

Tools to empower – your donations make a difference

Teresa Quail gives an update on the impact of the hearing aid related donations made by BATOD members and colleagues from charity groups, deaf education associated businesses and local authorities

I would like to start with a huge thank you for the donations and to plug the request to keep donating the equipment as your donations are making an impact across East Africa. These initial hearing aid related donations truly have been the tools to empower school staff and parents to be able to maintain support for their children themselves.

The group visit in October 2019 was six weeks before the long Rwandan school break. Part of my role's action plan entailed supporting the Headteacher of Nyabihu to set up hearing aids with the soft



Elie delivering parent training



Elie checking listening skills

tip moulds, whilst they still awaited hard moulds to arrive from the local Audiologist. The Headteacher, Elie, has the skills to do this specific activity, but as Headteachers and Heads of Service will appreciate, such an activity is not the only action that needs attention. So, an effective use of my time was to complete this task. Whilst the remit of DeafReach is to typically train the staff, not work directly with the children, this activity was perfect to observe first-hand the responses of the children who have had, in theory, hearing aids for one year. The children clearly knew the drill and were uber keen to have their aids fitted. I quickly learnt the Rwandan sign for 'wait'. The conditions for listening checks were not ideal, especially as six other DeafReach colleagues were also present in the school, delivering teacher training to the school staff, as well as deaf teachers from a school for the deaf in the Congo.

When the Headteacher, Elie, had a few spare minutes, he was introduced to a simple computer based audiogram to assist with monitoring changes in a student's deafness profile. Many thanks to Jan Nanor (long since retired Head of Service of Cambridge) who, many years ago, had shared the audiogram, created by Jane Gibling, as a tool for explaining the access to speech sounds to non-English speaking parents.

The discussions regarding the value of observing confusion between 'oo' and 'mm' was very useful for Elie. Access to personalised electronic audiograms gave him an accessible visual tool to use in his training session with the parents of



Teresa fitting soft tip moulds

his children who use hearing aids. That training session was scheduled for the first Monday of their long school break, as the children would be taking the hearing aids home over the holiday and the parents would be empowered to support effective use. Elie was proud to report that 23 of the 27 parents attended and only 4 were prevented due to the weather conditions. I feel many services in the UK would be ecstatic if they had such parental attendance statistics.

What about the donations?

Elie was able to lead the very successful parent training. The donations

enabled each parent to have their own hearing aid maintenance kit. The UK system is very lucky to be able to give parents these kits free at the point of initial hearing aid fitting. These small steps make such a big initial impact. In Rwanda, the whole audiology process has a cost at every step: hearing test in audiology, mould impression, mould provision, repair/replacement of damaged hearing aids, training from the audiologist, treatment for wax beyond application of drops, treatment for significant glue ear. Aetiology is not known for most children and there is no newborn hearing screening to aid the identification of deafness; the causes proposed by parents or country-based professionals often can only be taken as assumptions.

A generous gift-in-kind calibration of the audiometer by PCWerth has enabled the school to confidently test their children and any new arrivals. It had been hoped Elie could cascade his training with the audiometer to his peers in Umatarara school as they don't yet test the hearing levels of any child. However, Elie has since left the Headteacher role with this school to embark on VSO project work in Rwanda. The efforts were not in vain as I had learnt, just after this visit, about an audiologist, Brother Peter, based in a school for the deaf in Butare. So after making contact, I dipped back into my savings and arranged another visit in February to meet and work with Brother Peter.

For folk who know me well, I like to maximise opportunities, so tagged this visit onto a visit to Kenya which meant I had 72 hours to achieve some goals. With the superb attitude of Brother Peter and his colleagues, a Rwanda led training programme was started within 24 hours of my arrival in Rwanda. I arrived with an ex-demo audiometer which also has tympanometry (donated by



Parents using donations from BATOD members

General

Interacoustics), hearing aids from Oticon and funds from DeafReach to purchase a laptop so modern world equipment could be used. Delighted with the equipment and training resources I had provided, the audiologist happily agreed to lead on training with Rwanda where possible. So, the new audiology lead, Emmanuel – a teacher in Nyabihu had some intense 101 Audiology training on the Butare school site with a further week planned in April (subject at the time of writing to the coronavirus status in Rwanda).

During a deafblind research interview element of the October visit I met senior staff from Groupe scolaire Filipo Smaldone Kigali. At that stage I learnt they had audiometers, donated from Belgium, but didn't know how to use them. Within a week of my February visit, Brother Peter and his assistant trainer, Deo, had visited the school and trained five staff in the basics of Audiology and audiometers. A week's training has been planned with the head of the Umatara school for the deaf. There are only nine schools for the deaf in Rwanda, which is geographically the size of Wales and currently only three have audiometers. Perhaps with this Rwandan led peer-to-peer training scheme established, all the schools can develop the skills. Especially if UK colleagues can support donations of audiometers, hearing aids, hearing aid



Brother Peter, Deo and Emmanuel exploring the tympanometer

maintenance kits etc. Shameless plug!

What about the Kenya part of my recent visit to East Africa? All the people I met were inspiring. The opportunities I either accessed or supported were many. I will leave it to those new professional peers, contacts and in some cases new BATOD overseas members to tell their stories.



Teresa Quail is a Trustee and Audiology Lead for DeafReach.



Parents with their own hearing aid maintenance kits

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