



Aspire to Africa 2011 Journal

By Kelly McGihon



IRE
AT RICH

Saturday 13th August 2011

Day 1

Twenty four hours of travelling and eight members of the Aspire Sports Team land at Dar Es Salaam Airport. The journey was long but spirits along the way remained high. Nearly twelve months of hard work and various fundraisers the project is ready to begin.

The day started with a bus journey to Heathrow Airport. All bags were checked in successfully and all team members make it through security checks without any drama!

We board the plane to embark on a six hour flight to Doha to see that Qatar Airways has great taste in colour schemes. Something that Maurice Wright was very happy about as he donned his claret and blue sleeping mask!

During our flight to Doha we had a small taste of what was to come in Tanzania, Dan Woods getting caught short with no toilet paper on the plane's toilet. We landed at Doha a very tired team but managed to make it through the last six hour flight to eventually land in Tanzania.



We are greeted at the airport by Mark from African Space who is accompanying the team on the trip through our journey in Tanzania. We board our mini bus which, can I mention, has no air-conditioning and

settle in for our journey to the hotel. Along the way we got to see the hustle and bustle of everyday Dar - there were men walking through the traffic trying

to sell all sorts of merchandise, from mobile phone holders to cashew nuts and maps of Tanzania.

The streets were busy and what should have been a 45 minute journey took 2 hours. Nevertheless Danielle Barr utilised this time well by catching a few flies as she caught up on some sleep.

Finally, we arrive at the hotel and get a chance to have a well-deserved rest. We find out from African Space that we have two other people joining us on the trip - Daniel Mandley and Clare Stockdale, two teachers from Sutton Coldfield and a welcome extra pair of hands to help with the project.

The day ends with some rest and team bonding in the hotel restaurant and talk of the busy days ahead. Lesson learnt this evening by myself? Don't order the fish!!

Sunday 14th August 2011

Day 2

Today is a day to acclimatise and recharge batteries from the long journey. The team visits a small island about five miles away from Dar and talk soon turns to how hot the weather is and how we will cope teaching in this heat!

The journey back on the boat was extremely choppy, but it was exiting. The



boat that proved a little tricky for some team members - just ask Danielle Barr!

In the evening we all enjoyed our final 'civilized' meal and for some their last piece of chocolate whilst preparing in our heads the task we have ahead of us. We listen to how James

Cannon got punched in the face by a seven year old boy in the hotel swimming pool. Something we all agreed was long overdue!

Monday 15th August 2011

Day 3

8.30am bags are loaded on our air-conditioned bus and we are introduced to our driver, William (later on into the journey it becomes very clear that William has a deep passion for hip hop and gangster rap!) and Mia, a South African who is accompanying us on the trip and has a thirst for extreme sports such as kite surfing and later turns out to be a very handy photographer. Watch out Paul!

An hour into our journey we stop off for a toilet break, this was to give us the first taste into African sanitation. On the walk to the toilet (a hole in the floor with an extremely undesirable smell) Paul Griffiths kindly pointed out two very large spiders sitting in a tree above our heads, something neither Danielle or I were very impressed with! The team then enjoyed a samosa or two before carrying on with the journey.

It's 6pm and we arrive at Hondo Hondo (Swahili for hornbill birds that frequent the area) camp site and the night is drawing in fast. We have 15 minutes to take in the beautiful views on our campsite then quickly set up camp before dinner.

After our mammoth feast (and made to eat every mouthful as apparently "food is fuel") the team takes it in turns to pump up 60 footballs ready for the children in Mang'ula Primary School in the morning. We also get the pleasure of meeting Roy. Roy is the owner of Hondo Hondo Campsite and Wild Things Safaris and is also full of extremely interesting facts and one liners (something we find out later on in the trip). We discover that we have the delight of his company throughout the trip. Tonight Roy tells us that the villagers in Itete have a life expectancy of 50 years, this is something Maurice Wright looked very concerned about!

The day ends with a treat from some local African dancers. We sit around the camp fire and enjoy the beating drums and hypnotising dance routines. Myself and Danielle decided to try out our Zumba moves which encouraged other members of the team to also get up and dance. I must mention at this point no one could move their hips better than Maurice "snake hips" Wright - his rhythm was spectacular, it even made the locals stop and stare!



Tuesday 16th August 2011

Day 4

This morning started with a cold shower, which was not as bad as expected. We packed our bags and dismantled our tents then had time for a cooked breakfast, again the term "food is fuel" was being bandied around and we were made to eat every crumb!



Fully fuelled we drove down to Mang'ula Primary School where we were welcomed by over 500 children cheering very loudly at the sight of the footballs and the other sports equipment. The children were so excited by our arrival,

they cheered and smiled and jumped up and down, an experience myself and other members of the team felt extremely overwhelmed by. We walked around the children giving high fives and shaking hands calling out “Mambo!” to which the children would then reply “Pau!” (Swahili way of saying “how are you?” the reply is then “cool”).

We then had 15 minutes to organise the six activities that we had previously planned - Frisbee, dance, problem solving, football, team games and rounders.

Danielle and I were on the dance and we found a small area to set up our stereo and prepare for the session. We naively thought we had five minutes or so to quickly practice our first Zumba dance, so we turned on the stereo and started dancing. Before we knew it the beat of the music had travelled across the field and we were surrounded by at least 70 children. We continued the dance and got the children to copy. From what started as a planned, well thought out session, turned into (very well) organised chaos!

This was the same for the other activities, sessions were planned but it soon became apparent that teaching the skills in the methods we were used to was a difficult task. It was better to demo the game and get the children involved that way.

The language barrier was



harder than expected, the children spoke extremely limited English and the teachers spoke very broken English. We managed to learn a few words to get us by such as “Jambo” which means hello and “Misuri” which means very good.

The children hung on our every word and our every movement. They would watch intently as they learnt the different dance moves and the different games.

I did not encounter one child who didn’t want to join in or who would disrupt the class. There was no such thing as bad behaviour, just a willingness to learn and take in a new experience.

Roy told us that children in Tanzania respect elders as they have lived longer and posses more knowledge. This was very clear to us in the school as every child gave 100% and thanked us before we left.



Before we departed the primary school we went to visit the head teacher’s office, a small dark room with the basics. We exchanged email addresses and signed the visitor’s book. We said our goodbyes to the children and teachers and hopped on our bus

ready for the long journey to Itete.

The journey was to take 6 hours. Half way we stopped at the ferry crossing in Ifikara. The ‘final frontier’ was a very busy place which boasts a large ferry to carry vehicles and people across the river as well as various local delicacies such as deep fried tilapia salt fish, savoury bananas and fresh water prawns (which can I say at this point did not taste like crispy bacon, as described by Paul) all of which we had the pleasure of trying. Personally, I did

not enjoy this experience and gave my fish to James Trowman who was more than happy to finish it off!

After lunch it was time to carry on with our journey. We boarded the ferry which took us across the river - at this point we noticed we were missing someone, William the bus driver and more importantly the bus! We were marooned on the other side of the crossing for an hour, which gave us a chance to do some hippo spotting in the river.



The bus arrived and we were finally on our way again. The road became bumpy, red and dusty. Every bump was felt. There were no brick buildings just humble mud huts and shacks. The landscape was rural and for the first time in the trip we felt as if we were in "the real Africa"

Ladies walked the streets with baskets on their heads carrying wood, food and material, children played with a stick and a hoop, baboons littered the roadsides along with the odd giraffe and zebra. The further we travelled the more rural our surroundings became. For the first time in the trip I became

slightly anxious, we had no phone signal and we seemed to be miles from anywhere.

Toilet breaks were interesting, Mark would check for elephants as we were told to bang our feet on the floor to scare away snakes. The reality of the situation finally kicked in and the tone for the days ahead had been set.

The journey came to an end at 5pm when we arrived in Itete. We were welcomed to the village by the Father who was the head of the community in Iteta. He greeted us with a tippie of whisky - it would have been rude to say no!

We then set up camp our home for three nights was a concrete floor. Maurice Wright was not too happy with his roommate Dan Woods for 'stitching him up' with the thinnest floor bedding - I believe at one point it was compared to a yoga mat! We also had the enjoyment of our first shower in the mission building, a leaky shower head in a very dark grubby room ... nice!

After dinner we ventured down to the village where the locals like to socialise and play. The Aspire lads fancied their chances against the locals and embarked on a mini pool tournament. Wright, Woods and Maskell got knocked out in a poor show. Our hopes now lay with the underdog James Cannon. Cannon led in good fashion and was down to a sitter on the black; needless to say the pressure got to Cannon and scuppered his chances of taking the win. A shocking display of events!

Wednesday 17th August 2011

Day 5

The day started for most of the team at 6am. Some of the group went to the local church and sat in on the morning service where the Father thanked us for being there and wished us a safe and successful time in the village.

9am soon came round and we were ready to start a hard day's coaching. We found ourselves on a large dusty field with around 700 children in different groups singing Swahili songs. These songs were to keep the children focussed and entertained whilst we waited, a bit like our use of brain gym back in schools at home.



We set up our six activities and got to work straight away. There was a large volume of children with some groups pushing and shoving (in excitement) to get to the front. To restore order some of the older children would carry sticks to brush back the children - if you get hit you're in the way and you need to move. Something which would never happen back in the UK!

As the morning progressed the sun got hotter and myself and Danielle were finding it very demanding teaching dance in such dusty and hot conditions. I found myself feeling dizzy and faint and was advised to sit in the air-conditioned bus for some time out. Luckily the team were fine but it was a reminder of the tough conditions we all faced in the harsh sun.



As before, the children were willing to learn and gave their best efforts. The team were also surprised at how some children were a bit wary and slightly shy at first. It shows how children all over the world need to have their trust earned by an adult before they can trust you.

The morning session finished at 12pm and

the team went back to refuel for the afternoon. As we sat round the lunch table every one of us looked orange from the thick dust. I personally thought James Cannon had had a secret spray tan, but I was informed it was definitely the dust. We all agreed that the morning had been exhausting and we were zapped of energy.

Over lunch Jamie from African Space told us a young 9 month old baby from the village had gone to the medical centre with a fever and it was diagnosed that the child had a serious case of meningitis. The current medical centre in the village has no doctor, just a nurse who works very hard to help out where possible. The baby needed medical attention fast but the mother had no money to get to the nearest hospital. Luckily the African Space team helped out and organised transport to the hospital and the baby was in safe hands. This is a reminder of the serious need of a hospital in the village. Completion of the hospital is due in 2012 and will be fully functional with doctors and nurses from the local community.



The afternoon coaching was just as tough as the morning. Some of the locals would come and watch us and children who couldn't afford to go to school would stand close by and try to join in. The afternoon finished and we were lucky to have photos with children from the school.

After a hard day teaching we are informed by the Father that he has arranged a visit for us to see the nuns. The boys enjoy a cold bucket shower whilst the girls washed under a tap outside the local primary school. We were clean and refreshed and ready to visit the nuns.

We went to the convent and sat in a garden with picturesque surroundings. As the group waited in anticipation for the nuns to arrive we heard the angelic sound in the distance. As we looked around we could see the nuns walking from the convent up towards where we were sitting. They were singing a beautiful hymn in Swahili, which brought a tear to the eye. The nuns continued to sing. As they walked towards us their voices were exquisite - these girls really had some talent! The sister then welcomed us offering food and beverages. The nuns then treated us to another hymn. If these girls were on X-Factor they would win hands down!



It didn't take long for the nuns to ask if we had any talents for us to share with them.

We all looked blankly at each other feeling slightly embarrassed, however it didn't take long for Paul to volunteer myself and Danielle to show off our dance skills to the sisters. Bashfully, we accepted the challenge and showed off our very best Zumba routines. The nuns approved and re-arranged themselves into a new formation. It was clear at this point that it was war - Aspire versus Nuns - the battle was on! Again the nuns hit back with a more up-tempo number complete with dance moves and an obligatory recorder - they really had upped their game.

With the pressure really on this was to be matched by a beautiful rendition of 'Killing Me Softly' from African Space's Mark. The performance was truly inspiring and even encouraged more of team Aspire to get involved with more Zumba.

The experience was so surreal (especially when Beyonce's 'Single Ladies' came on which the nuns seemed to enjoy) but truly inspiring, these ladies were so happy for us to be there and treated us like family. It was also a reminder that simple things such as talking, singing, dancing and being in the company of others is the finest way to enjoy yourself, something the people of this village did in style!

Thursday 18th August 2011

Day 6

It's 9am and the team are ready to start today's activities. Again, there are over 700 children from Itete Primary School.

We set up six different activities, the groups of children seem to be larger today and there seems to be a lot of children who are not in school who want to take part in the activities - something the team are happy to allow. As we



have help from Claire on the dance I get the chance to lend a hand with the other activities. I go and help Maurice with some hand eye coordination (games and challenges). It amazed me to see how a single tennis ball could bring so much joy.



A simple activity such as passing a ball to a partner provided entertainment for a long period of time with the children giving 100% of their attention. I also watched a football session and was amazed at the children's natural ability to control a ball. It made me think what these children could achieve if they had the expertise of regular sports

tuition, they were truly talented. I really do hope that the teachers make use of the resources and equipment we leave.

The morning session had finished and it marked the end of our last day teaching in Itete. We handed over the equipment to the headmaster and had the opportunity to sit in on an English lesson being taught.

The aim of the lesson was to report speech. The classroom had the bare minimum. They were a whole different world away from what we see back home - classrooms with children's work, bright colours, computers, toys and pens and paper. This classroom had none of these things, the only comparison I can think of is the classroom in Itete looked like a derelict building. There are up to four children sat at a desk with one text book.



Although the learning environment didn't have the most stimulating setting the children were engrossed with every word their inspirational teacher was telling them. There was no talking when the teacher was teaching, there was no back-chat or disrespect, just pure focus from each child.

Late afternoon and crowds were forming on the dusty football pitch next to the school. There were children and local people all gathered around the side of the pitch.

But what were they here for?

It was only the football match of the century!

Father had arranged a football match between Aspire and the locals of Itete. Word had spread through the village and by kick-off what appeared to be close to one thousand people had descended on to the football pitch. Player manager Maurice Wright had managed to pull a team together consisting of the Aspire lads, Mark from African Space, Daniel "The Bouf" Mandley from Stockland Green School and Casper, a local farmer from Itete.



The first goal was scored by the locals who played barefoot. The crowd went wild and invaded the pitch, the atmosphere was electric!

The second goal was then scored by Casper who was playing for team Aspire, he was also arguably our best player.

The game was close but a penalty in the second half, won by Paul (he dived) and scored by Maurice clinched the win.

The game ended 2-1 to Aspire who lifted the trophy which was presented by the Father. Maurice then gave a speech thanking the locals. The speech contained a hint of sarcasm - something I think the locals didn't get at all!



After a very tiring, emotional three days it was the team's last night in Itete. We dined with the Father and enjoyed a meal of goat which was caught by the famous Royston earlier on that day. The whisky bottle was bought out one last time and we politely accepted this farewell gesture from the Father.

The team reflected on the past few days and spent time with some of the locals who had helped us over the past few days. An emotional night indeed.

Friday 19th August 2011

Day 7

Today is a day of travelling, before we leave we say goodbye to the people who have welcomed us so warmly into their community. It's sad to say goodbye to everyone but we hope that we will work together again one day.

On the way to our next destination we take a detour to visit a widow called Expedita, who lives on a shamba which is a fair distance from the main village. We brought her fish, oil and rice to help her feed her two boys, Roy 12 and Joseph 9. It was amazing to see their home. They lived off the land and grew all their own food, from fruits to chillies! Real hand-to-mouth living.

Whilst there we helped to build a chicken coop and I went with Joseph to collect wood. We walked far into the forest and I watched as this tiny 9 year-



old boy cut down trees with a huge machete. His technique was perfect and he knew exactly which trees to cut down. I watched in amazement and thought about what 9 year-old children would be doing back home in the UK – on their Playstation, maybe? Watching TV? Joseph is a hard-working young man and it's clear to see he takes pride in helping his mother and brother with the daily maintenance of their home life.

After spending a few hours with the family and building the coop we said goodbye to Expedita and her boys and carried on with the long journey back to the Hondo Hondo campsite.

Saturday 20th August

Day 8

Today will be the last day we teach in Tanzania and after breakfast we head to Mang'ula Primary School to teach our final classes and hand over the equipment. The school was a lot quieter today with only a few hundred children to teach, the rest of the school were in exams.

Again, the children were grateful and gave their best in all activities. When the teaching had finished we then presented the school with the resources and some sweets, which the teachers seemed very excited about.



In the afternoon another football match had been organised as part of our community outreach. Maurice Wright led his men out onto the dusty field and they battled in the heat against the Mang'ula locals. The first goal was scored by Maurice, from of another penalty.

The locals looked likely to score and had a fair few chances in the first half. Aspire were hanging on to the lead until an own goal from Danny Maskell brought the score to 1-1 late in the second half.

The slightly biased referee blew for full time and the match went to penalties. All of the Aspire lads had scored their penalties; Danny Maskell even managed to smash the ball off a little girl's face, doing wonders for public relations between Tanzania and the UK!

Aspire took the victory yet again winning 5-2 on spot kicks.



The end of the football match marked the end of project. Aspire to Africa had been a major success. The children we worked with have been amazing and so grateful - they took all of our knowledge and expertise on board and thrived on it. Not only did they take something from us but we have learned so much from them.

Also, the lifestyles of the people we met were very humbling, living in tiny mud huts and walking miles to school and work each day really does put our way of life into perspective.

Although they have nothing they are extremely proud people and would happily give what they had to you without thinking twice.

The whole experience has been life changing.

Even things like being with work colleagues who you don't know that well and living in each others pockets 24/7 is enough to cause problems, but I personally feel I have more tolerance with people now. Everyone has gained so much from the trip.

It is hard to put into words the feelings and emotions that we experienced every day. If I could do it all again I would and I would encourage anyone to take the chance to be part of the Aspire to Africa project should the opportunity arise.

Here's to a truly inspiring and life changing journey.

Kwa heri!



