



Hartcliffe-Africa 2012

It all became real, sitting in the doctors' surgery, waiting for our jobs. After so many people's generosity in helping us to raise the £6000 to send us to Tanzania, it was now clear – we were on our way!

There were three of us on the 'Artcliffe to Africa trip. Will: a labourer who was eager to share his skills. The Saints captain for the previous year. Ashley: unemployed and never been on holiday but someone who loves to help and was excited about this opportunity. Zoe: someone who's never had any interest in going to Africa and, generally, hates foreign food but inspired by what God might do in these boys' lives in Africa.

One of the aims of Enough is to "broaden the horizons of and experiences of young people" and this trip fitted into that. This opportunity to experience another culture was something that the boys had never had the chance to do before. Broadening horizons generally means moving out of comfort zones and we were certainly doing that – we were scared. Hartcliffe is a 98% white community and whilst Hartcliffe residents don't generally consider themselves wealthy (Hartcliffe is a UPA), in comparison to residents of the Tanzanian village, we were rich white westerners. Ashley and I have always been very particular about our food so we made a pact before we went that we would try anything once.

Serving others less fortunate than ourselves was another of the aims of the trip. Ashley and Will both had practical skills that they could use to serve the maternity ward of the hospital that we were staying at in Kilimatinde. The task at the hospital was huge when we arrived and there was some doubt we would achieve it in the time we had. There were four bays of about a dozen beds each, a massive corridor with eight large examination rooms or offices and a delivery room. They all needed to be emptied, cleaned, painted and have their windows renovated. Each bed had two women in it too, so all in all, it was quite a task. Will and Ashley got to work quickly and enthusiastically and were a good influence on the rest of the team. Every morning was spent working on the hospital; by the end of the week Ashley was choosing to spend his afternoons working on it too because he really wanted to see the job finished before we left. The other side to our service was our work with children. The boys got quite excited about going to the kindergarten and developed bonds with the children that they've never had the chance to in this country and have missed since they got home. A month before we arrived, the Government had visited the hospital and had threatened to close it based on the conditions of the maternity ward. The boys really worked their socks off for the staff and patients at Kilimatinde and their hard work meant that the task was completed, enabling the mums to have a much nicer environment to stay in.

From our past experience with other young people over the years, people often more open to encountering God when removed from the structure and familiarity of their daily lives. Our biggest hope was that, with all our western comforts and distractions stripped away, that we would experience God amongst the Tanzanian community. Although the boys know Christians (Suzie, Steve and I), all the aspects of living within a Christian community was new to them. For example, we would start the day with chapel, being greeted in villages by 500 people singing worship songs about God's faithfulness, cathedral services and saying grace before meals. We got to know many wonderful Christians while

we were out there, Daniel, in particular, had a big impact on us all. Daniel was our local coordinator for the trip and was a man of great grace and gentleness. Ashley said that he was the “soundest bloke” he’d ever met and developed such love and respect for him that he even gave him his favourite jumper (that might sound like a small thing but it was a big thing for Ashley). I don’t want to write all that happened here for fear of embarrassing the boys or devaluing any impact made. However there were conversations and times of prayer that could not have happened were it not for this trip. God *did* reveal himself to them and they acknowledged that.

Part of our motivation for taking them was that we wanted them to feel valued. These are boys that have often been overlooked for different reasons and I wanted to give them an experience of a lifetime. The work at Kilimatinde was sandwiched between times that were simply there for them to enjoy; treats. A day on a tropical beach: swimming in the sea and eating freshly caught fish. A safari trip finished our time in Tanzania, seeing animals they could only dream of. They loved it.

The trip seems like a long time ago now and I’m left wondering what the long term effects will be. It is impossible to tell what has truly impacted them and what will be forgotten. Back in normal life it feels a little like two steps forward and one step back but who knows what God is using in them and what He will use in the future. It is important to remember that these were boys who had never opted in to the “God stuff” on offer at 404 but in these short two weeks they have had experienced God and Christians in a powerful way. Again, for fear of embarrassing the boys, I don’t want to go into detail, but I have seen glimpses of faith that I could never have dreamed before. The three of us are certainly left with a depth of relationship that only comes from such a shared experience.

As I finish this piece off I’m aware that I have described the good and not the bad. Travelling to Africa on a trip with 12 young people from difficult backgrounds was incredibly hard work and was a huge test of my own patience. It has taught me a lot about how to do trips like this and how we might do trips in the future. I am so glad that the boys got the chance to go to Tanzania and I know they are too.

Thank you to everyone who supported the trip whether financially, practically or prayerfully – we certainly could not have done it without you.