

### **Stephanie Barrett, Ethiopia - Summer 2013**

With many thanks to the generosity of the B M Rowe Trust Fund, I was able to spend a rewarding month running a summer school for 30 local children in Gondar, Ethiopia, in association with the charity Link Ethiopia.

Lessons on the camp ranged from maths, science and English to classes in health and hygiene awareness, contemporary Britain and pronunciation. I taught drama, storytelling, English language and lexis and pronunciation. The whole camp was taught in English, the language of all secondary education in Ethiopia, and the students' abilities varied greatly. Initially, the children, aged 11-19, were under-confident with their spoken English, too afraid to speak for fear of making a mistake. They also struggled to think independently; whilst their knowledge was impressive, they lacked the understanding of what their memorised facts meant. I worked hard with them to change this, focusing on understanding and creative thinking over rote learning. By the end of the summer school, there was a marked improvement in the students' written and spoken English, confidence and freedom of thought, which was hugely satisfying to see. These skills will hopefully stay with the students' for life, and will continue to develop.

Further to organising and teaching on the Summer School, I worked with the Ethiopian teachers at the host school, with the aim of helping to build upon the quality of teaching the school can provide all year round. Having been working with the children, I had identified key problems with their abilities and attitudes to learning, which I discussed with the teachers, and together we worked on methods for addressing and improving fundamental issues. These included: teamwork, creative thinking, confidence and problem solving.

Working closely with Link Ethiopia's Gondar team and being out in Gondar for the month, I was able to make close friends, and experience the culture, with local Ethiopians. This provided me an invaluable insight into the local, vibrant colour, and to understand more fully the community's way of life. This meant that, for example, when the town was overtaken by goats one day, Zemene, the facilitator of my project, could explain to me that it was the end of the fasting period, during which no animal products could be consumed, and a meat feast was imminent! Zemene also introduced us to The Kindu Trust, another charity working locally with children and young adults in Gondar, and we took the camp students on a trip to one of Kindu's projects in a poor village, where they had built toilets, showers and a biogas plant. This, accompanied by a talk from the General Manager of the Trust, helped to instil in the children a sense of communal responsibility and of helping others, which I and the other teachers felt was just as important a lesson as the ones we offered in the classroom.

Overall, the trip was an unforgettable, eye-opening experience. I feel that I made a real difference to 30 students' lives, as well as gaining a new perspective of my own.