

Kenya 2014

Student reflection 2014

Pre – trip expectations

The Kenyan Orphan Project is a UK based charity which supports orphaned and vulnerable children in Kisumu, Kenya. It was set up 13- years ago by three medical students from Nottingham University. These students like most other medical students in the UK, as part of their under-graduate training decided to travel to Kenya to experience health care provision in a setting which was greatly different from that of their home country. This was the birth of the Kenyan Orphan project, which today has given students like me the opportunity to give back to humanity and to experience something truly incredible.

Prior to taking part in the Kenyan Orphan Project, I knew very little about the charity sector, and how international organisations such as KOP support local NGO's. I had heard about places like Kibera (one of the largest urban slums in Africa) in Kenya and had a vague idea about the level of poverty and hopelessness that I would encounter while in Kenya. As a result of the above my primary aims for visiting Kenya was to be further enlightened by the reality of poverty faced some individuals in Kenya and to also see how international organisations work to alleviate poverty.

One month before traveling, I had the opportunity to meet with students from other universities also taking part in the Kenyan Orphan Project (KOP). Every student taking part in KOP had the task of fundraising £800, all of which would be used by KOP to support the projects that we were to visit.

The aim of our pre- trip meeting was to equip us with the essential knowledge and preparation needed to make the trip a success; however nothing could have prepared me for what I actually encountered while I was out there in Kenya. It was also at this event that I was appointed group leader, meaning that during our time in Kenya I would be responsible for a small group of students.



Image 1: Pre trip attempt at content creation, spelling out KOP with our shoes because many orphans in Kenya do not have shoes to wear on a daily basis

During Trip

We arrived in Kisumu (western Kenya) late Saturday afternoon, after a pleasant 6-hour road trip from Nairobi. On our first official day at the projects, we had the opportunity to visit the head office of Ogra Foundation (KOP supports Ogra, the local NGO responsible for running community based projects

such as the OMEN feeding centre, which is where I spent most of my time). At the office we also met other volunteers from major companies such as GSK, one of which was in the process of putting together a community project on fistula education for local women.

Later on in the day, despite the long and bumpy journey in a matatu (Kenyan public mini bus) we finally arrived at the OMEN feeding centre. As the matatu pulled into the compound I was filled with much excitement but also much anxiety as I knew not what to expect. On arrival we were greeted by Madam Ida (the woman responsible for running the feeding centre), we were given a tour of the entire compound which consisted of one main building with two rooms (one dining room and one office), and a smaller kitchen.

One by one the children started to trickle in with excitement on their faces, I was unsure if their excitement was as a result of seeing us or whether it was due to that fact that a warm and nutritious meal awaited them in the dining room – I like to think it was a combination of both. However for some of these children the meal provided at the feeding centre would be their only guaranteed meal for the entire day as their families did not have sufficient money to provide food. The food provided by the feeding centre aims to provide these children with a balanced diet with adequate amounts of carbohydrate, protein and fats and consists of the following: rice, beans, ugali (local maize meal), kale, and very occasionally meat, all of which the children enjoyed and would always finish completely without any left overs.

For two weeks, KOP students helped OMEN feeding centre in various capacities including; tending cows, cleaning the compound, assisting with food preparation and serving, gardening and teaching about drugs, malaria and HIV prevention.



Image 2: Omen feeding centre (left), Kids playing outside Omen feeding centre with skipping ropes donated by KOP Students (right)

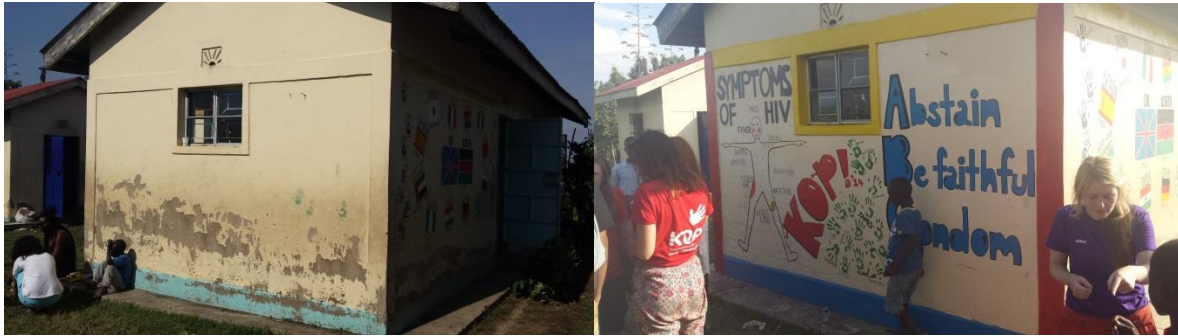


Image 3: Wall of Omen feeding centre painted by KOP students with educational message on HIV

Post trip/ lessons learnt

There are so many lessons to be gleaned from my time in Kenya, and I am truly thankful especially to my friends, family and the QMUL expedition fund for enabling me to pursue such a cause.

As a group leader, I have learnt a lot about leadership and how to manage difficult situations, as well as the need to motivate and encourage team members.

As an individual, I have developed in compassion and consideration towards others. A quote from one of the organisers from Ogra foundation, which simply states

“You can never have too little to give or too much to receive”

This quote is something I witnessed in the lives of the children that I encountered at Omen feeding centre day in and day out. Despite how little they had, they were always willing to freely give and they did not see their lack of resources as a limitation. They remained hopeful and determined to stay positive and maximise every opportunity. This trip has reminded me to not only appreciate all my given opportunities but also to give back to my community at every opportunity. This trip has filled me with so much hope in knowing that through persistence and determination anything is possible, but also that even if I am unable to change the world, I can certainly contribute to making it a better place.

Finally, the YouTube link below contains a photomontage of my time in Kenya:

YouTube http://youtu.be/7d_hzxgu1Mc