



### Uganda trip September/October 2017

Each trip to Uganda, brings with it different experiences, some of which you can immediately process and others which take more of a 'slow-burner' approach. For me this recent trip falls in to the latter category.

Both Paula Gabbott and myself had the fortune of spending two weeks at Macedonian Vision Africa, Masese, Jinja. Although there were individual incidents or happenings that are touched upon in the following report, there are two main 'feelings' that have emerged from the trip: team and family.

**Nabulo Stellah** is a key appointment at Macedonian Vision Africa, and although interviewed in October 2016 was not in post (due to contractual obligations with her previous employer) until March 2017.



Nabulo Stellah in the grounds of MVA

Funded by the Laing Trust, the role of programme manager oversees all areas of MVA: MCOP (which ensures approximately 140 children from Masese can afford to go to school, as well as pastorally

transforming people's lives

[www.macedonianvisionafrica.org](http://www.macedonianvisionafrica.org)

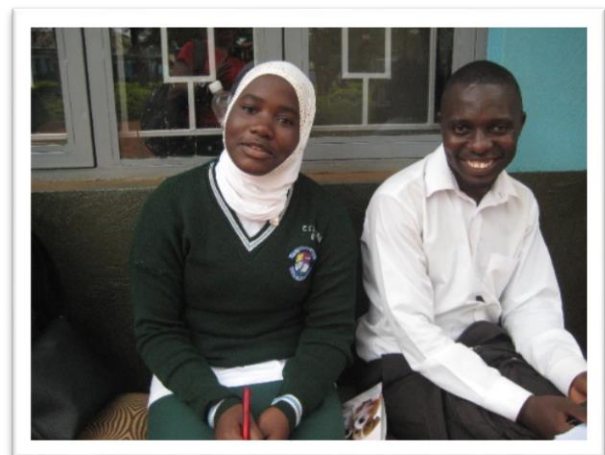
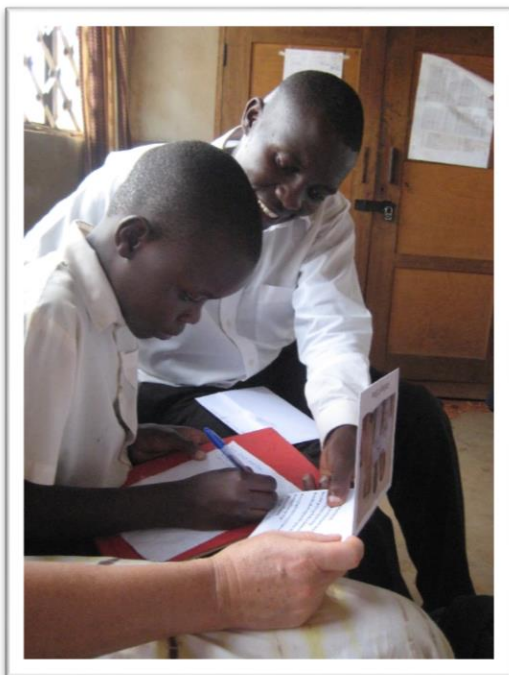
Macedonian Vision Africa (UK) part of Macedonian Vision Africa

Uganda registered number - 9970

cares for them), MAYI (the sexual and social health training for teenage girls and young women), MVI (the vocational school with teaching in tailoring, cosmetology and motor vehicle mechanics to date) and MM (Microfinance groups across Masese and Walukuba).

What impressed me about Stella was her willingness to learn, her approach to managing staff as well as structures, and her ability to communicate with the surrounding community. She is strong but compassionate. Together we spent time learning excel formulas, picking our way through the annual budget and getting to know the way each of us works. Trust and communication is essential when the team is spread across continents and cultures, and I am very optimistic that our working relationship will strengthen and under the care and guidance of Stella the project will flourish. Anyone that can make a 3 hour budget meeting fun, is worth their weight in gold!

**Obuya Julius** is another key appointment in the life and workings of MVA. As MCOP co-ordinator (funded through a percentage of the children's sponsorship scheme we run), he oversees the pastoral care of the children in the programme, communicating with families, schools and the US and UK teams that partner with MVA, about the sponsorship of the children.



Obuya Julius with a couple of children from the programme at school

In spite of his impending wedding, and the need to buy and present 2 cows, 6 goats and 6 chickens as dowry at the formal 'Introduction ceremony', he kept his cool, and worked tirelessly ensuring we

transforming people's lives

[www.macedonianvisionafrica.org](http://www.macedonianvisionafrica.org)

Macedonian Vision Africa (UK) part of Macedonian Vision Africa

Uganda registered number - 9970

caught up with as many kids in the programme as possible. This was often through school visits which is a great opportunity to really get a flavour of life for the children in the project. One boy, pictured with Julius above, had moved schools in the third term of that particular year, because the father hadn't paid his third of the school fees that were due (the project pays two thirds). The precarious and fluid nature of the children's education is evident as we annually review which school they are in, whether they have moved area, and whether they have managed to move up a year.



One of the days we were at the project, Julius had gathered many of the children together after school, so we could play some games, give out letters from sponsors and ensure every child received a gift from MVA UK. It was lovely to see familiar faces and increasingly put names to those faces.

Some of the children in the programme with gifts from MVA UK

It was at times like this there was a real sense of 'family'.

In addition to spending time with the children, we spent time in the expanding vocational institute. Although there are still only three departments, cosmetology, tailoring and car mechanics, the vocational institute has become officially registered since my last visit. As all things Ugandan, that means a lot of bureaucracy has had to be dealt with by Stella. The next stage is for the three departments to be fully equipped and get a plan in place to become self-financing.



Paula talking to students in cosmetology

transforming people's lives

[www.macedonianvisionafrica.org](http://www.macedonianvisionafrica.org)

Macedonian Vision Africa (UK) part of Macedonian Vision Africa

Uganda registered number - 9970

Because the project is on the edge but in the 'heart' of the Masese slum, the team (who all live in Masese) are able to work closely with the local community. We had some clothes that had been donated and hand puppets, baby blankets and jumpers that had been knitted by the Knit and Natter group at the Hub, Altrincham, that needed to be distributed. Some families in Masese were asked to meet at the project, where Stella carefully and sensitively gave out the items. The babies were looked after first but the look on the young children's faces when they were handed the glove puppets was a picture.



Masese children with glove puppets from Knit & Natter

As well as the highs we also experienced the lows, like when we found out one of the sponsored children gave birth to a still born baby in April. Such tragic circumstances, and a case of medical and emotional neglect. The week her baby died was the same week her sister died of HIV AIDS. I had another conversation with a girl whose family can only afford one meal a day. The money her dad earns giving people a lift on his bike, buys the food for that day's meal. And another story, but this time of child labour, with the girl's aunt forcing her to carry a 20 litre jerry can filled with water for miles, before she was given food.

In spite of this, and in part because of those stories, the work by MVA continues to grow from strength to strength. I return to the UK with a renewed sense of purpose, that there is hope in transforming a community holistically from absolute poverty. As my friend Gordon always says, 'serve God's kingdom', and it is with that purpose in mind and a vision and sense of justice for the people of Masese, the work of MVA and MVA UK continues.

Rachel Muter

[masesejinja@gmail.com](mailto:masesejinja@gmail.com)

24<sup>th</sup> October 2017

transforming people's lives

[www.macedonianvisionafrica.org](http://www.macedonianvisionafrica.org)

Macedonian Vision Africa (UK) part of Macedonian Vision Africa

Uganda registered number - 9970