



**Bryony Downes**

Biological & Forensic  
Science

During my time in Malawi I achieved everything that I had hoped to and more. It was a life-changing experience that taught me so much about myself, life in Malawi and albinism. I made some great friends and have had the opportunity to do things that would never have been possible otherwise. If you take a trip to a developing country and see a completely different world, like we did, and you come back the same person that you were when you went, then something is wrong. For me, there were two particular activities that have made a lasting impression:

While in Malawi, we visited Mpemba health centre, Madzizbango clinic and Chikwawa district hospital. It was an eye-opening experience to see the difficulties that the doctors, nurses and other hospital staff face on a daily basis. The struggles they have with regard to staffing in comparison to the volume of patients requiring treatment and the lack of resources is incomprehensible. The district hospital has two doctors, several medical technicians (along with other staff) serving a district with a population of over half a million people. It made me consider my life and how much I take things for granted; something simple like being able to get in the car and drive to your local GP surgery if you need to see a doctor, is a million miles from the conditions in a developing country. While we were at one of the clinics, there was a lady who had walked for 4 hours so that her son could be seen by a doctor (she suspected that he had malaria). People in the U.K. complain about the NHS, the government and how things are run in this country, but if you are fortunate enough to visit a country like Malawi and see things from a different perspective, you learn to appreciate just how lucky we are.



Bryony and Dan help dispense medication at a rural clinic

We spent three days teaching in three different primary schools - Nankumba, Chipecwete and Mbame. It was very difficult to plan lessons in the short space of time that we had, even with all of the resources that were available to us. I couldn't imagine how difficult it must be for a teacher. They don't have a fraction of the resources that we had available to us; such as being able to print out worksheets or having paper and pencils. It was an eye-opener to see first hand how the schools differ so greatly in regards to their standards, resources and the number of pupils, depending on their location. Chipecwete school is approximately 5 km from the main road and much more rural than the other two; it had far fewer pupils and only had two properly constructed classrooms. However, regardless of the school or its location, all of the children were completely engaged in what we were teaching them and enjoyed the experience. This made me think how much these children would love the opportunity to continue their education to secondary school and possibly university, even though for many it is simply not viable. We, in developed countries, have so many opportunities for education, and many people do not take them. We take education for granted because it is so readily available to us. It is not something that we should become complacent about. Education is a basic human right and should be something that is available to everyone regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Seeing the children, schools and the education system in rural areas of Malawi has encouraged me to take advantage of all the opportunities that I will have throughout my life to further my education and hopefully I will be able to use the knowledge that I gain to help others. I hope that the time we spent in the schools inspired even one child to pursue their dreams and continue with their education – going to secondary school and university, in order to make a better life for themselves and their family.



*Bryony, Lauren and Liz head off on Lake Malawi*