

# Two Week International Volunteer Network Trip Update...

Dear Friends

Greetings and salutations for the New Year.

It has taken a while, but I have finally managed to find some time to give you an update on our recent trip to the Lily of the Valley orphanage, a home for children affected by HIV and AIDS. The orphanage is situated in a rural township called Mophela, in Durban, South Africa and there are now over 90 children that live there. I will begin by saying that the trip was a great success and we all had an incredible experience.

Our primary aim was to assess whether teams of healthcare and other professionals could volunteer on a short term basis and handover to the following team successfully, to continue their work. Our final team comprised of 5 doctors, an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Lawyer/teacher and gap year student.

The weeks before heading out to South Africa were awash with meetings, fundraising events and more meetings with potential sponsors and donators alike.

Team A consisted of Dr Richard Fotiadis a GP, Dr Patricia Rijsenburg, another GP, Nicky Holland an occupational therapist, Rosemary Graham, a physiotherapist and Jacqueline Cohen, our 'lawyer, come teacher'. Nicola Brady was our gap year student who intended to stay at Lily for 3 months and I as acting team leader and doctor, would stay for a total of 4 weeks. Dr Samina Shah and Dr Preethi Venkatesham were going to follow on 2 weeks later as Team B to continue the work Team A had started.

Our journey began at Heathrow airport on the 3rd of November with Team A, several suitcases and a cleverly disguised steriliser that weighed approximately 35 Kgs - we hoped. We had received permission for a total of 30 kgs per person and we were all perilously close to this amount with each suitcase as they were full to the brim with medical equipment, medicines, toys and things for the children.

15 hours later with a stopover in Madrid and then in Johannesburg we were being greeted by Noel and Pat at Durban Airport, who are the chairpersons of Lily and principal fundraisers. We collected our rental vehicle and were soon on our way to the rural township of Mophela. Everyone was tired but glad to have arrived safely with all of our luggage and a rather battered steriliser that had been inconveniently dispensed with the rest of the luggage down the conveyer belt.

As soon as we entered the gates of Lily and I saw the little houses with their green roofs and the children playing, I knew I was home.

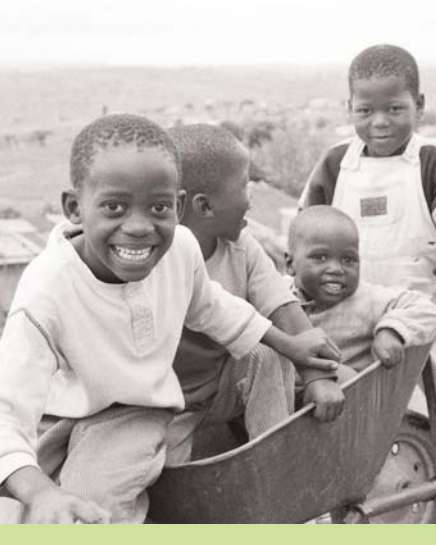
All I can say is that the team worked extremely hard. Rosemary and Nicky got straight into assessing children and following up on programs and care instigated by previous volunteers - Bernie and Esther. They then worked with the children to improve their motor and communication skills which were often delayed due to their illness and previous malnutrition, resulting in poor growth and development.

Richard, Patricia and I started the health reviews on the children and refining the computer program that Richard had devised for this very purpose. The health reviews involved checking the children from head to toe and diagnosing any previously missed or new complaints.



## What can I say about the children?

They are amazing, beautiful, lovely, kind, mischievous, funny, cheeky, happy, enlightening, humbling, caring, intelligent, resilient, proud...



Jacqueline began to assess the teaching programs and after school homework club that the resident long term volunteers participated in.

Nicola helped us all in different ways by learning the different assessment and care programs provided by Rosemary and Nicky, as well as assisting the doctors with typing reports and inputting data and assisting with teaching programs.

We were also asked to review the children at another orphanage recently taken over by Lily of the Valley called Makaphutu, which was located in a place called 1000 Hills approximately 45 minutes drive away. This children's home had more of a troubled past and so Noel and Pat had 'stepped into the breach' to turn things around for the staff and children there.

The 2 weeks for team A passed all too quickly, but they had managed to see half of the children at Lily of the Valley and Makaphutu. But there was still a lot to be done. Soon Team A were saying their goodbyes and Team B comprising of Samina and Preethi, now renamed 'Team A+' had arrived and quickly got straight to work seeing the rest of the children at Lily and Makaphutu.

Team A+ also managed to do full health reviews on the house mothers who care for the children at Lily of the Valley and some of the staff that work on the premises on a daily basis.

Both teams were involved in holding a 'carnival' for the children, where we did face painting, made balloon shapes and had other arts and crafts with story telling and a treasure hunt. The children absolutely loved it and so did the volunteers. We had such fun and it was also an opportunity for the children to see us in another light, ie. other than medical/professional.

The time flew by and overall the medical contingent of the team managed to see

152 children, most of the house mothers and some of the staff at Lily. The greatest achievement for our OT and physio team became evident after only just 2 weeks. They had been working with a little girl called Caitlin who hardly spoke before they arrived. But by the time they left she was saying a few words and calling to people.

Jacqueline had practically become an 'educational advisor and consultant', assessing and reviewing current teaching programs and making suggestions as to how to improve them further. She also worked with the house mothers to assess and help with their needs, as a lot of these women leave their own homes and families to take care of the children at Lily.

Preethi and I were also pleased to see that the health clinic that would serve the needs of the children and local township was under construction. We had visited Lily of the Valley last year in October to do a health needs assessment to establish what was needed by the local population and the costs that would be involved. By the time we left the roof was almost finished. The real challenge will be the staffing and successfully running the clinic when it is completed.

I think I can conclude that our trip was an overall success. We managed to assess and implement treatments for the children and made many friendships in the process. We also learnt a lot about ourselves as individuals and as team mates and our knowledge as clinicians increased as we saw a wide spectrum of medical conditions whilst there.

What can I say about the children? They are amazing, beautiful, lovely, kind, mischievous, funny, cheeky, happy, enlightening, humbling, caring, intelligent, resilient, proud, protective, creative, entertaining, friendly, blessed and still very much missed by all of us who were privileged to help them.

I would also say that we were very impressed with the volunteers that live at





# Thank you, thank you, thank you!



Lily and the workers who enable the children to live and thrive in a safe environment, and again many friendships were made with them and will not be forgotten.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for all your help and support in this our first venture as the Two Weeks International Volunteer Network. Your money, time and skills helped in so many ways and enabled us to help these children in even more ways. We managed to raise over £2000 in cash which we gave to the manager Warren Holland on our last day there. We raised also money to buy physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy equipment as well as medicines for the children and a laptop, which will be used for future health assessments and keep up to date medical notes on the children. The bruised and battered steriliser lives on and will soon be joined by more clinical instruments for it to clean. Funds were also raised to help buy books for the homework club library, and arts & crafts items used for the carnival, which we noted were all proudly displayed on the cabinets in the children's homes

Now the hard work will really begin as more and more people are asking to come on future trips and thankfully, most of the team that came on this trip have offered their services & skills for future trips. This year hopes to see the Two Weeks International Volunteer Network registered as a charity and to have the website devised and up and running. The process of recruiting and vetting volunteers will also begin and I have been asked to advise Lily on how to staff and run the clinic that is being built. A challenge it must be said, but one to be embraced.

So there you have it, our first trip is now a distant, but happy memory, but I hope there will be many more to come. I will conclude this update with 'please watch this space' and a reminder that you do not need to be a doctor, lawyer, an OT or physiotherapist to make a difference to a child's life. There is so much we can all do both here and overseas regardless of our training and current standing in life.



Thank you, thank you, thank you!

## Thank you again for helping us to make a difference.

**Karen Patten**

