

An update from Kenya

Teresa Quail interviewed **Rosie Gardner** about her teacher training project in Nairobi

Teresa: You last wrote an article about deaf education in Kenya in 2012. As we approach the year 2020 what differences have you noticed with the project you support?

Rosie: For those people who didn't read my article back in 2012, it might be helpful to give some background of why I began this project and how it developed.

Like most things in my life, I start something small-scale, but it then leads me into areas where I hadn't intended to go. I have been a qualified teacher of the deaf now for well over 30 years and in the 1990s, I was a teacher in the Peripatetic Service for the Hearing Impaired in the Southern Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland. Over the years, I had got to know a QToD, Helen Moorehead, who was the Senior Teacher in a Unit for the HI in a secondary school in Lurgan. I used to call in to see her from time to time as I travelled around my 'patch'. I couldn't say I knew her well at that time, but I got to know her better in the years to come – she is a little woman in stature but in vision and sheer determination, she is a giant.

In 2005, I became Head of the Service and at the same time, Helen's Unit was closed. I learnt she gone out to Kenya and after that, I lost contact. Around 2008, I became aware she had started a school for the deaf in an extremely remote and poor area of Kenya – an area where few people ventured to go and where there was no provision for deaf children. The treatment of malaria had, apparently, been the cause of deafness in the area but because of the lack of understanding, these children were not given an education and many of them had no means of communication, many not even knowing they had a name. I was very interested to know what she was doing there especially as Kenya has and always will have an attraction for me, being the place where I was born and brought up.

Our service team were keen to support her project. I suggested to the team that we could send little gifts of clothes, sweets, bubbles, crayons etc. I contacted Helen to say we would like to send a parcel. Helen's response was not what I expected... "Actually, what I need is someone to come and test the children's hearing ▶

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and for them to get hearing aids" ...

Keeping a very long story short, I finally got to the school, going there in the summers of 2011 and 2012, visiting the school that Helen had built, to see the children, teachers, just to witness the amazing work done there. I had raised money over here and BATOD NI was fantastic at supporting the project. Phonak UK was also very supportive. In this way, I was able to provide a large number of hearing aids.

My contact with the Kenya Society for Deaf Children, the director, Mr. Macharios and Nicholas Kariobe, the audiologist, has been crucial to the success of the project. I have been able to pay Nicholas to go out to the school (which takes a full day to drive to, across roads which can be dusty tracks or in the rains, a muddy river). I was always conscious that I needed to do this as a sustainable project that did not rely on me. The school, which was now recognised by the Kenyan government, needed to take responsibility for itself or for me to be able to hand the project over to the school so that this could continue even without my involvement. When Helen then returned to NI about 4 years ago, I realised that it was more important than ever for me to begin to hand over the project.

I went out to Kenya again in February 2018. Before I went, I asked Nicholas to give each teacher in the school a questionnaire that I had composed. I was anxious to see how the hearing aids were used and whether the teachers felt they were of help. I met Nicholas and Mr Macharios during our visit and I was given the completed questionnaires. They made fascinating reading – I appreciated the honesty of the teachers. What came over loud and clear was that the teachers were requesting, wanted and needed training.

By this time, I had left the Service and I was now training to be an auditory-verbal therapist with AVUK. I told Nicholas that I had a little money available and I would use this to pay for 25 teachers of the deaf to come to Nairobi to provide a day's training for them.

Can you tell me about your recent teacher training project?

I had been in touch with Nicholas and I organised to go back to Kenya in February/March 2019 for 25 teachers of the deaf to come to Nairobi. Nicholas and I corresponded over some months and it finally came together. He set it up for me in a Catholic Centre called the 'Rosa Mystica' – teachers travelled from all over Kenya for this training. I was a few weeks away from doing my final big exam to become a certified Auditory-verbal therapist so I was very happy to be able to share some of the amazing recent knowledge that I had gained.

Before I left NI for Kenya, I met you through a mutual friend and QToD, Rebecca Millar. I thought I was going to meet you to give you advice and suggestions for your trip to Rwanda. But meeting you was so timely and just wonderful as I was able to contact Fred Marinus at

your suggestion. Fred works for Kentalis as the project manager for international projects, in the area of deaf education, diagnostics and rehabilitation. All Kentalis projects aim at local capacity building. Their mission is to make the knowledge from within Kentalis available to peer organizations worldwide. Kentalis have a very long tradition of supporting schools in developing countries. Whilst Fred currently does not have a project in Kenya, he has a lot of connections in Kenya because of his voluntary work for the Ear Drop Foundation in the past.

The day's training went well. I had entitled the training 'Deaf children listening and talking?'. As a QToD of many years and a newly qualified AV Therapist, this is a subject dear to my heart. I loved providing the training, to excite people into understanding what the brain can do through the use of hearing technology. The ToDs who came along were very interested. Fred and his wife, Pauline who is an audiologist, also attended. To me, they were a god-send because Pauline and Fred were able to let the teachers know where they could go or who they could contact locally to ensure the audiological management for each child in their school could continue.

What are the next steps for the project?

As I said, I was hoping I would be able to begin to hand over the project after this to the schools and KSDC. However, what has come out of it is that more training is needed. The one day was good but it was a drop in the ocean and the teachers have asked for more. I know I need to go back and give more training but this requires funding. Training, I feel, is more crucial than anything else.

What do you feel are the current challenges for staff, parents and pupils?

The challenges are huge – I feel 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 this and other areas of Kenya has no choice.

There is a huge need for training – for parents, to staff and to audiologists too. They are hungry for training and have asked for more. I have skimmed the surface in a one day's training and more is needed. ■



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

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