



**BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE WORLD:
2 WEEKS AT THE PEACE CENTRE UGANDA**
Summer 2018

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Foreword

By Kyndra Douglass

Lucky. Gift. Moses. Something struck me on my first visit to The Peace Centre: the names of the children. Charity. I don't have kids, but I imagine one of the most powerful and perhaps stressful aspects of parenthood is picking their names. You carry your name with you for the rest of your life and some believe they will shape the rest of your future. Promise. I imagine names hold the hopes parents have for their children in some way, but with The Peace Centre kids those dreams feel quite literal. Did Gift's parent's hope she would be a gift to the world? Is Moses going to lead people to salvation? Will Sincere be true to her word? Will Promise have all the opportunities available to her that young people in other parts of the world do?

Now having visited The Peace Centre twice I can see the long-term positive impacts that this place is having on all of the children. Promise is working hard and reaching her goals as she's in her first year of teacher's college; Zion brings together the younger ones for guidance and for laughs; Charity shares her smile and her sweet personality with everyone; Gift gives us her playful attitude and plenty of hugs. The Peace Centre is transforming lives and giving these children opportunities that may not have been possible for them otherwise: the opportunity to laugh, to be educated, to eat regularly, and to be part of a family.

The Peace Centre also gives its charges the opportunity to live out their parents' hopes for them, the ones that they placed lovingly in their names, perhaps the only thing they were able to give at the time. The Peace Centre has transformed plenty of other lives since its creation – those of the Bukinda community, Peace and Golden's family, and all of the Dulwich staff and students fortunate enough to spend time there. It really does seem to be a centre of peace for many. The power of a name.



From City Lights to Shining Stars

By Judy



Right now, sitting in the library of The Peace Centre, I can hear the birds singing, laughter of the children and occasional sounds made by cars when they pass by in front of the library. It has been 48 hours since I arrived, and I am already feeling a lot more relaxed and comfortable in the environment here.

The Peace Centre lies in a lush valley, surrounded by mountains. The hills are a beautiful green colour, with patches of farmland, banana plants, grass and trees dotted around the landscape. As I look into the distance from The Peace Centre, I can see the red rooftops of houses scattered across the hillside, a dirt road and some electricity

lines disappearing into the distance. This environment couldn't be more contrasting from Shanghai, where I came from, with its towering buildings and highways jammed with cars. Here, it seems like the electricity lines and the dirt road are the only connection with the outside world. At night, with countless stars glowing, the sky seems so alive. With the mountains replacing the buildings, the stars replacing the city lights, this represents an exhilarating new world for me.

On the first day after I arrived, to tell the truth, I was nervous and missing my family. I have never been so far away from home, finding myself in a culture and environment that I am completely

"I hugged more people yesterday than I have done on any other day in my life."



“The smiles and thanks made me feel a part of the family.”

unfamiliar with. When I thought about the safety of my luxurious room with even my own bathroom, everything here was so different.

However, after two days, I am already a good deal more comfortable. I did not expect such great affection shown to me by people that I have never met before. Yet the children welcomed us with enormous smiles, and when they come back from school, they will hug us fondly. In fact, I hugged more people yesterday than I have done on any other day in my life, by some distance. This is unusual for me, as I can be a shy person at times, and I often hesitate to talk and play with people I don't know. However, yesterday, by trying to step out of my comfort zone and sitting and chatting with TPC children during lunch and dinners, I learned the incredible value of making that seemingly impossible jump, resulting in a rewarding feeling of seeing the children enjoying my company.

I am starting to appreciate the lifestyle here, finding beauty in its simplicity. It has really made me think about what the necessities of living are, being content with the material things I already have instead of constantly desiring more. Helping around in the community and playing with children are not things that I usually do, but they have made me feel more integrated. Instead of having the staff here serving us dinner, last night I decided to reverse roles and serve TPC children and staff instead. The smiles and thanks made me feel a part of the family, breaking down any boundaries between me and them. I have learnt that there is value in giving and serving.



Just Being Me

By Fran

I would have never thought that I would feel the way I do right now. Over just the past two days I already feel like I can just be me. Real, true, open: loved. Being here is so different to home – Shanghai or England. In both I am happy, but here my happiness is different. At home I have family, friends and a good education, but something is missing. I find it hard to truly be me and feel like I'm not judged for anything, whereas here that is easy. I don't have to change to fit in.

Since I was about 13, I have enjoyed wearing make-up; I wear it because I like it, but also because I like to look different – better – for other people. My friends all look naturally pretty. When I don't wear make-up I feel insecure, so wearing it gives me self-confidence. I know people judge me for it - they say, 'Why do you wear so much make-up? You'd look



"I would have never thought that I would feel the way I do right now."

better without it." I remember my brother telling me after the first week of school that people were talking about my make-up. It's kind of a lose-lose situation because I feel like if I don't wear it people will judge me for my natural face, but if I do, people will judge me for changing it.

Here at The Peace Centre, everyone welcomed me with open arms, and it occurred to me just how much the people surrounding you can transform the way you see yourself. In Shanghai, after two years I still feel like I have to cover up, yet here after just 48 hours I feel comfortable, safe in the knowledge that I don't have to change anything to fit in.

This afternoon I led a dance session, which, before I came, was something I had said to myself I would never do. I'd been told how dancing was a huge part of Ugandan culture, and I was really not looking forward to embarrassing myself, because, just in case you haven't seen any of my moves before, I am certainly not a professional dancer. I'm not going to lie, at first I was nervous. I was totally convinced I was going to make a fool out of myself. But then





“I already feel like I can just be me. Real, true, open: loved.”

I stood in front of all the children and saw their smiling faces and thought ‘Who cares?’ I showed them the YMCA, Cha Cha Slide and the Macarena and I absolutely loved it! Everyone followed and danced along, and it didn’t matter the slightest bit how stupid we all looked, because we all looked it together. Leading this dancing session was a big thing for me, as at home you would never see me doing anything with the potential to be even remotely embarrassing. I would be too scared of being judged for being different, for being myself. However, here, at The Peace Centre I’m not: I know I am accepted for who I am, as is everyone. I am really looking forward to many other experiences like this, that will push me out of my comfort zone and make me realise that I can be myself and don’t need to pretend.

It’s amazing how I feel like this after just two days, and with so many more to come I can only imagine the emotions I will have then. If I take one thing away from this trip I really hope it is the ability to feel like I do now all of the time. I want to be confident in myself with or without make-up, no

matter where I am or who I am around. I want to not be embarrassed or scared to do something that I want to do, to feel relaxed dancing in front of a group if I feel like it. Put simply, I want to be my true self.

I want to be able to do all of these things, but the real question is, can I?



“Here at The Peace Centre I know I am accepted for who I am, as is everyone.”



A Turning Point in Life

By Aegean



"I'm hopeless".

Four days into settling down at The Peace Centre, I have felt the welcoming hellos and warm goodnights each day. Everything has been beyond what I had expected, yet this comment Luke made about himself is still stuck in my head. I want to tell him, "you're not hopeless, you know you're not."

In just these few days, I have already become good friends with Luke, as I met him in the evening of the second day as he ate his dinner. His simple "hello" transformed into a meaningful conversation - to me, at least. At first, I thought he was just an ordinary kid, living his life, but I was wrong. His background may have been tough, but his hopes are still high: "I want to be a soldier, maybe a General one day, so I can help people".

Luke asked me where I was from. I told him Hong Kong. He then asked me what Hong Kong is like, "Is it like here, Uganda?" I described the environment there, the tall buildings and crowded streets. I then casually added a sentence, which looking back, perhaps I should not have said in the first place: "One day you'll see it yourself!" "No," he stopped eating, "I'm hopeless."

The two words left me speechless. I did not know how to react. I immediately regretted saying that, and I started wondering if I had hurt him. This morning, I learned how Luke used to be a rebellious and angry kid, who disobeyed rules before he came to The Peace Centre. This surprised me, as the Luke I know is so nice, caring and positive.

"Next time I get on a plane, I'll be thinking of my friend Luke, of his bright future, and how he has inspired me to make the most of the opportunities I have been lucky enough to receive."



About three years ago, he was only 12 years old and was already two years behind in school as both his parents died of AIDS. He was left with his aunt before she got married to a man who totally refused to keep Luke. Sadly, it seems, this is not uncommon. Had he not been accepted into The Peace Centre, Luke would likely have been left alone in an empty shell of a house, with no electricity, only a basic kitchen and a foam mattress to sleep on. Fortunately, this was not to be his future. Luckily, he was accepted into The Peace Centre, where he is now a hardworking and happy person. He is nearly top of his class, and determined to do even better. I believe, Luke, that you will do great in the future. You will be able to embrace the world as you want, if you keep trying, and I know you will, Luke.



“The Peace Centre can be a literal turning point in lives, providing children with a safe shelter, caring friends, and love.”

The story of Luke proved to me how The Peace Centre can be a literal turning point in lives, providing children with a safe shelter, caring friends, and love. It is possible for people's actions to completely change the thoughts, behaviour and future views of others. Having this story of Luke in my head makes me want to do something myself, too; something to support their dreams? Or maybe to challenge myself? I feel like life isn't fair at all, since I didn't work as hard as Luke has, yet I have the opportunity to travel around and he doesn't.

I hope Luke makes it to Hong Kong one day, but I also appreciate there is a chance that he won't. What I do know, however, is that the next time I get on a plane, I'll be thinking of my friend Luke, of his bright future, and how he has inspired me to make the most of the opportunities I have been lucky enough to receive.



A Conversation in Three Times

By Mao



“It was about connecting with the local community, and I came back last year forming relationships with people whom I can now call a family.”

[Mao is sitting under a banana tree in The Peace Centre garden having a conversation with her younger self. She turns 18 today and is reflecting on her childhood, and the journey that has made her the woman she is today. Mao is dressed in a long, black skirt, a loose-fitting t-shirt and has her hair tied up in a pony-tail. Whilst the two are dressed similarly, 15 Year-Old Mao is dressed in more vibrant colours. Her younger self is humming aimlessly with a wide grin on her face, while current Mao watches her younger self contemplatively.]

Current Mao: As I enter adulthood, I have been reflecting on my life, my past few years at Dulwich, and this, my third trip to The Peace Centre. Even though I have not been back here since the summer of 2015, I have always felt closely connected to the team. My mind has frequently drifted to my time here, considering the impact it has had on me and what I have learned through it all. What are you most excited about being back in Uganda?

15 Year-Old Mao: Having been to Uganda in 2014 to help build The Peace Centre, I learnt the meaning of service, and how it is not only giving, but also receiving. A friend of mine had mentioned that she would rather donate the money to The Peace Centre, instead of using it to fly there, but I think the trip is more than that. It is more than just giving money, and I’m excited to go back to build relationships with the children, who are now living in The Peace Centre that we built last year.

“It’s crazy how I can call people here ‘family’, within just two weeks of meeting them.”

Current Mao: I’m sure you learnt lots about the meaning of service, but I can’t help but feel that you – albeit innocently – idealistically overstated your own importance in it. Mao, we did not build the Peace Centre; all we did was help carry the bricks and cement, and stack them for the foundation of the building. We are nowhere near trained professional builders, so how are we supposed to build anything other than Spongebob Lego? We may have been part of an experience in which we helped with the building; however, that could not have been done without the expertise of the local builders babysitting our every step, and of course the whole Peace Centre community.

15 Year-Old Mao: I think you’re belittling the experience a bit. It was more than just moving bricks. It was about expanding our horizons and giving to something more important than my own small sphere of life. It was about connecting with the local community, and I came back last year forming relationships with people whom I can now call a family. Through donating my time, I



was able to build these connections, and came to understand the value of giving energy rather than just money.

Current Mao: I take your point... However, ever since I arrived here at The Peace Centre on Monday, I've been contemplating whether me coming here for just two weeks is doing enough. After leaving The Peace Centre, we simply go back to our lives, and before we know it, the trip can become an experience of the past. I've tried to not let that happen by keeping in contact with The Peace Centre children, by constantly talking about my experience with my school community back home, but was I successful? I don't know.



15 Year-Old Mao: Oh, I hadn't really thought about that. I always assumed that the change the trip has instilled in me in terms of thinking more about others around me, was enough. Is there anything you think you've been successful in doing?

Current Mao: Well, every time I return to Uganda, I am filled with gratitude; gratitude for the welcome we receive from the children and staff at The Peace Centre, and the wider community here in Bukinda. It's crazy how I can call people here 'family', within just two weeks of meeting them, and it's always a pleasure to come back and build those ties. It also fills me with gratitude for my parents, friends and teachers back in Shanghai, whom I realise I can take for granted. Only when we are distanced from them do we realise their significance and become grateful for them.



(Pause.)

Just thinking about it though, as I'm sat here with you reflecting, I'm struck with the realisation that gratitude alone is not enough.

(30 Year-Old Mao now enters, sits, and listens in on the conversation.)

15 Year-Old Mao: Do you think you have a vision of who you'd want your future self to be?

Current Mao: (to 30 Year-Old Mao) I guess now you are an adult, you're unlikely to have come back to your home at The Peace Centre every summer. Studies and life will have got in the way. Regardless, I hope that you made the most of these experiences you had in Bukinda to become someone who hasn't just periodically dipped into others' lives to try and give, but someone who has tried to embed selflessness, giving and compassion into your daily life. I hope that that was the legacy of your summers spent at The Peace Centre. I hope that there was a genuine, lifelong change and that your gratitude and generosity has inspired others to do the same.

Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

“I thank TPC because I had never celebrated my birthday before in my life. I had never even got a gift. But now I get not only a birthday gift, but also one for Christmas too.”



“The Peace Centre has provided basic needs for me which I did not have before. Things like a toothbrush, good clothes and even shoes.”

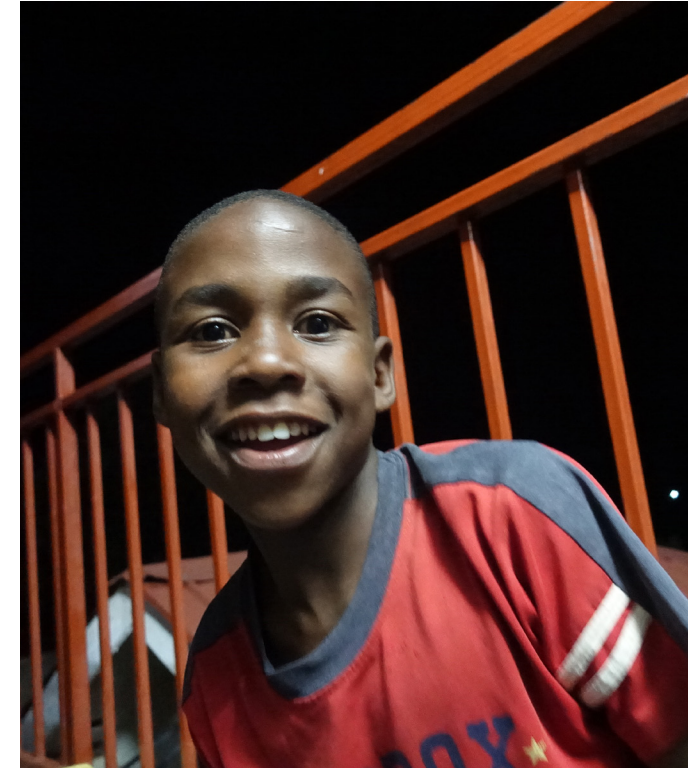
“I am grateful to The Peace Centre because before I came to TPC I had never learnt tailoring but now I can make my own shirt.”





“I have learnt to always appreciate people.”

“I used to be very shy and find it hard to speak to people. Now I lead devotion. I am confident.”



“I thank The Peace Centre because before I came to TPC I didn’t know how to play football. Now I am the best!”

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

Thank You

By Paula Quintanilla



At The Peace Centre, it has really struck me how all of the 35 kids look out and care for each other so considerably and diligently. Perhaps it is because they don't have parents or other family members, or at least none capable of caring for them, that they manage to create such a successful family of their own.

Diana and James, at two and three-years old, are children of staff members at The Peace Centre. Theoretically you might say they are not Peace Centre kids, yet they are treated like one of the biggest priorities of this family, and in such a natural, instinctive way. During my first week at TPC, I began noticing patterns in the way the children behave. I saw that every single time little Diana gets upset - either because someone is jumping too vigorously on the trampoline with her, or maybe

because someone simply tries to get too close to her - there will be at least three TPC kids who run over and try to comfort her. Even some of the very youngest of the children, like Jane or Helena, will do so. It seems the whole world just stops for them when they decide to help their younger siblings. Everything else can wait. The minute Diana is being held by any of the children, she stops crying immediately, and she will often fall asleep right there in their arms.

So, Ignacio, Iggy; these moments have made me think of you: I now realise that you have been doing the exact same for me. As I sit on a boardwalk by the side of a beautiful lake, just like the one we used to go as kids, I recognise that you have been caring for me all these years, just like these children do for each other.

I feel a sense of regret that I am only realising this now, that I haven't previously told you what a fun person you are, and how much you have taught me, and how much I want you to continue teaching me in future. In only two months you will leave for

"I now realize you have been caring for me all these years."



university and begin a new chapter of your life. Even though I know this is huge for you, sometimes I wish that you could just stay with me a bit longer, only this time I would acknowledge it properly.

So, thank you.

Thank you for listening to my endless stories about things that you probably didn't even care about. Thank you for letting me tell you my dramas and for the amazing guidance you always gave me. Believe it or not, of all the advice I receive, I know that yours is the one that I can always fully rely on. You were - well... still are - my personal and emotional security guard. I never really appreciated that security enough, and I'm sorry for that. I guess that being here has made me recognise and value all that you have done for me, and really I just want to say thank you for that.

Te quiero mucho hermanito.
La enana de tu hermana,

Paula

*"You were and still are my
personal security guard."*



Taking a Breath

By Wendy



“For the first time in a very long while, I feel completely free.”

With my last surge of energy, I pushed myself out of the lake towards the glistening surface. Here, I finally took a breath.

The first time I cried at the Peace Centre was during my second night here. I was lying in my comfy bed and out of nowhere, tears came pouring out of me. Before you get any wrong impressions, you should know that these were happy tears. For the first time in a very long while, I feel completely free.

Going to Uganda marked my survival of the first year of IB. Thinking back now, this has been a tough first year for me. Many times I found myself still studying for a test at 2 in the morning, ignoring my parents’ pleas for me to go to bed. Ironically, as my way of relaxing, you could also find me binge watching Grey’s Anatomy the very next day. This was me trapping myself in a web of an unbalanced lifestyle. It was no coincidence that this unfortunately led to the build-up of a volcano of stress that was bound to explode.

Being here at the Peace Centre has allowed me to ponder about why I constantly feel chained up by this stress. Is it pressure from my peers? My parents? Teachers? Even though they all have affected me in one form or another, I definitely know that the biggest source is me. I want good grades, the best if possible. I want to go off to a good college, the best if possible. I want to travel like my friends, to as many places as possible. I want to feel beautiful, as comfortable as I can be in my own skin. I want... I want many things. You may consider me selfish and



*“Live for the right reasons,
like people here do.”*

unrealistic, but I argue ambitious. Yet, it seems like this driving force in me is going to be my undoing. Why am I not happy with my current state? Why am I always asking for more when it only leads me down the rabbit hole to a state of feeling angry, lost and scared?

At the Peace Centre, we value love, care and home.

Love: the warm feeling of affection towards parents, children, or friends. This is arguably the easiest to identify at the Peace Centre. From the very first moment when we stepped out of the bus, every kid embraced us. Now, imagine receiving 35+ of these loving hugs every single time you see the kids. Being in this environment, I don't believe you could have another bad day.

Care: the provision of what is needed for the wellbeing of a person. Being a sister, my protective instincts naturally kick in. However, I know that there is much more that I can learn and develop about caring for others. It is absolutely okay to care about those outside of our inner-circle; we need to care.



Peace, Golden, the children and the staff at TPC have shown me that to care is not about being able to provide the best, but rather how much attention you give by stopping, pausing and listening. By being present.

Home: a secure shelter. Not once have I felt homesick since arriving at the Peace Centre (sorry Mum and Dad, I love you so much!). And trust me, this rarely happens when I am away from my family. I think this speaks at length to how easy it is for a



group of strangers to be able to come together in this loving community and feel united.

Looking at it now, I can say that I have found the cure to my stress – by integrating myself within this community full of love, care and home, I have removed myself from my own bubble and focused on what is important.

However, for the purpose of clarification, I need to emphasise that life here is not as simple as I make it out to be. People here have been through horrifying experiences, matters of life and death that I will never be able to accurately communicate to you, because I don't fully comprehend it either, and it is not my story to tell. Yet, they are still able to live on happily with what is available to them. This really puts my expectations into perspective. How funny is it that just a few days ago, I was still sitting at the Dubai airport constantly refreshing the web browser on horrible wifi stressing about my report cards? Yes, even though grades are important, the source of my motivation shouldn't be to please others. Always remember Wendy, learn to measure your expectations, put them into perspective. Stop. Breathe. Check in on yourself. Go to bed earlier, and don't feel guilty about it. It's just one test. You learn because you have passion; you travel because you are curious about new cultures; you smile because you are happy. Live for the right reasons, like people here do.

As I float in the middle of Lake Bunyonyi, peace takes over me.

When Children Sing

By Sri

Music flows in the blood of these children.

Not an hour goes by when the gong of a drum or the sweet, melodic chant of a hymn isn't heard. It breathes life into the bricks and mortar I had left behind on my first visit to Bukinda in 2014. Indeed, the importance of song in the local culture is unmistakable – the children at The Peace Centre have their daily musical highlight, 'Devotion', embedded into their routine. It's a thirty-minute improvised session of a myriad of religious songs, each number seamlessly weaved together with the steady, naked beat of a djembe.

As a musician myself, this small, but powerful portion of the day is one of great importance to me. On any trip away from home I miss my instruments, without which I just feel a little off, like there's a



"I compose music because it allows me to express myself in a way that doesn't diminish my emotional vulnerability."

part of me that's missing. While many of my peers found joy in mastering their respective instruments and learnt about the intricacies of music theory, my connection to music is a little more contrived. My 'instrument' is my laptop, and the music I make is seldom heard by an audience, at least not in the traditional sense of a performance or recital. That's not to say that I can't share my work with the world – for the most part, I just choose not to. I compose music because it allows me to express myself in a way that doesn't diminish my emotional vulnerability. I've always found it strangely burdensome to share my innermost feelings with people, even my family or my closest friends, but I realized what I couldn't convey through words, I could convey through rhythms, melodies and chords, creating a language only I could truly understand.

So naturally, while at The Peace Centre, I feel the nagging discomfort of not being able to write music. It's like an itch I can't scratch, which



eventually fades but never really goes away. Indeed, I felt this sensation on the first few days of my time here in Bukinda, but it was also the reason why I was immediately drawn towards the energy that the children let out during Devotion. Although I missed home, I'd been introduced to a new kind of musical expression, one which resonated with me in a different way.

Each song was generated beautifully, complete with intricate harmonies and overlapping rhythms which



“Music flows in the blood of these children. I hope someday their songs are heard.”

slowly fused together to form cohesive chants. I made sure to stand by the makeshift drums, which consisted of a jerrycan and a djembe. With each transition and change in rhythm, my mind felt a little less stiff, a little less crowded, a little less agitated.

I thought of how much it cost me to achieve the same sensation back home. Hundreds of dollars of equipment (some of which I would only use once) and hundreds of hours of trawling through the internet for software. But here, unified as one, the children poured all their passion into nothing more than their voices, and the result was a token of their development at The Peace Centre. I came to realize something I always knew but could never come to understand fully – the value of a song didn't lie in its intricacy, but in how it made you feel. While I revelled in their singing because it freed me of stress, I could see that Devotion was just as momentous an event for them. They each sang with pride, and danced with a plethora of emotions, some with joy, some with ecstasy, some with a mournful repose. Perhaps the most uplifting realization of all that came from Devotion is the fact that The Peace Centre has not only provided these children with love, care, home, food and education, but the ability to be their own person, and express themselves with the freedom that every child deserves.

Music flows in the blood of these children. I hope someday their songs are heard.



Lessons Learnt over a Jar of Nutella

By Gaia



“I started to reflect on my actions; constantly reminding myself that I was so privileged.”

I am sure that everyone has had that day or certain time where they think about how other people live, what people around the world earn, or how they make their money.

Before coming on this trip, my mum always used to tell me that I bought too much and that it was not necessary. Every time I would walk through the door with a new shopping bag, she would give the

same look. It would make me second-guess my actions. Did I really need to buy that? - Most of the time the answer was no. She would start saying, “Gaia, how much did that cost?” My answer, “Not a lot mum, it’s fine.” Even though I knew what I had done was wrong and it made me feel guilty, I kept it to myself; I still kept doing it, without thinking. I did not consider what other people could buy with what I spent in Shanghai.

As my brother had been to Uganda in the previous years, he had told me about his experiences, his impressions. After coming back from Uganda, he had a better understanding of how people lived in other countries and what it meant to be happy without having a wardrobe full of clothes. He would ask me regular questions like, “Do you know how many lives you can save with what you just spent?” Without realising it, he was teaching me something that could have changed the way I thought forever. My brother tried to help me open my eyes and understand the value and worth of certain items. However, I didn’t quite understand him until I experienced it myself. He tried to educate me by making me more aware of what could be going on in the world but I still didn’t see the clear meaning behind it until I came to Uganda myself.

One morning, we came together as a team to discuss how well we were being treated here. During the discussion, I zoned out. I zoned out because it hit me. I realized that even though we



came here to experience what another culture lived like, we were still being treated differently. An eye-opening example came up about a jar of Nutella. How the Nutella was around 20% of a cook's monthly salary at the Peace Centre. For some people buying a jar of Nutella would mean making other sacrifices, for example not buying new clothes in order to be able to buy Nutella. This would mean saving up months of pay for Nutella to please their family. However, to us we would just buy it without considering any other side effect or a difference in our daily lifestyle. After the discussion, I did not talk to anyone because at that moment I started to reflect on my actions; constantly reminding myself that I was so privileged.

Another example would be when I went to the street market. The street market was a bunch of huts on the side of the road with people waiting for cars to stop and buy some goods. One day we were in the car coming back from town and we needed to stop to buy vegetables. As we approached the side of the road, people started to chase after the car with their baskets full of crops

"I didn't quite understand him, until I experienced it myself."



they had grown and taken care of themselves to sell off. As we lowered the car windows people started to shove baskets inside, asking how much we wanted. People were pushing, shouting to get closer to the car. The eagerness to sell their crops shocked me, the willingness to do anything to get a bit of money. Coming from a place like Shanghai it was such a different experience because in Shanghai most people are not bothered if you would not buy their items, they would just wait for the next customer. However, here getting one customer could make the people so happy because they would be able to buy their families food.

Over the course of the trip, I gained a lot of knowledge and understanding of other people's lives. These memories have made an imprint on me as now I reflect more on my actions and spending before considering what I need and do not need. As I continue to learn more about the world, I constantly remind myself that I am forever grateful for my spending privileges.

My Dream Is To Be...

Staff Blog, by Anthony



My heart is full. It is full of hope for the future for the wonderful kids who we have living in The Peace Centre, and it is full with the realisation that children - regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background - are pretty much the same: they all dream of a better tomorrow in which they can play their part.

A month ago I was privileged to again witness the Graduation ceremony of IB students at Dulwich College Shanghai. These students, on their last day of school, were full of the nerves and excitement of the unknown. They had completed a long, and sometimes arduous journey of knowledge and self-discovery and were on the cusp of adulthood and

independence. There was a palpable excitement in the air. Why? Because they were all dreaming dreams of where they were headed: off to study medicine, law, international relations, development, engineering, to name just a few. Their futures as yet unwritten, gleamed like a vast white canvas of potential spreading out before them. Students, parents and teachers alike were all excited about the potential these young people have to go out and forge their own path, and to hopefully make a difference where it is most needed.

Fast forward one month and I am sitting in the office in The Peace Centre. I have just been in a meeting with the home's leadership team where we discussed some issues of poverty, sickness, mortality, abandonment and abuse. We discuss these ideas as we seek to work out how our team of staff in Uganda can continue to move forwards to best impact the community. It is a long conversation, at times difficult, but at times rewarding. The meeting draws to a close and I see a poster that I hadn't noticed before; it had been behind me. The title loomed large, "Career. My

"Children all dream of a better tomorrow in which they can play their part."



Dream is to be..." it read. I went to have a closer look and I saw that each of our children living here had proudly written on this sheet their future hopes and aspirations. Beside each name was a career. Nurse. Optician. Lawyer. Doctor. Soldier. Policewoman. Journalist. Pilot. Musician. Engineer. Bishop. Radio Presenter. Teacher.

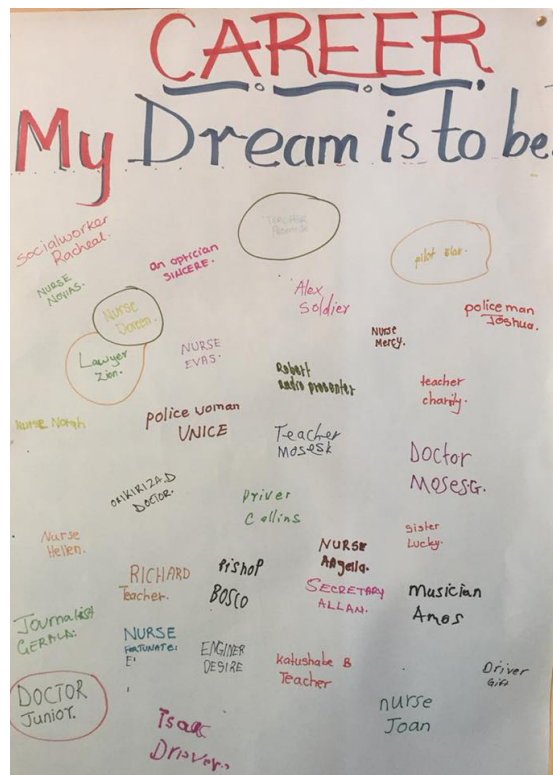
What do you notice about these professions? What do they have in common? I see in each one a desire to make a difference, to be a positive force for good, to want to help others - be it in their learning, their health, justice, spiritual path, or desire for knowledge.

These children may have come from lives of abandonment, abuse or abject poverty, but that is in the past now. It is no longer their story. Now their

“My heart is full: full at the excitement of what tomorrow holds, of dreams dreamt and, maybe, coming true.”

futures are as exciting as those of the graduating class at Dulwich, despite the vast difference in economic status. Why? Because The Peace Centre has provided these children with clothes for their backs, nutritious food for their growth, a solid education to satiate their thirst for knowledge, sound morals to help guide them, and a loving, caring home that allows them to dream dreams of a better tomorrow. What is most exciting to me is that these dreams are not intangible and will not always float just out of reach in the teasing, tantalising fashion of many dreams. These dreams can become real.

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing today, I want to challenge you to consider the lives of those around you. They may be children or young people, but not necessarily. I want you to try and find out what their dreams might be, and I challenge you to do what you can to help that dream come true. Be a Dream Enabler. That's not a profession that you find in any University prospectus, but perhaps it should



be, because it is what our staff here at The Peace Centre do every day. And I think there is something we can all learn from that.

My heart is full: full at the excitement of what tomorrow holds, of dreams dreamt and, maybe, coming true.





Focus on Race

By Johnnie

I believe in miracles – the idea that in life, sometimes there are too many variables to manage that the end result depends entirely on something out of your control. This is especially true for photography. I shoot film; you know, like, old film. With each roll of film, you have 36 opportunities to capture interesting moments. With practice and experience, you might be able to perfect your understanding of composition, light, and colour, some of the tools necessary to take a good photograph. However, I think often times, photographers would agree that some of their favourite creations happen by accident. It might have been that 37th shot you squeeze out of your film, or a flicker of light and shadow, or unintended double exposure, that added something more to the photograph. Moments like these are unplanned, miraculous, even.

However, at the same time I feel obligated to believe that should parts of what I do lie out of my control, the least I could do is believe I have the capacity to influence it in some way. I must be constantly investing my time and energy, and not being afraid to shoot bad photos. And one day, my efforts will be rewarded with a miracle. This is the lesson I took away from photography: that miracles do exist, and things work out in the end.

For the same reason, I know that everything will be alright with our world. Regardless of your religious, social, or political background, I think we can agree that right now, many things aren't. One of the main issues that I feel passionate about is rivalry between



racism, and not just the black vs. white racism that we traditionally speak of and see in the news, but discrimination that every other shade of colour in between face.

It upsets me that there is so much stigma around conversations about race. It upsets me that people aren't able to have proper yet necessary conversations about controversial topics, without anger, violence, or slapping labels on the opposing

“We are not defined by our outer appearance.”

“I believe in miracles.”

side, like misogynist or fake. It upsets me that people can be so devoid of empathy for others. I think this creates an atmosphere of fear that prevents many with good ideas from being able to bring those into discussion.

Here at The Peace Centre, I’m not going to argue that racial division does not exist. We, the Dulwich team, receive special treatment from locals. There are words like Muzungu, meaning light skinned, and Muchina, the Chinese, Muhindi, the Indians, that label people based on skin colour. But many times, our special treatment comes from the fact that we are visitors, who are culturally held at a higher position, and words like Muzungu are not used derogatively, perhaps even with a hint of playful teasing.

I remember during one of our first nights here at TPC, I had a conversation with a group of older boys I was close to last year. One of them asked me if I still remembered all of their names, but because it was so dark outside I genuinely could not identify any of them. “What is my name?” quickly became “Can you see me?” and we had a good laugh

that night about the differences between our skin colours. I think being able to have this conversation is a miracle, in context of the socio-political situation of our world today.

Perhaps the correct solution is not to create stigma around the conversation, flame those with wrong ideas, and marginalize an entire group who think differently, (or incorrectly?) but to educate and talk with those whose words or actions risk harming people and our society. The ability to talk about a sensitive topic without fear is, in my opinion, the key to solving any problem of this calibre.

Back on the topic of race, perhaps it is not possible to detach oneself from their race and outer appearance. If someone happens to be white in a village of blacks, it is the same as having someone with overgrown facial hair in a village of bald, and freshly shaven people. But as people, we’re not defined by our outer appearance, nor is that the force that binds us together. We do not get along with the kids here because of our races, we get along because we share the same values that TPC strives to provide for and protect – Love, Care, and a Home. When we have fun together, we smile and laugh, and it does not matter if we speak Rukiga or English, laughter is universal. When we went scouting, we sang and danced together even though we didn’t know their language, but the same rhythm that moves them also makes us want to join in.



I think that is proof that love, happiness, and music can transcend racial boundaries. Those are also just three examples out of the countless ones I can pull from my experience here. I think that is enough to prove that peaceful coexistence is possible between people of different races.

It hurts to think that in a world where we depend so much on each other, it would take a miracle to ensure that people and people can live together without shedding blood. But then again, if it only takes a miracle, then the least we can do is put in our effort and do our part and hope that the pieces will come together just fine in the end. And having learned a thing or two about miracles, I know it will.

“We sang and danced together even though we didn’t know their language.”

Disconnecting: A Letter to my Sister

By Julie

"You have the right to be yourself, because the real you is the best you."



Dear Maya,

At The Peace Centre we don't have our phones. It was not something that I was used to, since normally my phone is constantly by my side. At first I felt unsafe knowing that I was not going to be able to contact anyone if something went wrong, and anxious knowing that I wasn't going to be able to keep up to date with what was happening back home. I never thought losing my phone would be such a difficult thing to do, and it was only when I settled in and I stopped thinking about what was going on back home that I felt I was able to disconnect, and I ended up accepting that not having my phone was a good thing.

The family here at The Peace Centre are some of the kindest people I have ever met. I know I will not be judged in the same way as home. I know that the only standards here are the ones that I have created for myself. As soon as I realized how loving the environment at The Peace Centre was, I knew that if I was with my phone I wouldn't have felt like this. Social media creates unrealistic standards which are hard to ignore - all over you can see girls with the "perfect" figure, and it makes you think, "Am I good enough?" Here, that hasn't even crossed my mind.

An example of this was when I was doing devotion. Devotion is a time where we all sing and dance every day before dinner. During the first few devotions I was really hesitant about joining in because I was worried about being judged, but



it didn't take long for me to realize that it did not matter how I danced or sang, it just mattered that I was doing it with them. I did not feel afraid about the way I danced with the kids or even singing, I just knew that here I could be myself.

Maya, I'm not trying to tell you to get off your phone, but I do want you to think about the idea that social media is fake. It is an unrealistic society that has been created from peer pressure to be 'perfect'. It can be a place that is full of hate.

I remember the times when you would come into my room asking which pictures to post because you were afraid of the way people might judge you. This is not something that is healthy. I would like to be able to tell you to ignore the judgement, ignore the hostility, ignore the standards that people are choosing for you and, finally, ignore all the people that tell you to change. I want you to know that

"I have even come to appreciate the real me, and I can't help but feel that this me is a much better version of me."



you don't have to try to get validation from others to please them. You have the right to be yourself, because the real you is the best you.

I know it's not that simple though.

But my time here has showed me what it is like to be authentic. By taking myself away from my online social circles I have found that I can just be happy with who I am, which means I can give more and appreciate more. I have been able to open my eyes to new experiences rather than being on my phone. I have been able to get out my comfort zone by teaching children at the local primary school. And above all I have been able to create new relationships with the kids at the Peace Centre. In fact, by learning new ways of living here, I have even come to appreciate the real me, and I can't help but feel that this me is a much better version of me.

I wouldn't have been able to do this if I hadn't had my phone taken away from me, but I now understand the value of disconnecting. So why not take that jump and leave your phone behind some time? Surround yourself by people that truly care about you and separate yourself from the ones that cause you pain. It may seem scary at first, but you might just end up finding the real you.

Love always,

Julie



A Sense of Security

By Stephanie



Before arriving to the Peace Centre, if the words "Love, Care and Home" were mentioned to me, the first thing that would click in my head is probably the Mission Statement of the Peace Centre. But now, after arriving in Uganda and experiencing the daily lives in TPC, I have come to realise the importance of these words and how impactful they can be. To me personally, receiving love and care is very important since along with the two, I also receive the sense of security. I think that many people often disregard the importance of the sense of security, but for me, it is an essential and an integral part of my life. It helps me build up my confidence and it makes me more comfortable to share my ideas.

Prior to this experience, I have always stayed in my comfort zone in terms of socializing. I would rely on my friends and family and I wouldn't share my ideas and feelings with many people. I felt unsafe to open up to people I don't have a relationship with. Even in the TPC after school activities, I felt that talking in depth about my emotions to the Dulwich team was very difficult. I remember when I first arrived in TPC it was raining very hard and as I got off the bus to step into a place where I had only seen on



"It was both heart-breaking and heart-warming when one of the older boys shared, 'Before TPC I did not love myself. But now, I love my life and I love myself.' "

“To me, the definition of home is not just a shelter that can keep someone dry from the rain or warm in the winter, it is a place where love and care are both found.”

pictures Norah (a girl from TPC) came running into the rain to greet and hug me. Before the arrival, I had already heard about the constant hugs in TPC but I never expected them to be so welcoming. The children embraced me and instantly I could feel the care they have to us even though we were strangers to them. But even then, I couldn't feel the sense of safety.

However, after my visit in TPC has elongated, I have started to grow bonds with not only the Dulwich team but also with the people in TPC. Every day when the children see me or anyone from the Dulwich team, they come and give us a hug and I think that as these little demonstrations of care and love accumulate, so does my sense of safety. And I felt safer to share my ideas and emotions. One example was the night at Lake Bunyoni where we go as a Dulwich team to reflect. It was night time and we were sat around in a circle, under the stars and around a bonfire. We were told that this circle was called a “Brave Space” and it was where we could share our feelings and reflections about the trip so far. I felt that after all the interactions between me and the Dulwich team, it became easy for me to speak out and to be honest. I talked

openly about this topic of security that I am sharing now, and how I had been nervous at first, unsure of my new surroundings and the people around me. This openness is not something I would have felt comfortable sharing before, but I felt safe, brave and able to be honest. It was very refreshing.

After just a few days of the visit in TPC, this experience began to impact me more and more. Now I've understood just how fortunate I am but I also realised my privileges: food, clean water, shelter and also a family. Before coming, I thought I knew the importance of family but only when I



got here have I realised that family itself is also a privilege. Being in TPC, I have learnt just how much the three simple values and actions can affect a person. Many children here in TPC don't have family members but they have built family-like bonds with Peace, Golden, other TPC children and staff members. I remember the senior school children made presentations about the comparison of their past lives and their lives now in TPC. Every presentation mentioned “I had no family” or “I was not cared for” while resurfacing their past lives. And while talking about their current lives in TPC they said “I have brothers and sisters” and “I have parents”. It was both heart-breaking and heart-warming when one of the older boys shared, “Before TPC I did not love myself. But now, I love my life and I love myself.” It made me very glad that TPC is such a life-changing place and that the love and care they provide to these kids really made them feel loved and a part of a family.

Love, Care and a Home: perhaps out of these three values, the most important one to me is home. To me, the definition of home is not just a shelter that can keep someone dry from the rain or warm in the winter, it is a place where love and care are both found. I think that the reason behind why I am starting to feel more comfortable in TPC is not only due to the bonds I have created with others but also because I am starting to consider TPC as a home. As a first-time visitor, and just over the course of a merely two-week visit, I have already felt so much care from everyone and it made me certain that I can call TPC a home, for me and thankfully, for many others who need it too.

The Peace Centre and Me

By Ruth



“Love transforms lives.”

My name is Ruth and I live at The Peace Centre, but not because I have no parents. My parents run The Peace Centre. I call myself a lucky soul for that, although it didn't make sense to me until I was a little older. Just like lots of other young children, I was often mean when it came to my parents' love, care and attention for me.

In 2014, the first team of Dulwich students came to stay with my family to lay bricks for the building of The Peace Centre structure and that's when all sorts of weird thoughts started running in my mind. So I asked my mother what The Peace Centre was to become and she honestly replied, “It is going to be a home for those with no parents, for those with nothing.” I asked her whether they were all going to call her mother and she said, “Yes.” I was completely anxious about how I was going to share my parents and struggle for my own love and care.

In February 2015 the building was complete and the first group of children were welcomed to their new home. They literally had nothing that belonged to them except the clothes on their backs. Upon their arrival they were all given new clothes, shoes, a school bag and a bed amongst many other things they had never owned before. I remember clearly as I was one of the people welcoming them and giving out these things. This was a turning point for me from selfish to guilty. I had a good talk with Ms Maria, who had come out to officially open the Centre and that was a helpful consolation when she told me that her young daughter cried when she



wasn't ready to share her mum either. Even for just a week's trip.

For the last 6 months, I have been working at The Peace Centre as part of my gap year before I go to University. Spending all my days with the children has changed my perspective on life. I have realised

how much the children needed the love from all of us together, as well as how much their new home means to them. Along with the home comes the Rights of the Child such as education, health support, play time and love. It is a special place that has saved some children from abuse and provided a bright ray of hope where it is needed.

I have learnt how to love and be loved in return, especially with the morning hugs from my siblings that really make my day. The Peace Centre has served as a huge eye opener to carefully treasure the time I have with my parents, since there are plenty of children out there whose fate is far worse than mine.

Living in The Peace Centre has helped shape my life. Nowadays, I don't only live for my parents and biological siblings, but for the countless new siblings that I share my home with. I learn so much from them and with the journey still young, I am excited about what else I will learn in the future.

I now realise that my parents' love is not limited. I do not need to be anxious. They can love me as they always have loved me, but still love many new children too. I am blessed to have learnt this lesson from them. My hope is that everyone can learn to love always, even when you may not always feel like it, as love transforms lives.

*“Spending all my days
with the children has
changed my perspective on
life.”*



No More School Missed. Period.

By Winnie and Kjara



Most girls know it: you are on your period; too tired for everything; acne; moody; stressed; in pain and one chocolate bar is just not enough. However, our friends and we can't really complain because at least we actually have access to supplies and education on women's menstrual health. This is not the case for everyone.

In the world, only twelve percent of people with periods actually have access to menstrual products. Millions of women over the world have to use substitutes to manage their periods: mattress stuffing, old rags, leaves, feathers, sand, ash and cow dung. As if this wasn't already bad enough, there are documented links between girls not having access to menstrual products and them missing school. In Africa one in ten girls will miss

school during their periods, largely because they feel ashamed, uncomfortable, and just don't know what to do.

Frustrated by this inequality of women's access to sanitary products we started an after school club six months ago at Dulwich to concentrate on those issues. Being inspired by the excellent organization 'Days for Girls', we pursued the potential solution of making and then donating reusable sanitary pads. What is Days for Girls (DfG)? It is an international NGO that supplies reusable sanitary towel kits to women from all around the world where high costs of disposable supplies, inaccessibility and lack of education on menstrual health are problems commonly faced. Essentially, DfG makes menstrual products, like pads, that can be used, washed and then reused, lasting up to three years.

Fast forward to our trip to Uganda and we were keen to face this issue with the girls at The Peace Centre. We hated the idea that they may miss school because of their periods. We spoke with Peace, the Director of TPC, and she loved the idea,

"In Africa one in ten girls will miss school during their periods."



so we had a session with the girls where we gave them the opportunity to ask any questions at all on the topic, and where we introduced our idea of making reusable sanitary towels.

"How do I hide my period?"

"What do I ask my teacher when I want to leave the class because of my period?"

"Where and how am I supposed to change my pad when I am at school?"

"What if the teacher won't let me leave the class?"

"What do I do when boys find out and laugh at me?"

“How can something so normal for some people be such barrier in life for others?”



“Why does my period even happen in the first place?”

“Who can I talk to when I need help?”

We felt inadequate to deal with these questions, but we did our best, supported ably by Peace and our Dulwich teachers. The number of questions highlighted to us the need for these kinds of workshops in rural Uganda. It was a rewarding session and girls seemed very grateful that we talked with them about this issue openly, positively and without judgement.

Perhaps the biggest problem causing these negative feelings in girls is the way we talk about periods. Or rather, the way we don't talk about them. Just having casual conversations about menstruation are often considered taboo. There are even existing myths that portray periods as something repulsive or not right. For example, we learnt that some children are taught here that periods are a disease and you should not get the

blood on your hands. With nonsense like this flying around, it makes menstruation education even more of an uphill battle.

Bringing this idea to TPC has resulted in the possibility of bigger opportunities than we expected. Whilst we had first only anticipated this being a problem young girls encounter, after talking to Peace, we quickly realized that there was more to the story. The problem was bigger than we had originally thought, as women also face the same struggle, which interferes with their daily routine. From one perspective, this was really exciting as this meant that our project could have a greater and even more meaningful impact, but at the same time we were shocked and saddened by being confronted by this harsh reality. How can something so normal for some people be such barrier in life for others?

On our way back to the airport, we stopped by at the headquarter office of ‘Days for Girls’ in Kampala and had a talk with the director there. We discussed the possibility of forming a long-term relationship



between The Peace Centre and DfG. It looks like our vision may soon become possible and that we may be able to provide a long-term sustainable solution to periods for many girls and women who need it. As the meeting was wrapping up, very excited about the future, we were able to buy a sanitary towel kit for every girl at the Peace Centre. We hope that this can make a tangible difference in their lives and that something as normal as menstruation will no longer be taboo, and will certainly result in no more school days missed.

“Perhaps the biggest problem causing these negative feelings in girls is the way we talk about periods. Or rather, the way we don't talk about them.”

Thoughts from Children Living in The Peace Centre

“I had dropped out of school. My TPC home has helped me to keep studying. Thank you.”



“The Peace Centre has helped me learn new skills such as knitting, in addition to providing me with an education at school.”

“I eat good food at TPC. Thank you.”





“I thank The Peace Centre as I used to have to dig for money. Now TPC pays my fees and I get to go to school.”

“I had never touched a computer before I came to TPC. Now we have some laptops and we are practising our computer skills.”



“After the death of my parents I came to TPC and I got a new loving family and parents and even a family overseas who write me letters.”

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







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