

NINA AND DUNCAN'S VOLUNTEERS REPORT

Prior to arriving in Bolgatanga, we had read and heard the outstanding praise and accolades that numerous volunteers, visitors, donors and beneficiaries have given for the work that AfriKids is doing in the Upper East Region. Our own experiences of the projects here have done nothing but reinforce our preconceptions about just how much good AfriKids is delivering in this area, and just how effective their core and partner projects are.



Our time in Bolga has been spent somewhat differently to other volunteers, as rather than being out on the field or working directly on the projects, we have been based in the Head Office working with the new Senior Management Team (SMT). Amongst other things, this has involved analysing potential sustainability initiatives, undertaking reviews of existing sustainability businesses and providing management training to the new SMT - such that they can continue to develop the skills and tools needed to take on more of the strategic and managerial aspects of AfriKids in the future.



Being Management Consultants in the UK, we have both worked in many different international organisations and businesses over the last 8 years, and with all honesty we can say that we have found the AfriKids Ghana staff to be among the most committed and dedicated team of people either of us have had the privilege of working with.



We whole-heartedly support AfriKids long-term objectives around sustainability; the principle that AfriKids Ghana should become 100% self-sufficient from a funding and managerial perspective, and ultimately remove the need for the AfriKids UK office. This long term goal is to be achieved through establishing local businesses capable of generating the income necessary to finance the AfriKids Ghana office and all core and partner projects, and through developing the knowledge to manage a large and dynamic organisation.

This was a new concept to us when we arrived, however having discussed this idea at length with both the Ghana staff and the UK staff, we have come to understand the thinking and logic behind this very ambitious aim. Many NGOs preach the importance of empowering local people and investing not only in their skills development but in long-term initiatives to enable local sustainability, however, precious few have made it a core strategic objective as AfriKids have done.



AfriKids has a proven track record in delivering very ambitious projects, even where other governmental bodies and NGOs have tried and failed. But our belief is that achieving 100% self-sustainability for AfriKids Ghana is, without doubt, the most challenging goal that AfriKids has ever set itself. And it is a different challenge, with a completely different set of obstacles to overcome.

Generating the income required to finance an organisation of AfriKids' scale is difficult in any economic environment, but particularly so in a region where 90% of people cannot afford to eat 3 times a day. Additionally, the management skills and structures required to oversee and control an organisation that delivers grass-roots development and large scale businesses are extensive and complex.

Quite rightly, the skill sets of the Ghana staff are currently centred around in-depth knowledge on how to successfully deliver development and change programmes within the local communities - something they do extremely well. However, there is clear awareness amongst the SMT of how much they need to learn if AfriKids Ghana is to grow into an independent organisation. The Ghana staff's insatiable appetite for learning new skills has certainly kept us very busy, which has been both very rewarding and sometimes challenging!

We have thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone here at AfriKids Ghana, and so it is with heavy hearts that we finally leave the office this week. We very much hope to visit the team again in the years to come (if invited!)- to see how everything is progressing; we have no doubt it will be going from strength to strength.

Alongside the rewarding time we have spent working at the Head Office, we had the equally inspiring privilege of living at Mama Laadi's Foster Home. It is a truly happy, loving and caring environment for anybody to live in - let alone the children who have suffered the neglect and hardships of those that Mama Laadi cares for.

Her compassionate nature, caring attitude and huge capacity for love is not only something that the children are so clearly benefiting from, it is something that they themselves are learning. The kind, well-rounded, intelligent, fun-loving individuals that Mama Laadi is raising are themselves the highest accolade of her outstanding achievements. Saying goodbye to them this week will undoubtedly be the hardest aspect of our trip, however we are safe in the knowledge that with Mama Laadi and AfriKids behind them they will continue to flourish.

During our time here, we have had numerous once-in-a-lifetime experiences.



Highlights include:

- The children's dance competition that took place during the party at the NGH for Georgie and Nina's 30th Birthdays (those kids can move!)
- Zooming around the projects with the UK team and Insight TV to film a documentary on AfriKids
- Enjoying the freedom afforded by Betty, our motorbike
- Dancing (ok, jumping around..) for the Sirigu women's group in response to their welcome dances
- Travelling to the amazing new stadium in Tamale to watch some African Nations Cup games
- Duncan getting nutmegged on a nightly basis whilst playing football with the kids at Laadi's
- The odd Star sun-downer at 'Small Small Youth Drinking Spot.'

On occasions it is hard to reconcile our happy stay with some of the hardship and suffering that AfriKids is working so hard to address. Some of the stories we have been told and things we have encountered have been truly shocking, and will stay with us forever.

We have learnt a huge amount during our time in Bolga, one thing that has probably struck us most is the misconception we had about what help and assistance AfriKids Ghana would need from us. AfriKids Ghana has developed to the stage where they now perceive the most valuable volunteer assistance to be around developing management and financial planning skills, rather than needing additional pairs of hands to help in the field. This is perhaps the biggest indicator of just how far AfriKids Ghana has already come in their journey to independence.

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