heroes, but we are not. We haven’t fought any battles, stood up against tyranny or done great deeds. We are not special. We are just normal people. We are normal people, doing normal things, doing what we ought to. We had travelled to make new friends and to love and care for others, but how was this heroic?



The Importance of Caring with Empathy & Tenderness

By Matthew

Ever since I heard about the possibility of joining a trip to Uganda, the area that has captivated me the most is healthcare. Not just the diseases themselves - diseases such as HIV, cancer, malaria, TB or Ebola - but the ways doctors and nurses help their patients on a daily basis, the way they talk, care and connect with those they are looking after. That area has long fascinated me, so much so that I am considering a future career as a Doctor. So, when I was offered the chance to visit a local hospital to spend a day there, shadowing medical professionals, I jumped at the chance. TV programmes only show the exciting moments, the critical conditions, the blood splurting, the life and death. But the reality isn't necessarily like that, and I was keen to experience real hospital life and its daily routine.

Along with three friends, I entered slowly through the hospital gate and walked along the dirt road to a main



“Illness and death know nothing of age, race and gender.”

building. Despite the outward appearances, of walls with paint flaking off, the inner corridor was flooded with nurses, doctors, and patients. The managing director of Rugarama Hospital led us to a briefing room with wooden chairs and sat us down in the midst of doctors and nurses. Dr. Steven was discussing the HIV problem in Uganda and the sensitivity of the topic. HIV killed approximately 28,000 people in 2015 and about 7% of the adult population has HIV. Inside this small room, he wanted to discuss with his team the delicate process of revealing terrible news to a patient, such as how to tell them their tests have come back HIV+. This was something that I had never considered before. I can't really begin to imagine having to be the one to pass such life-changing news on to somebody.

After the talk, we moved down the corridor where we saw mothers sitting with their wailing babies, trying to calm them. We continued through the vaccination ward and came to a building that was still under construction where a simple sign at the top read,





“Surgical and Maternity Ward”. We met a patient with severe burns, a woman recovering from a poorly-performed (and likely illegal) abortion, and a man who survived an automobile accident. The most harrowing was the small boy with third-degree burns: they covered his chest, with all of the skin totally burned off and with wounds still open and fresh blood glistening in the light. He was midway through the surgery and a large portion of the skin on his thigh had been removed and was waiting to be grafted on. The boy was conscious, sipping some water, and seemed numb to the world around him. The care that he was receiving was empathic, gentle and showed that the doctor had developed a real connection with the boy. If I do ever enter the medical profession, I certainly want to ensure that I treat each patient with that same tenderness that I saw today.

Visiting the hospital made me confront, first hand, the reality of mortality and the fragility of life. The diversity of the illnesses that people were suffering from was shocking; I had naively expected them to all have similar tropical diseases, but that was far from the case. Illness and death know nothing of age, race and gender. And yet the doctors and nurses I saw in action today disregarded this and simply got on with it. They cared, and it showed.

Whatever the outcome of my aspiration to become a medic - and this experience has only motivated my desire - I want to remember this lesson. I want to make sure that, whatever the diagnosis, showing a patient, friend or relative that I care, and that they are not alone, is something I will never fail to do.



“I want to make sure that showing a patient, friend or relative that I care, and that they are not alone, is something I will never fail to do.”



A Complicated Visit

By Yi Jing

If you were a parent in rural Uganda, and you heard your young child ask, “When will you die so that I can join The Peace Centre?” what would your reaction be? Shock, I imagine. Deep shock. What circumstances could lead a child to think or say such a thing? I was mortified when I heard that a child in the village had actually asked their mum this very question, albeit unaware of its gravity. But today I got a glimpse of what it might take to drive a child to ask that.

I was part of a small group that made a Home Visit to the house of David, a 5-year old boy, to assess how suitable he was for enrolment at The Peace Centre. David lived with a carer, an elderly woman, who informed us that he had been abandoned and left with her – even though she had seven children of her own – when his mother had tested HIV positive and subsequently passed away. We were told that she had been selling herself in order to make ends meet and thus the identity of David’s father was unknown. David was not at home when we arrived, but came back ten minutes later, wearing torn and dirty clothing, carrying a full jerry can of water in his little hands. The mud house that he lived in was



extremely cramped. There were barely any windows, just a few gaps in the mud secured by some rough strips of wood. There was a tiny sitting room that was pitch black, cutlery and garbage littering the ground – including small, empty bags of moonshine made from sugarcane. Two bedrooms that slept four people each were sectioned off by hanging scraps of fabric. Tattered sponge mattresses and scraggly thin sheets were splayed on the ground. David and the rest of the children in the house ate a single meal of corn or potato mid-afternoon, and this was supposed to keep them full for the entire day. As the story unfolded and a clearer picture was painted, my heart strained increasingly for him. In my mind, he was the perfect definition of ‘needy’.

“Both parents are capable of providing for him. They are just choosing not to.”

However, as I’ve mentioned, it is simply impossible to provide for all ‘needy’ children in and around Bukinda. But as we heard more and more about David, I mentally checked off each box down the typical criteria you might attach to becoming a TPC resident. Is he a double orphan? Yes. How are his living conditions? Upsettingly bad. Is he “at risk”? Without parents around, most definitely. During these home visits, it is essential to observe the situation of the child, looking for indicators



of extreme poverty. Almost like a detective, Racheal, TPC's Social Worker, looked at each aspect of David's surroundings to gain a better understanding of how he truly lives. Meanwhile, David kept looking up at me timidly for reassurance. Later on, as he took us around his small garden, I reached out my hand and he grabbed onto it immediately. How much I wanted to smuggle him into my backpack and bring him straight back to TPC! Every single day he'd be showered with all the love and care that he deserves, with endless laughs and smiles.

Talking to his carer, however, was not enough. After all, a good detective is never satisfied having only consulted

"I am happy to see TPC children and carers hugging each other as a family should."

a single source. As such, Racheal talked with neighbours to confirm that the stories we were told are reliable and match up. Wandering down the path, we talked to some children who had returned from school for lunch and began to question them about David's situation. All I could think was that David had to be accepted into TPC. There was no reason why he shouldn't be. But life is not always so simple: just seconds later the neighbours claimed that all his carer had told us was a lie. I couldn't believe my ears. I was completely crushed. It was a fabrication. His mother was not dead, rather she was neglectful. She lived not too far away and in fact had recently come to visit. David's father was a bicycle-taxi driver with a steady, although low income, and lived in the neighboring village. David had even been attending a private school until recently, but dropped out – presumably due to lack of funds. I was absolutely dumbfounded, my jaw literally dropped. How could someone come up with such lies? What could possibly compel a parent to dump their child for their own selfish reasons?

Even now as I've had time to reflect on what has happened, I'm still as shaken and infuriated as I was when I first heard it. My heart aches for David, knowing that he has to continue living under the care of such irresponsible, unloving people. The sheer thought that people are willing to weave webs of lies just so they can pass off the responsibility of raising their own children to someone else fills me with anger, frustration and sadness all at once. Because the reality is that David cannot be enrolled to live in TPC as he has two living parents, both of whom are capable of providing for him. They are just choosing not to.

Nonetheless, I feel there is still much we can take away from this devastating scenario. Above all, the fact that people think their children will live better lives under the care of staff at The Peace Centre could be seen as a measure of the success of the orphanage in its mantra to provide the neediest children with 'Love, Care and a Home'. And I have to say that I am endlessly thankful that so many children are now in a place where, according to the anthem they themselves recently wrote for the Centre, all their 'sadness has been taken away'. There are many needy people in the world and that is an undeniable fact. Of course, we cannot help each and every one of those, but we could and should help those that we have the power to. I'll be sure to hug the children as tight as I can tonight, but most of all I will be happy to see TPC children and carers hugging each other as a family should.





“I left the classroom feeling like I had learned so much more than I had given.”

A Lesson Learned

By Yoonho

I was one of the group of seven people who visited Bukinda Secondary School, located more than a mile away from The Peace Centre. We were going to help out with some lessons in ICT, and being one of the “newbies” here I was aware that it would require a great deal of understanding to overcome the barrier presented by different ethnicities and cultures. Being a Korean national, in my previous experience teaching Koreans and Chinese this did not present much of a challenge for me at all, but facing Ugandan teens was going to be somewhat different.

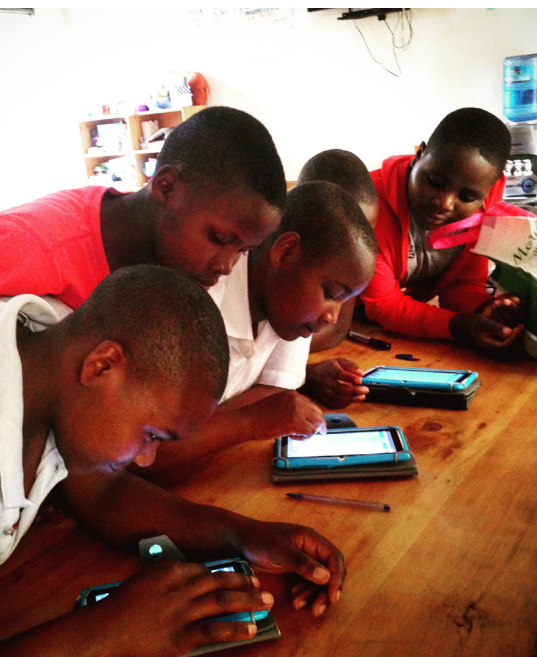
The sandy road to the school was deceptively contrasting to the YangGao highway that takes me to school in Shanghai. The scenic view of the Bukinda plateau was strikingly beautiful, but juxtaposed was the dilapidated school environment. The white building walls and columns were stained yellow, with debris scattered around the ‘long-drop’ toilets and an overwhelming smell mingling with the equatorial heat.

I was in charge of helping two senior students aged eighteen and nineteen, neither of whom were TPC children. Since both of them were older, I felt a pang of guilt at the idea of being the ‘helper’, as I was aware that it was against the code of the culture in my home country, where youngers teaching elders is considered extremely rude. I expected them to be intolerant to my guidance and even angry for my “cheeky” behaviour. However, to my astonishment, both of them showed genuine interest in learning from an unqualified foreign “teacher” whom they did not know at all. After learning some basic PowerPoint skills pertaining to photo transition, I asked them to make a presentation about their own family.

Isaac, an eighteen-year-old Senior 4 student, depicted his family as, in his words, “the richest in the world.” He was just dreaming of an idyllic future, however, as the current reality is rather different: his father used to be a lorry driver but is no longer able to work due to debilitating illness. The reason for Isaac being older than the rest of his classmates is because he left school two years ago in search of a job in Entebbe to support his sickly father. Isaac was independent and resourceful, and reminded me of one of those fictional heroic figures who face challenges with passion. Normally, people tend to internalise their surrounding environment - in this case a troubling one - but Isaac seemed to surpass the expectations of the people around him. My response should have been one of compassion, but if I am completely honest, I was actually a touch jealous. I have never experienced the kind of situation Isaac has had to deal with, and it really impressed me how, despite such a tough background, not only is he resilient when overcoming the many challenges he has had to face, but he also keeps such a positive attitude toward learning. To me, this commands a great deal of respect.



“There is always something to be learned from new encounters with different people.”



I can still recollect teaching the Korean-Chinese teenagers in Longbai the day before the Uganda trip. You might think that because we share an ethnical background, that should allow us to more easily develop empathy than with the students I was working with in Bukinda. However, what I have learned today is that perceived cultural differences actually don't matter. I had expected students here to be less keen to learn, but in reality, they were highly inquisitive and impassioned – they were constantly asking questions about my home country, and were extremely interactive. In fact, their desire to develop an understanding, coupled with their open-mindedness, completely flipped the roles of 'teacher' and 'student'.

I left the classroom feeling like I had learned so much more than I had given, and if there is one thing I will take home from this trip, it is the importance of being broad-minded and curious, as there is always something to be learned from new encounters with different people.



Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

“Living in The Peace Centre I am loved and cared for. I have peace.”



“I love being at The Peace Centre because now I can study.”

“Before I had to stay in the field and look after cows. Now I can go to school.”





“Before I came to The Peace Centre I was stealing people’s food. I was forced to be a thief to survive. Now I have three nice meals a day.”

*** Actual comments not necessarily said by the child in the accompanying photo for anonymity reasons.*

“Now when I am sick, I am able to take medicine to get better.”



“Before I came to The Peace Centre I had no hope for the future. I was going to be a wheelbarrow pusher. Now I have a good education and I hope to be a doctor one day.”

A Letter to my Older Self

By Ben

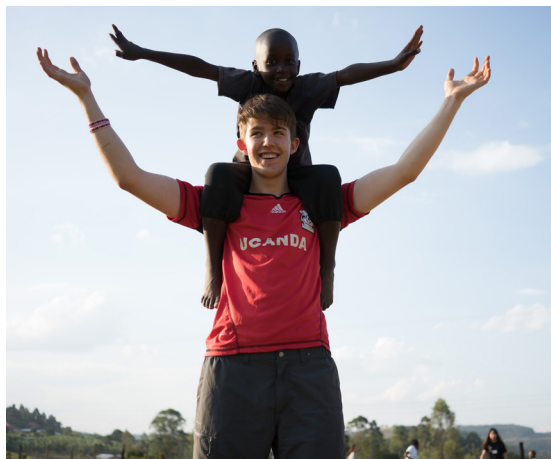
Dear 30-year-old Ben,

One day when you decide to have kids you should remember your trip to The Peace Centre in 2017.

When you have kids, you will be exhausted. In TPC you worked hard every day before the children returned for lunch and dinner, giving yourself very few breaks. Each day you: organised clothes so that when they needed them they were easy to find; repainted their walls so that it looked a little cleaner; reorganised their books so that they wouldn't have to stress about checking for the level of difficulty. You were tired and yet you didn't want to rest. Every rest felt like a betrayal of their trust because it meant you spent time doing something for yourself and not for them. And after all this, the kids would want to play, which only made you more tired.

When you have kids, you will care about every aspect of their life – all the way from academics to friendships. When you asked Zion about his grades he told you he

“Every rest felt like a betrayal of their trust because it meant you spent time doing something for yourself and not for them.”



was good in English class but not so much in Maths. It was saddening to think that you couldn't help him. Zion didn't seem to care too much and diverted the conversation by tickling you. Or perhaps he just didn't want you to worry for him, yet you still did. You cared when Lucky called Amos cute so you tried to get Amos to talk to her because you wanted the best for the both of them. The whole time you were with the children you were constantly reminding yourself to be sensitive to their lives before coming to TPC, as you didn't want to upset them. You will care so much.

When you have kids, you will worry. Worrying will become second nature for you. When TPC went to Lake Bunyonyi all you did was fear. When they swam wearing five different pieces of floaty gear, you still thought they might drown. Despite being so proud of them for wanting to swim you thought that something



was certainly going to go wrong and that you would have to jump in there and save them but luckily nothing happened. When they climbed tall trees to grab fruit for everyone, you worried they would fall and hurt themselves, but fortunately no one fell. When they went to explore the island you worried they would get lost so you joined them so that they got lost with you. In the end, you got lost and Amos and Collins had to rescue you.

When you have kids, you will smile. After working so hard during the day it would all be worth it just to see the children's grins at lunch and dinner as they came around the corner of Peace and Golden's house, beaming and yelling “Agandi?” from across the yard.



“You have to walk a mile in a parent’s shoes to truly understand all they do.”

It was so uplifting to see the children smile despite knowing what they have been through. To know that they can experience the same childhood innocence you once had is amazing and it means that all the hard work is worth it.

And lastly, when you have kids, you will want to say a heartfelt thank you to your own parents as you begin to see everything they gave for you, and especially the little everyday things that you did not notice, realise or comprehend at the time. You will want to take some time out and show them your love, because now that you have your own children, you are starting to understand that they always did their best for you, even when you were difficult or stubborn, threw a tantrum or disagreed with them. You have to walk a mile in a parent’s shoes to truly understand all they do. When you are a dad yourself, you will appreciate your own parents much more and it is important that they know it, so whatever you do, don’t forget to tell them.

Wishing you the very best of luck!

16-year old Ben



A Place of Joy

By Pier



“I realised how lucky I am to have always had the privilege to go on holiday multiple times each year when friends like Brian have never been out of Uganda.”

Last year, when I came to The Peace Centre for the first time, I did not expect to be surrounded by such an incredible atmosphere of joy and laughter. The immense sense of fun I felt right from the very moment we arrived in 2016 is the reason I've decided to come back this summer. While it is important to reflect on the more emotional and intense things that sometimes happen here, I think it is equally important to highlight the happier, more fun experiences at TPC and I want to share some of these with you.

This year, I have felt even more fun, joy and banter than before and it has been amazing to see that in the development of all the children. For example, last year, a then 7-year-old Bosco who had only just joined TPC a few months earlier, was a lot less playful and rarely smiled. In contrast, this year he is so much more cheerful and he participates in all the singing, dancing and games that we play daily. Now that his basic needs

are being met, he is able to develop his confidence and emotional ties to his extended family around him. It was especially heart-warming to see his smile and hear his laughter at Lake Bunyonyi as I could see that he was truly happy.

Of course, it is also important to reflect on some of the more serious things that happen here. For example, 2 days ago, I was talking to Brian, who is 20 now and was the very first orphan at The Peace Centre. A really interesting thing he said was that he wanted to go to Mexico City in 25 years. Perplexed, I asked him why he didn't want to go sooner. He responded that he could not afford to now and that he would have to save up for 25 years to do so. I realised how lucky I am to have always had the privilege to go on holiday multiple times each year when people like Brian have never even been out of Uganda. I also realised how privileged I am to never have had to plan so far in advance.





in his hand! I would never have expected for him to be so playful when I first met him and it is lovely to see how much he has changed in such a short period of time.

I will never forget that the kids living here had very difficult lives before coming to TPC. In fact, I think I must remember it. And the tragedy of their previous lives is made all the more relevant when you consider just how happy and joyful they are now. The change is really very remarkable and shows clearly the great work that TPC doing – and that is why I wanted to come back this summer. And why I am sure I will continue to return here in the future. We all need joy in our lives, and you find lots of it here.

“We all need joy in our lives, and you find lots of it here.”

In contrast, a more short-term change I have witnessed is that of Isaac, another young child here. He is new so he didn't know any of us when we arrived. Our first day here, Mass, Ben and I noticed that he was sitting alone so we sat with him and as we tried to introduce ourselves it was very clear to us that he was uncomfortable with us. He barely said a word to us when we asked him questions, and he did not make eye contact. Just a week later, he is now so much more open, joking around with us. A few days ago, when he and some of the younger kids noticed my fear of bugs, he started chasing me around TPC with a grasshopper



Thoughts on Brotherhood

By Mass



What does it mean to be a brother?

Brothers love each other, they stand up for each other, they comfort one another. Sure, sometimes they bicker, squabble and annoy each other, but there is care that is deeper than these petty arguments. Just ask my siblings who I see almost every day! We squabble, but we care.

Since I came to TPC last summer, my family have started to sponsor a young boy named Blaire. He was not living at The Peace Centre last year and moved into the home in the autumn of 2016. Our family have been in correspondence with Blaire since we started to sponsor him at the beginning of the 2017, but I had never met him. As such, when I was on the bus to Bukinda just over a week ago, I was worried that

meeting Blaire might be strange, that I wouldn't know what to say or how to act around him. I was planning different conversations and scenarios in my head - but I really wasn't sure how any of them would pan out.

When I first arrived he was a bit distant, so I wondered if he didn't recognise me from the photo that my mum sent. So at dinner time that night I told him that my parents were Luca and Gabriella and as I said that he looked up at me in shock and asked with raised eyebrows, "your parents?!" and that was the moment he realised who I was.

The next morning I got hugs before and after school. And not fake hugs, but hugs that were strong, (that winded me!) and you could see the genuine happiness in his eyes and smile. It was amazing how he made me his brother that quickly. I have come to appreciate the sparkle in Blaire's eyes. They are one of his most recognisable features and I look forward to seeing them shine.

*"Brothers love each other,
they stand up for each
other, they comfort one
another."*



A couple of days ago, Pier and I were messing about (as we tend to do) and Pier started to tease me a little. Before I had time to tease him back, Blaire intervened and said, "No! Mass is not that. Mass is my brother." I was shocked. I had no idea I meant so much to him. It is not easy to stand up for your friends or family, and Blaire did it immediately even though I had only known him for a few days.

Am I a bad brother? Would I have stood up for Blaire as quickly as he stood up for me? Did I feel the same care



and connection to him as quickly as it seems he did for me?

This time last year Blaire - a double orphan - was living with his brother Joshua in an abandoned home. They were failing to sustain themselves and struggling to survive. Now they both live at The Peace Centre and they are thriving. They have over 30 new Bakiga siblings and each have sponsor families with new siblings abroad too. They don't have to worry about their school fees, where their next meal will come from or their health. Blaire has a family that will write to him regularly and he can finally have a childhood that he deserves.

I have learnt a lot this trip to Uganda, including more about how to be a brother. I am Blaire's brother. He defends me, and I defend him. He hugs me, and I hug him. He loves me, and I love him.



"Now they both live at The Peace Centre and they are thriving."



A Message about Emotions

By Meg

Dear Angus,

When you first told me about The Peace Centre and your experiences, I came away thinking that it was all about having fun with the kids and doing work around TPC. I had not really considered the extent of the deeper emotions I would experience, but now that I'm here, I'm reflecting a lot more than I initially thought I would, on a combination of warmth, guilt and shock.



You told me about how accepting they are, and true enough, as soon as I got off of the bus I already felt like I had another home here. Such was the warmth of the welcome we received. But what has really got me is that it's not just the greetings on the surface – it runs much deeper than that. The food over the past ten days has been amazing, and there has been lots of it. Golden insisted multiple times that I should eat more but I've had to refuse because I thought I was about to explode. For most of the meals we have had chips, avocado, mango, even beef, and I'm sure you can remember more from your trip last year. The thing is, I didn't realise that this was more than they usually get, until one day when we had a normal local meal which just consisted of rice, beans and peanut sauce. Peace and Golden aren't any normal hosts – they're so caring that they have been specially preparing food for us because they don't want us to feel uncomfortable or underwhelmed by their day-to-day diet. I have been so grateful for all the hospitality, making me feel right at home in the Peace Centre family.

I don't know if you felt guilt when you were here but I'm sure you must have done. Seeing small children on the street or in the fields walking around alone, barefoot and in tattered rags, I keep feeling a sense of sadness because I remember when we were that age we wouldn't even walk anywhere by ourselves. Mom would always give us a kiss when we came home from school and we've probably taken that for granted. Throughout our lives we've always been in school and haven't even had trouble paying for extra music/



“Mom would always give us a kiss when we came home from school and we’ve probably taken that for granted.”

drama classes, but I have seen so much neglect and inability to afford education. Although I have always disliked the amount of work and the tests that I have to take my spare time to study for, I am becoming more grateful for these opportunities and luxuries each day I am here. Seeing things like children without shoes or young kids working in fields in the hot sun have made me realise I’m not as thankful as I think I should be and I really want to change that after this trip.

I don’t know about last year but this year we are quite low on water here, so there have been a number of times when we have had to go get water from the standpipe and bring it back in jerry cans. I am amazed at the strength and endurance of every child here. I could barely carry the twenty-litre can, which half of the kids here were carrying with ease. I guess I have gotten better at saving water, especially since seeing all the small children having to carry so much water every day. You’ll be glad to hear that I didn’t shower until we went to Lake Bunyonyi. But don’t worry, I had wet wipes!



Even though a big part of this trip is about having fun with the kids and helping out around the Peace Centre, I have had to contemplate so many difficult emotions. At first, I thought that I was the only one feeling guilty, but to be honest everyone does seem to be going through an emotional rollercoaster ride the same as me. You know, I’m glad that you didn’t really mention the complexity of all the different feelings that hit you on this trip, because this way I have got to work through these experiences with my own eyes instead of yours. I can’t wait to talk to you about it when I’m back though!

Miss you loads.

Lots of love, Meg



Dancing in the Moonlight

By Chloe

“Dancing is integral to life here.”



Over the past two weeks at The Peace Centre I've come to really appreciate how dancing is integral to life here. This is fascinating for me as I have danced all my life. I have grown up learning how to dance a variety of styles, including ballroom, latin, ballet, disco, rock and roll and street dance. I was trained to think that dance is something to be choreographed and perfected by an individual, or as part of a team, in order to be successful. I was always dancing to be the best and in order to achieve something in return, such as a certificate, a medal or even the applause and praise from an audience. I have never really experienced dance in a non-competitive light. Of course, I have had fun dancing, learning the moves, practicing the routines, and my friends and I would collapse in giggles of laughter when one of us messed up. But I never thought that dance would be used as a way to let go of oneself and be truly free.



Here in Uganda dance is very different. It helps bring the community together. In fact, dance really helped the Dulwich team to bond closer with the TPC children. A couple of days after we arrived a large but portable amplifier was donated to The Peace Centre. This was big news as they are not found much in the village at all. As it was being set up there was a sense of excitement amongst the kids – and then it was working! The music was blaring out and suddenly all the TPC kids were up and dancing. They invited all of our team to dance with them and although some of us were reluctant initially, we all got involved. As one song moved into the next, I could sense us getting closer to one another, barriers coming down and all feeling as though we were part of the same community. I felt free, I felt as though I didn't

have to hide who I was, and it was all very uplifting. A far cry from the awkward school dances back in the UK where boys are lined up one side of the gym, as far away as they can be from the girls on the other side!

Since that day, we have all danced a lot more together. Sometimes it has been to just the beat of a drum, sometimes to local tribal dance, sometimes Zumba, sometimes contemporary western music. But every time it has amazed me to see the way that the children are so free with their moves; they just let go and let their bodies take control. They feel the rhythm and the beat and simply react and move to it. It's taught me that there is much more than self-satisfaction to dancing: it's the inner passion and love that comes out of a person that counts, when they aren't trying to hide themselves from anybody. And it is that inner passion that flows out that makes dance here so great, because as a consequence everyone is naturally smiling. They're happy when they dance. It was honestly amazing to see and experience.

It was also quite shocking for me. They have not been trained, and yet they are in sync. They have not been choreographed and yet there is unison. But it's also shocking as otherwise rural Ugandan seems to be a rather conservative society where, for example, women should wear long trousers, and having a social drink is frowned upon. But yet the dancing is so unconstrained and sometimes sensual that it is at odds with an otherwise traditional culture.

All this has changed my perception on dance. I always thought of dance as a profession that must always be



perfected in order to achieve something and make yourself and others around you proud. Now I feel as if dance is the freedom that comes from people's individuality. It allows for people to let go of their reality and help them to tie in with who they are and who they want to be.

“Dance is the freedom that comes from people’s individuality.”



Service and Impact

By Johanna

“The Peace Centre is being seen as an integral part of the community’s make-up.”



Before arriving in Uganda, I hadn't really questioned how much The Peace Centre is a home to children in need of a safe place, support and love. But the reality of its importance and its impact on children's lives, not to mention problems in the wider community, only hit me after spending several days here.

Since then, I have spent time reflecting on how impactful service can be. How can you maximise that impact, and how can you measure it? In many cases people all too easily fall into the trap of using service as a way to focus on the changes they themselves want to make, rather than on resolving real issues. Contrastingly, the message and purpose of The Peace Centre is to bring the community together in order to provide a safe environment for children that are being neglected. So we must ask the question, what does The Peace Centre really mean to the community itself?

First of all, I have noticed that The Peace Centre seems to have a very good reputation in the village of Bukinda. The welcoming ceremony following our arrival was attended not only by TPC staff but also by important community figures like the village's Chairman, the Reverend, the Head of the Nyabirerema Primary School, as well as the Principal of Bukinda's well-established Teacher Training College. To me, this was a sign of acceptance and importance, that The Peace Centre is being seen as an integral part of the community's make-up. Peace and Golden's work and efforts seem to be welcomed, and also relevant to different aspects of people's lives, whether that be the wellbeing of the villagers or the availability of education. During lunchtimes and evenings, teachers,



local officials and policemen often join TPC children for meals, creating a safe and homely atmosphere, but also making The Peace Centre a place for community members to come together and enjoy a plate or two of the nutritious food that seems to be less common in many other households here.

Another sign of the significance that The Peace Centre holds was made apparent to me when we were told about several occasions where local officials had recommended that certain children be enrolled here, showing that the orphanage provides a solution to a problem that affects a whole village and its surrounding districts. This appreciation of The Peace Centre shows its worth and the central role it plays in delivering a solution for the neediest of children. Many in rural Uganda struggle to afford school fees and to eat a nourishing meal every day, and in order to ignite a change The Peace Centre is setting an example by helping out in the most desperate situations, inspiring and encouraging the community to improve the environment their children grow up in.

Perhaps the most powerful reflection of the influence of The Peace Centre can be seen in the way the children talk and write about their home. Phrases like “The Peace Centre is my home”, “I love my friends” and “I am happy here” are very common. Although these sayings may at times appear formulaic to the untrained ear, their importance and meaningfulness is emphasised by their being used so frequently. They are then followed by hugs and laughter. Big hugs and abundant laughter. And that is when the emotional impact that The Peace Centre has made in Bosco’s, Bridget’s or Joan’s life



really rings home. The appreciation shows through the embraces Hellen surprises me with every afternoon when she comes back from school, the cheeky smiles Collins shares before he attacks me with a tickling frenzy, and through the adorable way Gift somehow manages to share a small piece of chocolate with five of her friends.

“The Peace Centre provides a solution to a problem that affects a whole village and its surrounding districts.”

This grateful and cheerful attitude is what makes me believe that the Peace Centre really does have an impact on the lives of individuals and the wider community. I feel privileged to be able to witness the amount of effort and love that is put into creating a safe environment for these children to be able to develop, to be innocent and carefree again. I didn’t sign up to travel to Bukinda because I felt like I could make a difference, but because I wanted to understand how an establishment like The Peace Centre would be run in an environment so different from my own upbringing, and how it impacts the lives of the children who live here. Being able to make these wonderful children excited about our visit and the fun activities that come with it seems rewarding to us, but is merely a tiny contribution compared to the endless care and support they receive from the people around them.



The Gift of Innocence

By Maya



“The Peace Centre gives these children the chance to have those carefree childhood adventures, to swim, to climb trees, to pick fruit and to smile.”

Do me a favour and picture a young child at Christmas. Can you picture it yet? I bet you are picturing innocence, happiness, excitement and smiles as wide as they can be. That's what I see anyway. The trip to beautiful Lake Bunyonyi with the TPC children was very much like that. For some of them they had been looking forward to it all year, for others it was their first time there. But for everyone, there was eagerness and excitement and the biggest, widest and happiest smiles.

From the moment they stepped onto the bus the kids were giddy. Everyone sat up in their seats and cheered as we overtook the other buses (and Mr Clapperton who was cycling there on his bike!) as if we were in a race to reach the lake. The children do not go on buses often at all, so even the journey there was filled with excitement. When we arrived at the lake and boarded the boat the children grinned nervously, hiding their fear of the huge expanse of water - for some of them, the first time they had ever seen so much of it.



“They splashed uncontrollably with their huge floats, the shining sense of wonder in their eyes, wide smiles on their faces.”

However, they got over their fear with some of the most beautiful singing I have heard which got them across the lake.

Once we had arrived at the island for lunch, we found a small inlet in the lake where we could swim. We had bought armbands and inflatable rings so the kids could all float (as none of them can swim) and once they had put them all on I was so surprised and impressed at how fast they all jumped in, willing to dive right into the deep end, determined to make it out to the pontoon, about 25 metres out in the lake. I began to tire after towing them back and forth through the uncharted waters for what seemed like forever, however their expressions were priceless: a mix of fear and excitement, and it was like adrenaline for me, their happiness gave me energy to keep going. I will never forget how they splashed uncontrollably with their huge floats, the shining sense of wonder in their eyes, the wide smiles on their faces. I will never forget how Charity laughed hysterically the whole way to the

pontoon and how Blaire, despite his shivering, was willing to jump back into the cold water and go again. Even though I was struggling with tiredness, their sense of pride and achievement when they reached the shore made me feel so happy and strange: to me swimming is so mundane but to them it was like removing training wheels on a bike and finding a sense of freedom, a whole world apart.

It was infectious and I regained my childlike sense of wonder when we walked around exploring the island. The kids dragged us by the hand as they were so eager to discover every path and every sight unseen. I felt like an adventurer. The children then climbed up the trees and picked fresh guavas, throwing them down to us. They swung from branch to branch like daredevil acrobats and rose to scary heights while we stood and watched in a mixture of awe and worry. They smiled so brightly down at us, not a care in the world. I guess this is where they thrived. They beckoned us to watch as they threw down large ripe guavas for us to tuck into, grinning at how inexperienced we were - some of us tasting guava for the first time, not really being sure how to eat it! This all made me feel slightly nostalgic as it reminded me of when I used to climb to the top of a pine tree to look at the view from up above. In my mind tree climbing is strongly associated with carefree childhood summers, and it warmed my heart to see the children deriving so much pleasure from it.

Every child deserves happiness, the right to play, to smile and to have a childhood filled with innocence and adventures. Sadly, not every child has that. And the reality is that the children here did not have this before



TPC. And to me, that is a large part of what makes the TPC so special: it gives these children the chance to have those carefree childhood adventures, to swim, to climb trees, to pick fruit and to smile the biggest smiles I have ever seen. Giving the gift of innocence reborn to children is surely one of the best gifts anyone can receive, whether it is at Christmas, or at any other time of the year.

A Reflection on the Freedom Not to be Self-Conscious

By Fiona



Playlists, necklaces and beads, hairstyles. These are just some of the things that we might be judged on, and what we ourselves might be critical of others for. If you are a teenager growing up in an international community in Shanghai, I'm guessing you would have faced peer pressure over some of these traits too, at some point. Most of us try hard to ignore it and move on with our lives. But that does not mean that we can just shrug it off; no, for it is a deeply rooted self-consciousness. It has been, therefore, quite refreshing for me to be at a place like The Peace Centre, where few appear to care for such insignificant little things.

This is my first time here, in Bukinda, in Africa. And it is really ironic for me to be writing a blog on judging and acceptance, because I was the one passing such judgments right before we arrived here. I based my

expectations of The Peace Centre on past blogs I have read, research on the internet and stereotypes of Africa in general, fed to me throughout my life. So, it should be no surprise that I was anticipating a place with primitive infrastructure and strict social rules. But what I saw was completely different, and refreshingly so. When I arrived in Bukinda, instead there was a clean, beautiful infrastructure, accompanied by acceptance and hospitality.

People here don't seem to judge each other on hobbies, for instance - they just accept you as who you are. Take for example, a jewellery-making night we had with TPC kids. Growing up with all the "boys do this. Girls do that," stuff in my head, I was quite worried that the boys would just shy away from such an activity. But I was wrong, and wrong in many ways. Not only were the boys unconstrained, they actually enjoyed making handicrafts as much as the girls did, and in some cases, more so. I remember having to persuade Bosco to stop making necklaces and start tidying up because he was enjoying himself so much that he wouldn't stop. One might argue that it is because of his young age that

"The boys actually enjoyed making handicrafts as much as the girls did, and in some cases, more so."



he was so comfortable with an activity that may be perceived by some as girlish, but looking at how older boys, some even in their late teens, like Gerald, Brian, or Zion, relished it equally, I would argue not so.

Another time, we were holding an evening activity in which everybody had to decorate their own masks and then walk a catwalk with them. To be honest, I was expecting to see shy kids not wanting to make a spectacle out of their artwork, but I couldn't have been more wrong. Everybody, old and young, was proud to show off their masks as they paraded down the walkway, even though some of them were not exactly masterpieces. One girl was even holding her mask upside down, albeit unknowingly. Looking at their happy faces, I was again reminded about the support and acceptance that is so engrained at The Peace

“Everybody, old and young, was proud to show off their masks as they paraded down the walkway.”

Centre, and how they are all proud of themselves no matter their background.

So, is it that in Uganda everyone is super inclusive, and you are not judged at all? I do not think so, to be honest. People still judge each other here, and in The Peace Centre I feel much more accepted than when I am out in Bukinda. But where we are critical of playlists, slangs and so on, they might home in more on religion, physical strength and, perhaps, skirt length. The other day I was at the village standpipe, fetching water, when I got chatting to some kids also collecting water for their respective homes. After some hearty conversation, it was my turn to haul my jerry can away from the tap, and I lifted up my skirt to just above my knees to prevent my skirt from getting wet. The children were so shocked that one of them nearly dropped the jerry can she was carrying. This action of lifting my skirt to keep it from getting wet would have been perfectly normal if I had done it back in Shanghai. Nobody would have even noticed. Yet here, it drew comment. It could be

seen as a minor cultural insensitivity on my part, but has served as a useful point for reflection.

Alternative hobbies, innovative dance moves, creative mask designs. These are only some of the things that are accepted at TPC that may face disapproval elsewhere. For The Peace Centre is an environment where everyone accepts everyone. Its blend of an outward-looking, forward-thinking approach alongside traditional values makes it less judgmental and more inclusive than both Shanghai and the local community where it is based. Put simply, you will find few places as welcoming and hospitable as The Peace Centre.



An Emotional Roller-coaster

By Anthony

“What leads a parent to simply abandon a child?”

To say that this year's trip to The Peace Centre has been a roller-coaster of emotions for me is no exaggeration. I have experienced some of my biggest lows since this project began, so much so that on one occasion I even doubted if we had done the right thing by building this home. But thankfully, as with any rollercoaster, following the worry and fear, there have been some incredible highs to restore my joy and belief in the work being done.

So, what happened to make me doubt? It's hard to react any other way when you hear that a 6-year old boy asked his mother when she would die so that he could come and live at TPC. I was dumbfounded at

hearing this. Shaken to my very core. This is not why we opened a home for Ugandan orphans, to have children turn against their parents, to see such bleakness. I wondered initially if this was just hyperbole, but then the boy wandered into TPC compound one night when we were playing and one of our staff came up to me and said, “Hey, Anthony. You remember we told you about a boy who asked his mum if she could die so that he could come and live here? That is the boy.” I looked over and studied him, wanting to see the boy who had said something so harsh and cold. He didn't look sinister. He looked just like a 6 year old boy. Playful, smiley, cheeky - if a little forlorn that he was on the outside of the action. Being a father myself, I know that children say things they do not necessary mean, so on reflection I tried not to let this get me too down. It wasn't easy, though.

We then did a home visit where an elderly lady lied point blank to us. She wove a web of deceit so

“As their ear to ear smiles showed their genuine happiness, I couldn't help but think that this is a special place and the work being done is good.”





profound that it seemed as though she genuinely believed them herself. She told us the malnourished boy in her care had been abandoned at her home by his mother, who has been prostituting herself out and had caught HIV and died shortly after his birth. She said they had no idea who the father was. She said that she had attended a local funeral and had returned home with a small girl who no-one was willing to care for. Of course, our hearts were bleeding at hearing these tales. What tragedy! But what a good woman to have taken these strays into her home and to have done her best for them all these years. A bit of fact checking with the neighbours later and we discovered that the first boy's parents were both alive, they were just neglectful. The mother came around sometimes, and the father had a steady job in a neighbouring village. The second little girl that she had said she picked up at a funeral was her own granddaughter - and both of her parents were alive too. This deceit shook me more than their original tales of despair, and left me exasperated with hundreds of questions shooting through my head...

- What leads a parent to simply abandon a child?

- This child is beautiful and unique, why wouldn't you want to love and cherish her, to love and cherish him?

- How could anyone want to just give their child, or grandchild, away to strangers to care for them instead?

- How can you be so manipulative to use genuine tragedies such as prostitution and HIV and death to meet your own gains?

- Surely you know there are double orphans in the local area in obvious need of help? These lies undermine those children and their real needs.

- Why are people born into such poverty in the first place?

- Why haven't we found cures for these devastating diseases yet?

- Why is the wealthy West so selfish in its giving? If we all gave just a little of our wealth away, there would be no more poverty!

- Why is there so much corruption that prevents international aid from being spent where it is truly needed?

- Why do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer?

"As I started to try and count all those who have supported The Peace Centre in some way it became impossible."

- Why? Why? WHY?!

In the heat of the moment I was seeing things very black and white. There was no middle ground. I was angry and despairing at the lies, the abandonment, the selfishness, the greed, the corruption, the envy, the malice, the deceit. My heart was aching with sadness, but I was also unthinkably angry. What a world. It honestly made me question why we do what we do if it turns carers against their own children or grandchildren, and turns children against their own parents. If our home is a source of such envy or covetousness, should it exist at all?

Of course, with a little bit of time, a bit of emotion removed, and a somewhat greater sense of perspective, some of these answers became a little clearer. It is hard for me to empathise with such poverty as I have never truly experienced it, but would I feel the same if I tried to put myself in their shoes? How would I behave if I didn't know where I was going to find the money to buy the next meal for my child? Would I lie? Would I deceive? Would I try to provide my child with the promise of a better life if I could? Am I really in a position to judge anyone's actions? Surely they have good motives at heart?

But still, I'll be honest, I was struggling with the emotional weight of what we were facing on a daily basis, and wishing I was with my own children - currently thousands of miles away - holding them close, tickling them, giggling with them. Wishing I was a world away...

Thankfully, after the lows come the highs.

The Peace Centre IS a special place. It is. That was the thought echoing around my head during our celebration ceremony yesterday afternoon. On our last full day in Bukinda village, Peace and Golden (the Directors of TPC) invite many of their close friends and many local dignitaries - all of whom support the work they are doing here on a near daily basis - to a special lunch to thank them for their ongoing encouragement and effort. The festivities began with our TPC children, all 38 of them, singing and dancing for us. As their voices soared up through the banana leaves, as their bodies swayed and moved in time with the beat of the drum, as their ear to ear smiles showed their genuine happiness, I couldn't help but think that this is a special place and the work being done is good. As the children turned their songs to messages of thanks to us, as they began to sing about how much they will miss us, my thoughts turned to tears and I found myself - once again - crying. This time not at the injustice, but at the joy of seeing these children simply singing and dancing with such freedom. Something almost unimaginable in their previous lives.

As Peace began her thank-you speech and thanked not only the students from Dulwich College Shanghai, but also the DCS Administration for supporting our trip for four years in a row, my tears of joy became tears of gratitude at all those who have supported this project. Not only tears of gratitude in fact, but tears of disbelief. As I started to try and count all those who have supported The Peace Centre in some way it became impossible. There are just too many of you. From the

“Continue, friends, to be the spark, to light lights and to fuel the flames of hope, of love, of peace.”



students who have come on the trips; to the parents who have trusted us with their precious children for three weeks each summer; to Dulwich's Administration who green lit the trips when many other schools wouldn't have; to the sponsors of the children; to those that donate money, time, prayers; to anyone following our social media pages; to the amazing and dedicated staff we employ at TPC; to the many teachers and village helpers in Bukinda; to the social workers in Uganda, to... to... to... My mind was starting to explode at the thought of how many hundreds or even thousands of people have joined us on this journey. My gratitude was overflowing.

It was an incredibly humbling moment. And I thank you. Simple words maybe, but meant to their fullest extent. I love words, but sometimes they are not enough.

Having these thoughts of gratitude and joy, and experiencing such delight at the singing of the children, at futures reborn, made me feel guilty at my immaturity for having doubted the work being done here. Yes, the world has moments of despair, of distress, of darkness... but when a light is lit there is darkness no more. Continue, friends, to be the spark, to light lights and to fuel the flames of hope, of love, of peace.

As I said, this past fortnight has been a roller-coaster of emotions. One I will continue to ride, despite knowing there will be lows. But one that I am ever so grateful I am not riding alone.



Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

“Living at The Peace Centre has given me parents and a family.”



“Before I was alone and afraid. Now I have friends and peace.”

“I never knew what a birthday was or how to celebrate before I came to The Peace Centre.”





“Before I was beaten. Now I am loved.”



“I love The Peace Centre. We have enough time to read, we play together, we eat together.”

*** Actual comments not necessarily said by the child in the accompanying photo for anonymity reasons.*



Cultures of Discipline

By Judy



Different societies around the world consist of their own diverse cultures and customs. In some societies women wear shawls to cover their heads; in others, all new-borns get their ears pierced by the seventh day after birth. Part of the culture I witnessed through my experiences here in Uganda opened my eyes, challenged my opinions and broke my heart all at once.

I had volunteered to help out at the primary school and we were working with the P4 (Year 4) children on some simple division. After confirming that everyone had understood why sixteen divided by two was eight, we made some jokes with the kids to loosen up the atmosphere a bit. The students gradually became more and more excited, even though they were still

focused on the learning at hand, and even I was starting to get a touch worried as a couple of children started jumping across tables and running out the classroom, so uncontrollable was their enthusiasm. Towards the end of the lesson a woman in red and black stormed into the classroom. The chaos died out in a snap. The children robotically walked back to their benches, and tables were instantly put back into their correct place. Silence spread across the room like a storm.

Feeling the need to move things on, I resumed the class by starting a hangman game we had planned, but the kids didn't seem the same – they were anxious and the atmosphere was uncomfortable. Our next session was with P5 class next door. Halfway through making some notes on the blackboard I glanced out the window, and just as I was about to turn back to the class I caught the eyes of John, one of the brightest kids at The Peace Centre. He walked straight past, the usual cheeky smile nowhere to be seen. This left me frantic with worry, and it turned out my

“Surely they should be enjoying their lessons, not being punished for overexcited enthusiasm about their learning.”



concerns were not mistaken. John had been wrapped on the knuckles along with Luke, another TPC child.

I returned to The Peace Centre and I was totally paralysed, utterly unable to process the idea that there was a price to pay for laughter and joy enjoyed in class time. It was way too much - they were no more than 10 or 11 years old. Surely they should be enjoying their lessons, not being punished for overexcited enthusiasm about their learning. Most of all, it broke me to pieces to think that the mark left on Luke's hand had been my fault.

With a bit more time, I worked my way through a wave of emotions: a mixture of frustration, helplessness and extreme anger. I realised that even though I was



totally against the idea of such discipline, who was I to tell the teacher off for what she had done, most likely with the best of intentions, to educate her students. A case in point - about a year ago a few boys had done something wrong at TPC and Uncle Golden punished them by banning them from going on the trampoline for three days. They were devastated, such is their love for leaps and bounces and backflips that they asked Golden to hit them with a stick. "Please don't ban us from the trampoline – we'd rather you beat us!"

Of course, Golden refused and stuck to his original form of discipline. And their plea shows what a powerful message the trampoline ban sent. But what makes me really happy is that change is happening. The kids of the Peace Centre are treated humanely



and loved by a group of guardians who do not believe in corporal punishment. Children in Uganda might be educated very differently from how I have grown up, and I was broken to know that I could not do anything to change what I experienced, but I am glad to know that in places like The Peace Centre people are transforming perspectives on this issue. Change, if it is to be effective, must come from within the community, after all.

"Change, if it is to be effective, must come from within the community, after all."

A Shift in Perspective

By Johnnie



Power cut.

I reach out my arms and extend my fingers, wriggling them around in the darkness, squinting my eyes, hoping to make out the outline of my hand. A room meant for 3 suddenly becomes subdivided into separate cubicles of darkness. I look around for a light source. Window? Door? Door crack? Nothing.

I settle back into my bed and zip up my mosquito net.

zzzzzzip

The zip glowed white like a sparkler between my fingers.

"Sorry for the darkness", a local friend said in the morning.

Why did he apologize? I mused. Darkness is a privilege back in Shanghai.

You know they say you can tell how developed a place is by looking down on its lights in the evening. By this standard, our little town of Bukinda would be technically one of the least developed areas on our little planet in this hour. By many development standards, actually. It really comes down to how you choose to see things: after all, love and loss both share the same bedroom of darkness. Privilege works similarly.

Step outside with me.

Look up for a change. Do you see those stars? Can that not be a development indicator? When was the last time you laid on the grass hours at a time to star gaze? When was the last time you took a photo of the night sky? Do you know how? How many constellations can you point out? Have you ever wanted to become an astronaut?

The kids looked at me utterly confused the second night when I brought out my tripod, camera, and a hoodie, and laid down on the Peace Centre field. As six kids huddled over me to look at my camera, I pointed to the sky and explained we're here for what's up there, not down here. I set my camera shutter speed to 15 seconds exposure, close down my aperture to f/4, and

"Sometimes we're standing too close to what we care most about to appreciate it."





stopped right there because I realized I have no idea how the image would turn out. I've never actually done this before; I couldn't have, in a city like Shanghai. Under the same darkness, the same stars, same moon, my privilege was seeing their night sky; theirs was seeing my camera.

Look left and right. Do you see these smiling children? Do you see pictures of them hugging us? Do you see these bracelets they make us? Do you see these cards they write to us and their sponsors? Can you identify wild fruits like they can? Can you climb a tree and navigate the branches like the captain of a royal ship? Can you pick guavas and skillfully crack them open with your bare palms? Would you offer your entire guava stash to a friend you met for only a week?

As we settled down to interview a TPC student for a documentary we're making, Sri taped the mic to the chair, and gave me the OK signal. I pressed record. Q: What is some advice you would give to other children? A: To focus in school and learn everything you can...

Guilt hit me as I remembered how ecstatic I was to miss 5 Friday mornings for vaccination shots as well as the last week of school for this trip. What kind of privilege have I known?

Look behind. Take a step back. Especially if you have a camera. Most of us only capture what's in front of us. Sometimes what really matters is what's beside. Sometimes we're standing too close to what we care most about to appreciate it; it's our responsibility to see it and keep it beside us. Sometimes it's not about the people, but the trail we leave behind us. Sometimes the trail is personal - memories, sweat and blood, time, effort, spent on the path to where we're now standing. Just know that the best scenery doesn't just come to us. We have to go towards it.

I slid my "DCS Prefect 2017" bracelet over a child's wrist seeing they were amused by the patterns on it. For you, I said. They squealed in delight, although placed it back in my hand moments later. It's a gift, from me to you, I explained. Keep it. Inside I thought, I printed 200 of these with our school budget. That evening she took off her wrist a bracelet she made herself from one of our DIY evening activity times and gave it to me as a gift in return.

Add these to your development indicators.

Tear yourself away from the world you know for a moment. Forget about the United Nations, or politics and elections, or whatever is cooking in the kitchen. Forget about your day at work, forget about your kid

and your pet. Forget about the development indicators, documentaries you have seen, and the western prejudice towards Africa. Regardless of city lights or star lights, concrete jungle or banana tree forest, running water or jerry cans from wells, café latte or African tea with milk, a home is a home, happiness is happiness.

Point being, everything is right in front of you. Most of us just choose to look but not see. Things don't change, at least not as often as we learn new information which adjusts our opinions. All it takes is an open heart willing to accept a perspective change, to see things entirely differently. That's what this week in Uganda has given me, a shift in focus on my camera lens of life: a change in perspective as things that really matter are now more sharply seen.



these bracelets they make us? Do you see these cards they write to us and their sponsors? Can you identify wild fruits like they can? Can you climb a tree and navigate the branches like the captain of a royal ship? Can you pick guavas and skillfully crack them open with your bare palms? Would you offer your entire guava stash to a friend you met for only a week?

As we settled down to interview a TPC student for a documentary we're making, Sri taped the mic to the



chair, and gave me the OK signal. I pressed record. Q: What is some advice you would give to other children? A: To focus in school and learn everything you can... Guilt hit me as I remembered how ecstatic I was to miss 5 Friday mornings for vaccination shots as well as the last week of school for this trip. What kind of privilege have I known?

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Life through a Lens

By Sri



“I learnt about the technicalities of light and sound and framing. But I learnt far more from Charity.”

It was my fourth or fifth birthday. I could see the cake right in front of me, the flames on the candles barely visible through the flurry of camera flashes engulfing the crowded room. It was blinding. Then, through the corner of my eye I saw someone take out a camcorder. To them, a gadget, to five year old me, a weapon - the distinct ‘beep’ of a camcorder starting to record was something I avoided like the plague. I couldn’t stand being in front of cameras. In fact, I’m still hesitant when it comes to getting my picture taken to this day. Which is maybe why I’m more comfortable behind the camera. Thus, the task of making a film centred around the lives of children in Uganda was something I looked forward to, but was also something I knew would be full of challenge.

We decided to create a ‘Day in the Life of’ style film by documenting the lives of two children - Charity, a child at The Peace Centre, and Daphne, an orphan living in harsh conditions in the local community who had applied to join TPC. The aim was to reveal the contrast between the two lives so that we can see first hand the wonderful impact TPC has on the lives of the children who live there. I’ll be focusing on the time I spent with Charity for this blog.

Charity is real, and what she has been through is real, and her life and tasks and relationships are real. It can be easy to forget reality when we watch films and TV, but that reality was what we wanted to capture. We wanted our audience to see and feel and know what Charity’s days are like. Ironically therefore, realism was something that I will admit we had to create somewhat artificially. We wanted to capture everything that she

might do in a day, but to ensure the light was right and the angle of shooting correct, we had to stage each set-up.

The way she ran, the way she played with her friends, the way she read - it was all staged. We worked closely with Rachel, the social worker at The Peace Centre. We would frequently tell her what kind of shot we were looking for, and she would work her magic, persuading Charity to give us our ‘perfect moment’. At times it was hard even for us to focus on our task. I found myself questioning whether or not what we were doing was ethical. The very prospect of asking anyone, let alone a small child, to dramatically reenact fragments of her life made me uneasy. I found myself finding remnants of my younger self in her, but I was surprised to see





that she was handling the whole situation with ease - a world away from the camera-shy child that I was.

It was remarkable how quickly she had accepted the presence of two strangers, people she couldn't even talk to properly. We communicated through actions and slow speech, but it was more than enough for her to trust us. I couldn't understand how she had such a profound sense of faith in us. It was as though I had been transported back to the very first time (2015) I met the kids at The Peace Centre. I remember them submerging us in hugs from the moment we met them, and I remember feeling the same sense of puzzlement. I realised that in both cases the root cause of my confusion was the same: where did their unparalleled sense of trust in everyone they met come from?

Before The Peace Centre, Charity had had a tough life, she had never had enough to eat, she never had anything that she could call hers and she was in poor health. And then, abruptly, she was put in a situation

where everyone surrounding her was kind to her - as a family should be. I realised that she had come from a place where she had not really had the chance to be a child, and had learnt of no good reason to trust adults. Yet now, even our simplest half-hearted smiles, feeble attempts to coerce her, were enough for her to trust us.

A lot was gained from my experience making a film at The Peace Centre this year. I got my first taste of making a documentary film, I learnt how to conduct interviews, and so much more about the technicalities of light and sound and framing. But I learnt far more from Charity. She didn't know us, yet she didn't judge us. She didn't fully understand why we needed each other shot, yet she trusted us. Despite our privileged lives and rich education, the majority of us have become far too skeptical. The familiar idea, 'Stranger = Danger' is something she didn't appear to consider.

Perhaps it's time we learn to be more accepting of those we share the world with. Only then can we grasp the true nature of what it means to be part of a community.

"Perhaps it's time we learn to be more accepting of those we share the world with."



A Story Still Being Written

By Megan

“The social structure of TPC being one large happy family is integral to what makes it a warm, welcoming and special place.”

You try abridging a story that's still being written. Believe me, it's hard. For the past four years, I have seen The Peace Centre undergo change that I would never have thought possible. I have played witness to the physical, social, and mental change undertaken, and looking back, I have come to realize just how astounding the change has been... I hope this reflection



we have a kitchen, a library, a canteen, a swing set, a trampoline, a volleyball court, a chicken coop, a guest house, and a home housing 33 children. In just this year alone, new grass was planted outside the canteen and lined with a hedge and a stone walkway. The physical change The Peace Centre is going through is immense and works towards creating a safe space which allows the children to feel at home. The area lends itself a sense of a garden to a place you wouldn't envision it. This originally dusty patch of dirt was transformed into a community gathering area where most of our activities took place this year. The landscaping of the area outside not only provided us with a place to convene and hold festivities, but it also made The Peace Centre feel even more like a home.

Obviously, there's more to a home than what you see on the surface. The physical structures in The Peace Centre compound are a good reflection of the progress made over the last few years, but I believe the social interactions and conversations happening in and around those structures are an even better indicator of the development of The Peace Centre. For example, when the kitchen staff congregate under the tent prepping for meals you can often hear their voices travel up to the library on the second floor of TPC. The sense of community is enhanced through their laughter, and invites warm comments and giggles in response. This is infectious and permeates all parts of the compound. The children of TPC too have developed strong relationships of their own. The growth and communication within this extended family is possibly the biggest development to note. The children now have siblings and aunts and uncles they haven't had before to rely on, talk to, and play with. There are older siblings they can look up to and seek advice from, and

provides you with better insight into the wonderful story of how The Peace Centre came to be.

The growth that The Peace Centre has undergone could be measured in numerous ways, the most obvious being what you see on the surface level. From concrete mixing and brick laying, to decorating murals a few years later, the aesthetics and the physicality of The Peace Centre is continuously evolving. In 2014, when the first Dulwich team arrived to what is now The Peace Centre compound, there was nothing but grass, dust, and Peace and Golden's house. Now it's 2017 and





younger siblings to play around and infantile with. The social structure of TPC being one large happy family is integral to what makes it a warm, welcoming and special place.

The final change I'd like to mention is that of a good friend of mine. As you may recall, I met a girl last year named Gift (in my previous blog post I referred to her as 'Mary' for privacy reasons). She was once timid and never lifted her eye-line from the ground. Now, that once timid girl plays tag with her other Peace Centre siblings as if she has known them her entire life. Gift is outspoken and loves to pull silly faces too. A year ago, I would never have thought that it would be possible for her to behave this way. The energy she exerts when she's bouncing around and/or trying to tickle you makes it so easy to forget the hardships she's been through. Remember, this beautiful little girl lost her

mother when she was two years old and watched her father die after having been lying outside their mud hut for two years and a half combating AIDS. The mental strength the children have developed is unfathomable. They are so young and yet their youth belies maturity and depth that we can't begin to imagine because of what they've been through. As with their social skills, their mental capabilities will continue evolve and grow.

As much progress as The Peace Centre has made, the story is yet to be finished. Things are always changing, and as alarming as change can be, it brings about new areas to grow and new stories. I hope you like this story so far, because it's going to be a long one, with many new chapters yet to be written.



"As much progress as The Peace Centre has made, the story is yet to be finished."







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