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Macedonian Vision Africa UK – January 2024 team visit

Rachel and Nigel arrived in Jinja on Tuesday 24th January after some 20 hours travelling and an overnight stay in Entebbe. It was wonderful to be able to unwind in the hotel (unsurprisingly called, Paradise on the Nile), which has fantastic views looking over the river.

The next day we took motor bike taxis through the centre of Jinja town (not for the faint hearted!) up to the project, which is situated on a hill on the edge of the Masese slum. It was lovely to see everyone again after a 14-month break for Nigel (Rachel had visited with her family in the summer).



Nigel and Rachel at the Paradise on the Nile Hotel.



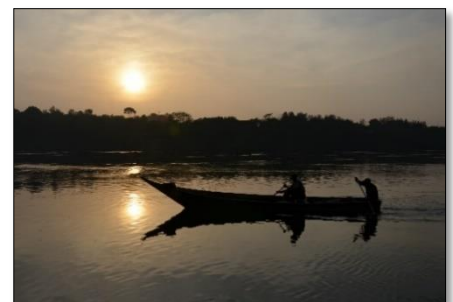
Andrew sharing letters with children from their sponsors

The children have two months school holiday in December and January, so Wanyonyi Andrew, the new Child Coordinator, was running 'Centre days' for the 50 or more children who are on the programme. We joined them in their morning reflection and shared an interactive bible story. The children then closed the reflection with some traditional African dancing before splitting into their different age groups for practical lessons, or games. Over the first few days we spent time with Andrew, sharing letters from sponsors and catching up on the progress of individual children, identifying those who were vulnerable and need more help. We talked with as many of the children who are supported by UK sponsors as possible. It was wonderful to hear their stories and to learn more about their favourite aspects of school and their aspirations.

We do try and have some time off during our visit, so on Saturday we went down to a restaurant called Bourbon, that is right down by the river. There was a whole range of birds, a visit from some otters and a wonderful sunset.



Children showing off African dancing, from the Samia region



Sunset over the Nile

On Sunday it was back on the motorbike taxis and up to the service in the MVA Masese Community Church. This is typical African style, with loud music and dancing, testimonies, and prayers.

Time goes very quickly and very soon we were into our last week. On the Monday we spent some time with Andrew going through all the children's files and then had a meeting with Pastor Alfred, the Director, discussing challenges of providing school fees for all the children.



The MVA 2024 intake of teenage mothers

We were pleased to draw quite a busy administrative day to a close, by the arrival of some 30 or so teenage mothers, who are just starting the 2024 training programme. Alongside practical training they will also learn business skills and receive mentoring. The girls would benefit from having reusable sanitary pads.

We left some money with Betty to purchase the materials for these.

Very sadly, on Monday evening we received news that one of the children on the programme, had died of malaria. The family is very poor and did not have had access to proper medication. In 2022 Rachel and I had visited the boy at his school and visited him at home with his family, so we shared the shock and grief that the all the staff and children at the Macedonian project felt.

In Africa burials are held quickly and we were pleased to be able to offer financial assistance. Pastor Alfred, the senior staff, and a number of children travelled to the family home in Mukono to attend the funeral. On Thursday, Rachel and I visited the family, we saw his mother, grandmother and younger brothers and sisters.

As well as catching up with sponsored children, we were also pleased to meet four of the teenage mothers who graduated from their hairdressing and dressmaking courses last year. Betty does a great work leading this programme and it was great to hear firsthand how this training has transformed their lives. Thursday was a busy day as we visited three of the teenage mothers in their homes in the lower end of the slum near the lake. It was a 30-minute walk down the hill, along an old railway line, past some big factories. There are open drains, discarded plastic bags and rubbish along the path. Chickens and goats rummage through these looking for scraps to eat, roadside stalls and lots of small children running around. The houses are packed closely together, most have traditional mud walls with corrugated iron roofs. Some have electricity, which is tapped illegally from the overhead wires. All the mothers were pleased to see us and invited us inside.

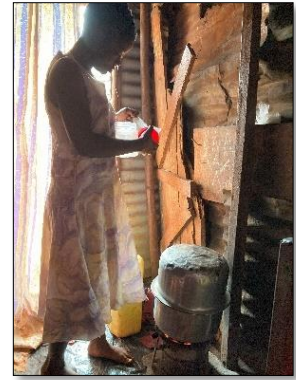


A roadside view in Masese



Betty and Helen

Typically, their homes are one room, around 3x3 meters with an area separated off for sleeping in. We visited Helen first, there were six people living in this space, this included her Mum, sister, and a friend of hers who also had a young baby. As we spoke, her sister was preparing lunch, which was a rice, cooked on a charcoal stove by the doorway. The money Helen earns



Cooking rice for dinner

from her hairdressing helps pay for food and the rent.

We began the child sponsorship programme in 2014 and it wonderful to catch up with children who have now graduated. Our afternoon ended with a visit to Isaac's house for afternoon tea. After MVA, Isaac was sponsored by Ugandaid to learn bricklaying and construction. He is now training to be a Baptist Minister at the International College in Jinja. His friend Cypriano joined us, MVA supported him through to A levels and he is now a teacher at a local Primary School. Conversation was lively and it was real joy to hear how they are gathering other young men together to share and grow their Christian faith. The evening was rounded off with a game of Ludo, the competition was fierce but I am pleased to report that the UK won the day.

On Friday we began with a visit to one of the children on the priority sponsorship list. Oscar lives with his parents, who are both disabled and who live in a storehouse belonging to a local church. There are limited opportunities for work if you are disabled and they make paper beads for a living. These are sold to gift shops for 2,000 shillings. Oscar's school fees are 200,000 per term, he also needs money for his uniform and other consumables. Oscar's father showed us how he made the beads. It is painstaking work and takes several hours to make a necklace. We left impressed by Paul's stoicism and determination to make the best of his circumstances. We sent the pictures and report over to the UK and were so pleased that someone came forward and agreed to sponsor Oscar.



Oscar with his father, Paul

Thanks to the generosity of the sponsors, we are now able to meet the full cost of the fees for the majority of the primary and secondary school children as well as lunch. We fund both Andrew's and Senga's salaries (the general assistant). It is challenging at times juggling different priorities but seeing all the children at the centre day and meeting graduates like Isaac and Cypriano, make it all worthwhile.

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