

Training in Nairobi

Rosemary Gardner, a retired QToD, updates us on her current project work in Kenya

In February 2019, following discussions between Nicholas Kariobe, the Audiologist and technician in the Kenya Society for Deaf Children (KSDC) and myself, I delivered a one day training in Nairobi to Teachers of the Deaf, Speech Therapists and Audiologists.

This project initially began over 10 years ago when I offered my support to Helen Moorhead, a friend and colleague from Northern Ireland, who was setting up a school for the deaf in a very poor and remote area in Kenya. After discussion with Helen at that time, I went out to the school in 2011 and 2012. Through the visits, I met Nicholas and I visited the KSDC in Nairobi; the contact with Nicholas and the KSDC has been crucial in the success of all that I have tried to do and they have been hugely supportive. With Nicholas's help, he fitted the hearing aids I sent to the children in Kamatungu School, the school Helen established in the Tharaka District in Eastern Kenya.

The training idea began in discussion with Nicholas over lunch in February 2018 after I realised that the hearing aids I had sent were possibly not being used to the full. Nicholas said training was what was needed and I agreed that this was indeed the way forward. I was not able to access many hearing aids and I felt it was time to hand that part of the project over.

The one day training in 2019 was good but I realised at the end of it that it was a drop in the ocean. I knew I needed to go back and give more training.

I feel more and more passionately that deaf children all over the world should have equal opportunities. We have so much in this part of the world: our children can access everything they need, have choices of how to communicate, whether to follow a listening and spoken language communication mode or not, whether to use hearing technology or not. A deaf child in East Africa may have no real choice.

And so, after the one day training in 2019, I offered to return again in February 2020 to do another day. Nicholas replied immediately saying he would like it, but in fact, he wanted 2 days this time and he was not going to budge



on that!! When I said I thought I might not have time to do 2 days, he was very insistent – no, he said, they wanted 2 days!

After some more discussions, I agreed on the 2 days but I said I would like parents to be included this time. Nicholas's comment that it would be an 'eye opener' for parents made me sure it was right to extend it to parents.

And so, on the 13th and 14th February 2020, we held a 2-day conference again in the Rosa Mystica Spiritual Centre in Nairobi. Seven parents came along which was wonderful. Many of these parents have been key to moving things forward in this part of the world.

Eddie Mukaaya and Steve Kittur, both fathers of children with cochlear implants, are key individuals. I hope they will write their own story for the magazine so I will not say too much about them here.

After I had written the last article for the BATOD magazine, it was suggested to me that I apply to the Mary Grace Wilkins Scholarship to help with the funding of this year's project. I am very grateful to Mary Gordon for contacting me to 'strongly suggest' I apply for the scholarship. I did so, and I was absolutely delighted I could avail myself of it to be able to facilitate the training in Nairobi. The funding allowed me to provide the 2 days completely free to all delegates.

To my surprise and delight, Teresa Quail offered to come along to the training too. It was great to have her along and to have her support over the 2 days. Nothing was too much trouble to her, and she was able to fill the gaps such as create an evaluation form, take everyone's email addresses, access additional information and links for people. She also took a session doing a practical hands-on troubleshooting and checking of hearing aids.

Before I left home, I had no idea if we would have anyone at the training. I was more than a little concerned when Teresa booked her flights, if she arrived and there was no one... The day before the training Nicholas rang me and



said, "I know you said 25 people but is it OK if 36 attend?" I quickly realised I did not need to have worried! I appreciated his calm reassurance and his hard work in setting it all up so well. We actually had 30 people attend the training days.

I had planned the 2 days with the title 'Deaf Children Listening and Talking? Building a Brain'. I took the topics of 'Learning to Listen and Talk using Play, Literacy, Music' over the 2 days. It was very well received and I loved the interaction between everyone. A few of the parents told their stories and Eddie showed us the video clip of himself and his daughter speaking at the World Health Organisation's conference in Geneva.

The facts speak for themselves:

Over 1 billion people live in Sub-Saharan Africa – around 9% live with disabling hearing loss.

Children in Sub-Saharan Africa have the second highest rates of hearing loss worldwide.

These affected children rarely get access to hearing technology like cochlear implants.

The evaluations after the training were very encouraging. In answer to the question 'After this training, what will you change when working with a child who is learning to listen and talk?' – these are a selection of some of the responses:

"I will be patient and not demand immediate outcomes. I am going to increase the playtime in order to enhance vocabulary, music is going to be incorporated in all my



activities. I am going to teach my family what I have in order for the siblings and Dad to work more with our son's brain stimulation with a purpose."

"Repeating over and over in a way that is interesting to the child."

"By conversing through play, music and reading, understand more what they need informs communication."

"Making sure they first develop pre-linguistic skills and also stimulate their brain by use of music; reading to them a lot."

"Giving more auditory verbal skills, especially repetition, acoustic highlighting and music, reading and play more to build their BRAIN."

"Probably play while singing with them more, give them time to respond."

"I will be slow and allow turn taking."

The story of Eddie and his family overcoming so many obstacles to enable their daughter to become the first cochlear implanted child in Uganda was wonderful and it was hard for us all not to weep as we watched the video. What an inspiration they are!

It made me even more determined to continue to help as many as I can to access the help they need in East Africa. And so I am already beginning to think ahead for next year – I would love it if we could have a bigger East African conference based on Listening and Spoken Language next year.... so...

Watch this space!



Rosemary Gardner is a qualified ToD, past-Head of Service and recently qualified as an Auditory-Verbal Therapist.

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Conference



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