



Tracey Askew

Physiotherapy

Visiting and volunteering in Malawi for three and a half weeks this summer was one of, if not **the** best experience of my life and definitely something I would like to do again in the future. Seeing the poverty first hand was an eye opening experience albeit a little upsetting at times, however I found all of the locals to be friendly and welcoming and most of all they had the greatest sense of spirit and community which was lovely to see. We experienced a lot whilst in Malawi; we taught, read to and played games with children, we referenced and painted libraries, helped to fix water boreholes, made bricks out of mud, climbed Mount Mulanje, visited a nature reserve, had Chichewa lessons and visited a local market where we attempted to haggle in Chichewa.



Tracey and Stevie at the early morning Chichewa lessons held next to the pool at Fisherman's Rest

The highlight for me was meeting the children. Playing with them and helping them with their literacy skills made me realise how much we take education for granted in the developed world. We made lesson plans and taught in three schools over three days, this was definitely something I will always remember. With no previous teaching experience, it was a little daunting at first but a huge opportunity that gave us insight into what the education system is like there. The class sizes vary massively. One class we taught had 130 children, so it was challenging to keep the children's attention at times and we had to think on our feet when things didn't go to plan, but they were all very well behaved and appeared to enjoy our lessons. We took colouring pens, crayons and colouring books into the nursery and some of the schools; it was lovely to see the children so excited, as they rarely get the opportunity to colour in, due to a huge lack in resources.

During one of our lessons, we asked the children what they wanted to be when they were older and found that they had dreams and aspirations to become pilots, teachers, doctors and nurses; it was refreshing to hear that they had such ambitions despite the communities' lack of resources and limited opportunities available. This trip highlighted just how important it is for the children to get a good education, as without one, their future prospects are limited and they will struggle to get out of the poverty that surrounds them.



Tracey and Asha after teaching a class

As a physiotherapy student I was also very interested in finding out how the Malawian healthcare system worked. We visited Chikwawa hospital and some local clinics, the staff

appeared to be very committed however there was an obvious lack of supplies, for example, in one local clinic they had a blood glucose monitor but were unable to get batteries for it, therefore they could not use it. The clinician's frustration was understandable as they knew exactly what they needed to provide better care, they just appeared to lack funding. We also visited a private international hospital whose motto was "adults pay a fee so children walk free", they treated children with a wide range of orthopaedic and neuromuscular conditions free of charge and we were shown around by one of the physiotherapists who worked there. I felt inspired to see the work that people do in Malawi and it has motivated me to want to return to the country when I finish university.

Malawi is known as the warm heart of Africa, and after spending almost a month there it is clear to see why. Despite the poverty that surrounds the country and the difficult challenges that the people face on a daily basis, they are some of the most welcoming people and we could learn a lot from their sense of community and togetherness.



Liz and Tracey teaching