

## Zanzibar Report

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My elective placement in the Mnazi Mmoja Hospital, Zanzibar, took place between 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and 7<sup>th</sup> August 2009. I worked in the physiotherapy department under the supervision of Dr Hassan, a physiotherapist based in the hospital. I chose to go to Zanzibar for a number of reasons. First of all I wanted to go to a developing country to experience first hand what the health care system, or lack of system, is like. Secondly I wanted to work with Muslims; being a Muslim myself I wanted to help those less fortunate and in need. Little did I know that Zanzibar is in fact one of the poorest Muslim occupied places in Africa.

The placement was booked through a UK based organisation called Work the World, who organise placements for healthcare students. In preparation for my trip, I did some fundraising, partly to pay the fee to Work the World, but largely for charity. I wanted to buy supplies for the hospital and clothes and toys for the orphanage, and wanted extra money to give to the poor while I was there. My fundraising efforts consisted of writing letters to various businesses, solicitors and trusts for donations. And I also produced a flyer with details of my trip which I distributed among friends and family members. I raised over £4000, and after spending some on supplies and materials to take with me, I was left with an enormous £3300 cash to take with me.

### The Hospital

The Mnazi Mmoja Hospital is the only government funded hospital on the island. It provides healthcare for a population of 1 million people, yet the hospital has only 25 Doctors. The physiotherapy department has just 2 qualified physiotherapists working there, and they see patients on an outpatient basis only; adults attend on Mondays and Wednesdays, and children/babies attend on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In addition, patients have to pay for their treatments each time they attend the hospital. The department itself is very ill-equipped. It consists of a large room with 3 beds and a separate private cubicle with a bed; none of them proper physiotherapy plinths (beds). The department has a good sized hydrotherapy pool which unfortunately does not get used as they cannot afford to keep it clean (chlorine is quite expensive) or keep the water warm.

My experience working as a physiotherapist was very rewarding although challenging at times. Being in a non-English speaking country meant that communication was difficult, however Dr Hassan was extremely good at translating. With the lack of resources, treatments had to be very inventive utilising anything available in sight. On one occasion we had to use a computer cable in place of a rolled up towel to demonstrate an exercise! Prior to my departure, I bought supplies such as exercise bands, strapping, tubigrip, massage oil and other general first aid materials for the department. These came in really useful during my time there as most of these things are just not available to buy there.



*Dr Hassan, myself and 3 other physio students*

There were no walking aids available to give to patients either, unlike here where there is an ample supply. Instead patients have to buy their own walking aids. One patient, a young boy who attained a spinal injury and was left paralysed waist down, needed a suitable wheelchair in order for him to manoeuvre himself around and transfer himself in/out of the chair but could not afford it. And so I decided to buy him a wheelchair from the donated money which cost about £150. This patient in particular I became really attached to as I worked with him almost everyday. In the UK spinal injury patients like him would receive intense rehabilitation everyday in order to regain function; however in Zanzibar the lack of structure within the department meant he would probably not achieve his full potential. During my limited time there, I wanted to work with him as much as able, to push for recovery and so I had him come in everyday for at least 2 hours, even if it meant staying later than normal. The intense rehab he received in just 3

weeks paid off as just before I left he began to take his first steps - it was so unforgettably touching seeing the look on the patients face, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of accomplishment! He and his family were extremely grateful for the time and effort put into his rehabilitation.



*The spinal injury patient and his brother...*



*...hard at work!*

A separate room in the department was used to apply casts on babies who are born with talipes (club foot). Here in the UK physiotherapist do not apply casts so getting the opportunity to do this there was an excellent experience! Patients there have to buy even their own plaster casts, and some could not even afford the 12p that it cost! It was heartbreaking that parents would not bother getting their children treated as they did not have they money. I used to help these mothers out by giving them the money to buy the plaster cast, as from a physio's perspective, these poor children's walking could potentially be affected for life if not treated! Other alternative opportunities I had at the hospital included watching several surgeries; witnessing a natural birth; and going to help at the orthopaedic workshop where I changed dressings and casts for people who had broken bones and had had surgery - this was not the most pleasant of experiences due to the lack of cleanliness and hygiene, but memorable nonetheless!



*Casting babies feet*



*The baby I saw being born!*

### The Orphanage

The orphanage in Stonetown housed 52 children between the age of 2 and 23 years. Prior to my departure I bought supplies, largely clothes but also some toys and stationary, for the orphanage. The orphanage coordinators were so appreciative of all the donations, especially since everything was new! They promised to sort through it all, assign something to everyone and give it to the children on Eid. Some of the children were a lot older than expected (in their late teens/early twenties) and therefore the clothes which we bought from here would not fit them. So instead during my stay I took the older girls (there were eight of them) out shopping for clothes, shoes and scarf's with the donated money.



*Sorting through the donations*



*Out shopping for dress material*

I also went out shopping for things for the orphanage - first stop was stationary! The teacher, Mr Mohammed, took me to a stationary shop to get some school supplies for the children. This included paper, jotters, pens, pencils, colouring pencils, rulers, rubbers, sharpeners, folders, etc.



*Some stationary*



*The class room in the orphanage*

On another occasion I went out shopping for food supplies (enough for about 3 months) which included flour, rice, oil, butter, sugar, tomato puree, milk, and other household goods such as washing powder, soap, tooth brushes, tooth paste, and some baby essentials like nappies.



*Food supplies*



*Happy children with new toothbrushes and toothpaste*

A couple of times a week I took a treat for the children, either sweets, chocolates or biscuits. Usually on those days I went home sticky and covered in chocolate! Once, I bought them all ice lollies and I had to make three trips to the ice cream vendor because more and more kids kept on appearing; it was a bit of a mission as some of the kids were trying to play tug of war with me and the carrier bag! Despite that, it was worth it in the end seeing smiles all around. On another day I bought a few footballs from the market on my way to the orphanage, and the kids went wild with excitement! We spent hours playing with the balls that day.



*Ice lolly day!*

The children at the orphanage are so full of life and want so much attention. From the moment you stepped into the building, they would run up to you, hold your hand, take you here or there, want to play or be carried, want to show you something, want to talk, want to play with your hair etc. I had so much fun during my time there; hours would pass like minutes when I spent time with the children. I became very attached to some of the children in particular, if only I was in a position right now to adopt them and give them a better life.



*Fun times with the kids...*

### The Village

The programme organiser from Work the World, Kassim, took me to the village to visit a couple of madressa, as I told him I had some money to donate to the poor. The first madressa we went to was a small one roomed building with stone walls and floor, and a steel roof. They didn't have electricity as they couldn't afford it; instead they were borrowing electricity from the neighbouring building. One wall was used as a blackboard yet this was only half painted black as they couldn't afford the paint to get it all painted. The teachers work there voluntarily with no pay, and the children pay 100 shillings per month (which is equivalent to 5p) towards expenses and funding to improve the building. The current status of the building is the progress of almost 20 years of fundraising and construction! The madressa was founded in 1992, where it consisted of just four palm trees and a leaf canopy as a roof.



I asked the teachers what improvements to the building are their priority. They firstly would like toilets and whudu facilities, but also their own electricity supply. I donated about £700 to the madressa, and that they said will cover the cost of getting the electricity and will leave some to put towards the building of the toilets.

The second madressa I went to was one just for the forty orphans in the village. It was a small single roomed building, which was partly sectioned into two by a small wall separating the boys and girls; they could not afford to build a full length wall to section it off completely. I asked the teachers what improvements they would like to make to the building, and they said they'd like to raise and get a proper roof as the current low steel roof causes it to become unbearable hot during the day and the children really suffer while trying to learn. I asked them how much money they had raised for this at present, and after 10 months of collecting they said they had raised just £250! I decided to donate enough money to them so that they can get the roof sorted, which was about £750.



*The younger ones reciting hadiths*



*Handing out sweets to the kids*

As well as raising money to improve the madressa, they are also raising money to build an orphanage. The children do not have an orphanage to live in as of yet; for the moment they are staying with other people in the village (including a few with Kassim). A plot has been bought to build the orphanage on and now they are raising money to construct the building. Kassim is one of the committee members who look after the orphans, and so he also took me to see the plot. It is a good sized plot however it requires a lot of work to be done even prior to construction as it is all forest land. I gave the last of the donations to Kassim for the building of the orphanage, which was about £400.

Early on, I also went to a mosque in the village who are raising money to extend the building so that they can have a teaching (madressa) area. The imam showed me all the plans for the construction, together with a breakdown of costs, and told me how much they have raised so far. I donated about £350 to them.

I have Kassim's contact details and he said he'll keep me updated with the construction progress at both madressa's and the new orphanage. Already I've had an email saying the roof of the orphans madressa is being re-constructed which was great to hear. I hope to continue to donate money to Kassim's orphanage regularly to speed up the construction; I think it's a brilliant cause and I really admire him for what he's doing.

Everyone I donated money to was really grateful and I have been told to pass their gratitude onto those who donated the money. These people will forever be giving Dua's to us all. I would like to thank you too for giving me the opportunity to do this. I met some amazing people on my trip and got to see things which have changed my perspective on life forever. There really isn't anything more rewarding than helping those in need; it was truly an unforgettable experience! A lot of people have asked me if I'd go back to Zanzibar again, and the answer is definitely! I would love to go back soon and see the progress of the madressa's and new orphanage, see how all the children are getting on, and meet all the amazing people again who work so hard to care for these orphans.