

## **Katie Duff (Law) – Kenya, Summer 2015**

This summer I spent 5 weeks in Nairobi, Kenya with Maji Mazuri- a charity dedicated to improving the lives and opportunities of young people, disabled and impoverished children. My time in Kenya volunteering with Maji Mazuri was an incredibly eye opening and broadening experience. It both taught me a lot about myself and the world around me, being exposed to a totally novel culture and way of life. I decided to join the volunteering trip because I was interesting in teaching English to the kids as well as drama and dance. Myself as well as four other volunteers stayed with our lovely host mum, Esther. Her house with a TV, two flushing toilets, a gas cooker and a microwave would be well below the poverty line in the UK but in Nairobi is considered highly affluent.

A typical day would start at around 9 am with Kimani our driver picking us up and taking us either to the disabled children's centre in Kasarani or Headstart Primary School based in Mathare slum. I loved helping with drama related activities at the school; taking and participating in the drama club in Mathare School- Headstart- a few times over the course of the project, as well as taking the youth club one afternoon. My ability to teach and tutor English was only used a few times at the school and towards the end of the trip at the children's centre. Admittedly a lot of this problem rests on unforeseen security restrictions- regarding riots in the slum or the Obama visit- stopping us from travelling to the school. This in particular meant that out of the two weeks of four that we actually solidly worked I was only able to work at the school around four times, which is where I may have been better employed, even though I thoroughly enjoyed working at the children's centre. I thoroughly enjoyed focussing my efforts on playing and teaching the younger special needs children, perhaps something I would have shyed away from doing before if not for Maji Mazuri.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding experiences of working at the children's centre was getting to know each individual child and overtime building up a real bond with a few and them recognising us arriving. I also found learning of each of their backgrounds and upbringings truly touching, seeing how far they had come and just how much they were able to progress with the help of Maji Mazuri.

We were truly immersed in the African culture and way of life which I wholly enjoyed. The experience even affirmed my desire to engage in more charity work in Kenya but with more of a focus on women's rights, gender quality and education and discussion of sexual abuse and mistreatment. My personal experience of working with Maji Mazuri and my visit to Kenya really has been decisive in my changing outlook on life as well as privilege in the Western world. Living in Kenya and engaging myself in the culture also opened my eyes to the various manifestations global issues take on in different parts of the world. Being part of this volunteering trip has helped me realise the extent to which I want to be involved in helping developing countries overcome particular issues, many of which originate from the tricky intersection between the growth of Western culture and the effort to maintain African culture and tradition.

We often felt that we were mainly extra hands and that Maji Mazuri didn't really need us for the roles we had applied for- they already have teachers and care givers who do an

excellent job. However, the time we spent at the projects did allow us to observe the practices of each project from an impartial outsider's view. This allowed us to identify where we thought practices could be improved or changed.

### A day in the life of a volunteer in Kenya

Katy Duff (2014) talks about a day volunteering with Maji Mazuri, a social development charity in Nairobi. She is working for a month there, with Liam Hammond (2013), Stefan Ulrich (2013), Alison Humphreys (2012), and Sarah Murphy (2012).

8am-wake up after a night spent on mattresses on the floor of one of the rooms in Esther's house-our lovely, welcoming host Mum. Her house with a TV, two flushing toilets, a gas cooker and a microwave would be well below the poverty line in the UK but in Nairobi is considered highly affluent. Eat a breakfast of chapatti, leftover rice or fresh fruit from the market stalls.

9am- We get picked up by Kimani our driver, a man who is always so sharply dressed today wearing suit trousers, a heavy leather jacket and a bucket hat. Today we are going to the disabled children's centre in Kasarani, but on other days we will go to Headstart Primary School based in Mathare slum.

10.30-11- arrive at the children's centre in Kasarani after a very bumpy ride over the many potholes and 'roads' of Nairobi. It would be fair to say that after all the bruises we have accumulated we know the roads of Nairobi very intimately!

I head over to the younger special needs class for children age 4 to 10. The older class has students aged 11 to 14 who are learning vocational training such as mat making or beading. The students in this class are then divided into two groups: those who are self aware and can learn by example of the teacher and those who don't have the self awareness to take part. The children learn such vocational skills so as to have a possible future business if they are integrated back into society on leaving the centre. The younger class however focuses on learning through play and visual and mental stimulation, watching the television and playing with building blocks, lego and picture cards. Giggs, named after the footballer Ryan, one of the most communicative children, always greets me with a big smile. I let him chase me around the balcony of the centre, giggling joyfully whilst pushing his walker to run after me. Then when he gets tired I help him to play with the lego and the picture cards, getting him to find the pairs and match them up.

1pm- All the children gather in the playground next to the kitchen for lunch. We help those who cannot feed themselves, spooning the big plates of rice, vegetables, and fruit into their mouths. After eating they all get some water and we mop around them, because inevitably a lot of the food has missed their mouths. We then eat ourselves, and go back to tasks that we have each been working on. Today I am tutoring the older part time residents who board at other high schools and return for the holidays, teaching them of the use of the comma.

3,3.30/4pm – We get ready to leave the centre. We have to set off so early because the traffic can be so bad that it can take 4 and a half hours at times to get back home to Esther's. Driving along the Kenyan roads is an interesting experience, with matatu drivers blatantly ignoring all rules of the road, motorbikes swerving through the two lines of static cars and people constantly coming up to the car and trying to sell us anything from lampshades to bananas. We also look out along miles of ramshackle shops and salons along the side of the road next to piles of burning rubbish and black sewage water, which at first was fairly distressing sight to see but now is understood as one of the realities of urban Kenyan life.

5/6pm- We get dropped off at the edge of the Ngumo suburb and walk along the road to Esther's house, passing many green grocers shops made of wood and pieces of tarpaulin. In the evening, Esther teaches Liam and I to make chapatti, one of the tastiest national foods of Kenya- in our opinion! It's made of nothing but flour, water, a little salt and sugar. We knead and prepare the dough ready for proving. Stacy, Esther's elder daughter, then helps me to wash some of my clothes, just using a bar of soap and some detergent in a bucket. We then come back to the chapatti, which we finish preparing and then fry to eat with a side of lentils.

9pm- We usually watch the news on the chatty Citizen channel with Esther- which always provides some interesting headlines, such as 'Grannies learning English for Obama's visit'. Last week, we made it onto Kenyan TV ourselves, wandering around in the background of a wedding show whilst the bride and groom were being interviewed!

10pm- We all head to bed, making sure we get a good night's sleep for a full day of work the next day.