

Alison Humphreys (History) - Nairobi, Kenya, Summer 2015

My Mill Lane Award supported a month's volunteering in Nairobi, Kenya, with the development charity Maji Mazuri. I would like to begin by thanking the Award's donors for their funding, as my experiences were amazing. My five-person team was able to achieve a lot of good work, and hopes to establish a long term connection with Pembroke College. Impressed with my organisation and leadership of the group, the charity has now invited me to be a UK Trustee with the ability to help implement further change. As I had travelled only a little before, and then never outside of Europe, it was also fantastic for my personal development, especially in dealing with a different environment and problem-solving. I loved the energy and colours of Kenya, and found the local culture fascinating.

Maji Mazuri aims broadly to empower people to make their own way out of poverty, mainly through education and community development. They offered the chance to gain a range of experiences and perspectives on Nairobi, although working in the city also brought frustrations, as when government raids in Mathare prevented us reaching the Headstart School there. Throughout the trip I was leader of the team, responsible for scheduling, motivation, and support.

The principal expenses which the Award covered were train and air fares; fuel for safe transport in the charity's van; rent for my homestay accommodation; medicine (with leftovers donated to our host's family), and supplies to help with our work.

In Mathare, one of the fastest growing slums in East Africa and home to over 500 000 people, I worked at both the Headstart Primary School and the Maji Mazuri Youth Projects. At the school, I produced a new noticeboard and taught English. At the weekends, I led Youth Group (18-25) sessions on cultural differences and life in the UK. The team also ran games sessions for younger children and helped out with a 'Green Heroes' clean up, where we cleared drains and collected rubbish to improve the Mathare environment.

At the Maji Mazuri Children's Centre in Kasarani, home to approximately forty physically and mentally disabled children and a number of orphans, I was able to use archiving skills from my History degree to reorganise case files and other documentation into a more helpful and easily accessible system. I helped with mealtimes, whilst other volunteers painted a new classroom mural, provided tutoring, and played educational games with the children.

The group was also able to visit the Maji Mazuri School at Kiserian, a project which the UK Trustees were concerned about and asked me to look into. Over a fortnight, I was able to unravel a new leasing and management system which they were entirely unaware of, and to identify potential problems with it. I also tracked the use of donated computers across the charity and made recommendations to make practices more effective.

Between volunteer work, I was able to see a range of African wildlife, and visit several museums about Kenyan history, which has enriched my understanding of the country's culture and biodiversity.

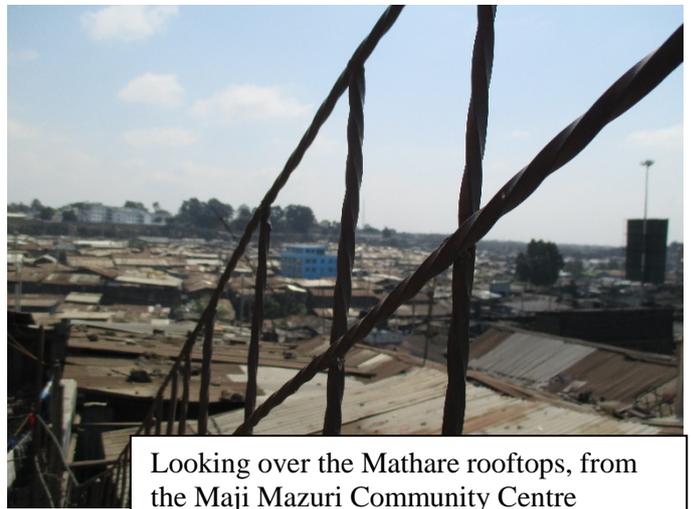
Since returning, the group has given feedback on their experience which will shape future volunteering offered by the charity. I am now preparing to present to Pembroke students in the hope of recruiting volunteers for a 2016 trip.

Again, thank you for this opportunity, and all the best for the future.

Alison Humphreys



The team, Kimani (our driver) and the van



Looking over the Mathare rooftops, from the Maji Mazuri Community Centre



Helping clear drains with the Green Heroes



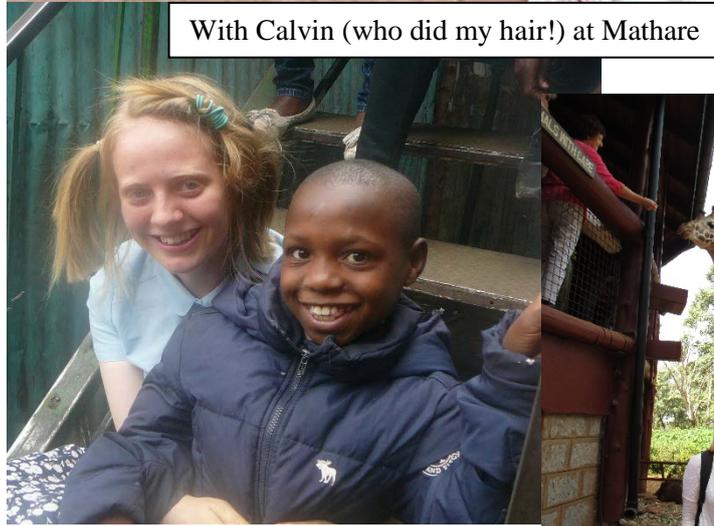
Children at Headstart



With the children of the Children's Centre



The new noticeboard I made at Headstart



With Calvin (who did my hair!) at Mathare



At the Nairobi Giraffe Sanctuary



With Rispah and Alice, residents at the Children's Centre