

Visit to CALM-Africa, Uganda, January 2011

By Liz and Alistair McIntosh

1. Purpose of our visit

We returned to Uganda in January 2011 to work with CALM-Africa as representatives of Children First Uganda (CFU), the UK charity set up by supporters of CALM since our last visit in 2008. CFU supports CALM, whose director is James Ssekiwanuka, by raising money and providing expertise and it offers a means by which former and potential volunteers and benefactors can provide their support to CALM.

The purpose of our visit was three-fold:

- to run two workshops for teachers in CALM schools which would further develop their skills in participative teaching techniques
- to explore the potential for a partnership for CALM with Five Talents Uganda, a local charity offering micro-finance to small businesses
- to view progress at CALM's projects in the Rakai district in southern Uganda

However, as is often the case when working with CALM and other volunteers, we found that we were able to get involved with much more than that which we had set out to do: for example, the further workshops detailed below.

2. Teaching Workshops at Jolly Mercy Learning Centre (JMLC), Kampala

It was great to return to JMLC, where we had spent a week in 2008 assisting in its construction, and to see it as an established school. Although we had returned during the school holidays, there was plenty of activity, including the construction of a new dining hall for the school which will also be hired out to the community to raise revenue for CALM.

2.1 'More Learning for Less Teaching' - participative teaching techniques workshops

Alistair ran two workshops for groups of 8/9 teachers at the Jolly Mercy Learning Centre, just outside Kampala, for 17 teachers from JMLC and the St James and Kiganda schools in Rakai over 4 days from 10-13 January 2011. The workshops were well-received by the teachers and the CALM staff who observed them. Each teacher took away a number of objectives to apply these techniques in the classroom and committed to send Alistair a postcard to inform of Alistair of their progress. James Ssekiwanuka, Joseph Luganda, Alistair and Liz presented completion certificates to the teachers on the evening after the workshops finished and there were many speeches made of thanks and appreciation.



2.2 Further workshops

The following workshops ran in parallel to the teaching workshops:

- Child Protection (run by James and Joseph)
- First Aid and HIV prevention (run by Sarah Hayward, an Australian volunteer who was working with CALM for a month)
- Leadership and Teambuilding skills (run by Liz and Sarah with input from Alistair). This included some practical outdoor exercises in which the teachers and CALM staff participated with great enthusiasm.



Outdoor leadership exercise



Certificate presentation ceremony



Joseph Luganda's speech

3. Meeting with Five Talents Uganda re potential microfinance partnership

Liz had arranged a meeting on 14 January between CALM and 5 Talents (5T), which is a US-based charity with offices in the UK and Uganda, and which provides small loans to 'active' small businesses i.e. not to start-ups. This was an exploratory meeting looking for common ground and the scope for partnership working. Whilst it was clear that both CALM and 5 Talents have the same overall aim of 'growing' their communities out of poverty, they differ in that CALM's model of microfinance focuses on start-ups and 5 T's on 'active' businesses.

5T's general manager, Esther Nakamatte, suggested that a 'pipeline' could be established through which CALM might provide early help in getting businesses going and 5T helping later. As CALM is already known in the community, they might open the door for 5T, and in return 5T could help sensitise and train the community about finance.

So it was a good initial meeting with agreement between both that the next step would be for 5T to visit CALM's office at JMLC and take it from there [this is planned for week commencing 31 January].

4. Visit to CALM projects in Rakai

We visited CALM's projects in Rakai district, where we had spent two weeks in September 2008, from Sunday 16 to Wednesday 19 January. The CALM projects in Rakai are functioning but they face a number of difficult challenges which reminded us that the road to sustainable development is never an easy one.

4.1 Kiganda Primary School and Daycare Centre

James has appointed a new Headmaster at Kiganda, Bright Kashaka Asingwire, to develop the school further. Bright, who is also a part-time teacher at St James school in nearby Kyotera, will work with two teaching colleagues to establish two secondary school classes at Kiganda, as there is demand in the community near the school, and to attract further pupils to the primary and daycare classes.

The school has suffered recently from the theft of the taps from the rainwater collecting tanks: until this is fixed the school's water supply is precarious as there is a drought and the remaining water in the tanks cannot be wasted. The teachers are therefore putting in a barbed wire perimeter fence and employing a security guard which will be funded initially by donations made to CFU.

The Vocational Centre at the school, which taught skills such as woodwork and sewing to young adults, has been wound down in favour of a more sustainable model. CALM is now using local businesses, such as a nearby farm and builder/ building supplies company, to offer workplace training instead. The building company is run by the Salongo ('father of twins' – and, incidentally, six other children!) who, many volunteers will remember, oversaw the building of JMLC and Kiganda schools. This model of vocational training is much more relevant to the needs of young people. Some of the equipment from the vocational centre at Kiganda has been sent to JMLC.



The Salongo (second left at back) and his family



Vocational training centre at local farm

4.2 Kiganda Farm

The nearby Kiganda Farm continues to provide food for the school and raise vital revenue for CALM through the sale of its produce. It also provides work experience and farming skills training for young people. The farm has however suffered due to the current drought and the theft of and disease amongst the livestock. Like Kiganda school activity is underway to improve the farm security and James expects the farm's fortunes to improve when the anticipated rains return.

4.3 St James School, Kyotera

The school has a new headmaster who plans and expects the school to have about 320 pupils this year (compared to about 250 last year). There is no longer demand for a daycare centre at the school because few of the pupils now bring their siblings to school with them and there is therefore no need for it. The building will be repurposed as a girl's dormitory.



Liz, James, Alistair and Joseph



Jolly Mercy Learning Centre

5. Developing the CALM/CFU relationship further

Since Children First Uganda was founded in 2009, its trustees, members and supporters have lent their expertise in Uganda and have participated in fund raising activities in the UK. Many of these supporters are ex-volunteers with CALM. However, CFU remains a small charity and it is vital that we grow the number of supporters so that we can continue to support CALM. The most effective way to do this is to ensure that all future volunteers are made aware of how they can continue to support CALM, through CFU, when they return home.

The notice-boards in the volunteers' house near JMLC provide essential and useful information about the volunteers' role with CALM but, in our view, the relationship between CALM and CFU, the activities of CFU and the ways in which volunteers can continue to help on their return home are not made clear. CFU will therefore produce a flyer for the notice-boards which will help volunteers to 'join the dots' and which they can take away with them for future reference. The flyer will also be available for download on the CFU and CALM website.

We must stress that it is not only volunteers from the UK who can support CFU: funds can be raised in any currency and donated as pounds sterling through our Charity Giving page ([Donate to CFU at Charity Giving](#)) and there are many activities, such as marketing and partnership development, which can be undertaken remotely. Contact details for CFU are at the end of this report if you cannot access the flyer.

It will be the responsibility of the CALM Executive, which manages the volunteers' house, to maintain the notice-boards, to draw the flyer to volunteers' attention and to ensure sufficient copies are available to take away.

6. Getting the best from the volunteer experience

There are areas, however, that concern the Directors of CFU and we would expect these to be addressed by the CALM Executive.

CALM receives volunteers from all over the world, from different backgrounds, of different ages and with different skills to offer. Some spend a month with CALM, some longer. In each case it is important to ensure that each volunteer is able to support CALM in a way which complements their skills and which helps CALM especially as, due to the global economic climate, the number of volunteers has diminished recently. It is important to acknowledge that each volunteer makes a significant financial and emotional commitment to volunteering and has high expectations of how they will be able to contribute. It is therefore critical that CALM have a detailed understanding of volunteers skills and knowledge either before they arrive in Uganda or immediately upon arriving so that these expectations can be met to mutual advantage.

In our experience, there is still some work for CALM to do in helping the younger volunteers – perhaps those in their late teens and early twenties - to understand how they can contribute during their stay in Uganda. It is often harder for younger volunteers to know what they have to offer because of their more limited life experience, the culture shock of being in a strange environment and their isolation from friends and family.

Whereas many 'older' volunteers gain great satisfaction from 'giving something back', it should be recognised that for young volunteers the experience is a formative one and can be a significant milestone in their personal development and learning. In this regard the young volunteer experience may be more about 'receiving' than 'giving back' and CALM could therefore do more to help younger volunteers to review what they have learnt from the experience. This would enable them to recognise their own skills more easily and to act as ambassadors and advocates of the rights of children when they return home, whether they continue to actively support CALM or not.

7. Conclusions

It was an extremely intense visit with little spare time. Our return to Uganda and our inputs were greatly appreciated and we had a good view of the current state of CALM's operations. CALM is clearly adapting well to changing circumstances and seeking further partners as well as recognising the need to consolidate its existing operations.

CALM never has enough funding to achieve all it wants to achieve but James stresses that volunteers' commitment and expertise are what are most needed to meet the challenges CALM must overcome.

We would encourage anyone interested in volunteering with CALM to go for it. It's an extremely stimulating and rewarding experience and CALM staff are the most friendly, helpful and welcoming people you could wish to meet anywhere. If you are reading this report as someone who has already volunteered and would like to continue to support CALM then, of course donations of money are very welcome, but you can support from home in other ways through Children First Uganda, the contact details of which are below.

Thanks to James, Joseph and all the CALM-Africa staff for looking after us and making our visit so memorable. We shall return.

Liz and Alistair McIntosh, January 2011.



If you would like to know more about or to support Children First Uganda, please visit www.childrenfirstuganda.org.uk

Or contact Tony Bateman, Trustee, by email: Tony@childrenfirstuganda.org.uk

