

## **Zahira Butt (Law) – Tanzania, Summer 2015**

From July to August 2015 I travelled to Dodoma, Tanzania to volunteer at DCT Mvumi Secondary School. Originally a missionary school set up in the early 1900s, DCT Mvumi is now a thriving school, and the heart of Mvumi village. My visit was a great learning curve: I had never travelled to Africa before, nor had any experience of systems of education beyond that of the UK. In applying my aim was to share my passion for learning and where I could to help students achieve personal goals.

The school was inhabited by a mix of pupils. Being a fee-paying boarding school there were those whose parents were relatively well off. Such students learnt alongside sponsored students who were intelligent but could not afford to go to DCT Mvumi without the financial aid provided by the charity associated with the school (Mvumi School Trust). The stories of these latter students were often saddening. One student we spoke to told us how she was forced from her home by her father's wives who despised her for her education, another spoke of caring for his disabled mother on very little annual income.

Students face various difficulties. Up until Secondary School they are taught in Swahili, after a small induction course they go on to Secondary School where they are taught almost exclusively in English. Many also speak in their regional dialect (a variation of Swahili) at home. Teachers are themselves not always proficient in English, they too are learning. Not all who are fee-paying can afford to pay the fees comfortably; it's common for parents to send one child to school and wait until this child has finished Secondary School before sending another, because they cannot afford the fees and secondary costs such as uniform for more than one child.

The school has a busy Visually Impaired Unit because it is fed by a local school for visually impaired students. VI students face difficulties of their own. Teaching is often based on the chalk board, because they are unable to see the board VI students lag behind. The school is unable to provide recording equipment for all students, and making notes on the braille machine is a noisy business so cannot be done in lesson.

The work myself and another volunteer did was varied. We attended Form One English lessons, assisting the teacher with his classes. We ran English Club in the after school hours, became involved in Debating, sexual health sessions, and improving the hygiene of the younger years. We proof-read for the school magazine. We tutored Mvumi's visually impaired students as often as we could to ensure they were up-to-date. We also created a mural in the VI unit, with the tagline 'DISABILITY IS NOT INABILITY', though many VI students cannot see it we were able to use braille for the lettering and so they are able to see it.

Whilst students face many difficulties, they are often bright and keen. I was touched by the kind and welcoming nature of many of the students, and many a time remarked that we would probably be met with suspicion or scepticism doing something similar in the UK. The teachers too were incredibly welcoming and eager to facilitate whatever we suggested. We were lucky enough to stay with two incredible volunteers who we joined as their year in Mvumi was coming to an end.

But my experience was not limited to Tanzanian education. We were able to attend a traditional wedding, to go to the local church, to eat at local haunts in the village, to go on an incredible safari in Mikumi National Park, and to visit luscious Zanzibar. My time in Tanzania was filled with adventure and wherever we went we were met with a warm welcome. If it wasn't the hotel keeper waking up early to make us breakfast, or the admin staff lending us what little food they had so we could entertain guests, or being given fresh fruit from the garden of a teacher's family on school grounds, it was being in the wedding photo of a couple we hardly knew, or being called by our tour guide to make sure we'd arrived home safely, or helping a teacher pick a name for his unborn child. Tanzanians are truly wonderful people.