

Where do I begin with writing a report on the best 6 months of my life?! I can honestly say I have never been happier and I owe all of this to the amazing country of Malawi and the people within it. I have truly found a second home. Whilst the first couple of months were tough this surprisingly had nothing to do with homesickness. The most common said thing to me before I left was along the lines of "how are you going to cope being away from home for such a long length of time at 18?" The only worries of mine concerning this was my reliance on people at home; I had barely cooked myself a dinner before arriving in Malawi. However, being six months into the year already (how?!?!?) I've realised a year really isn't a long time at all...

The tough days have been down to my project being extremely challenging. Almost all of the children I teach are from the village where their lives don't really have much of a structure; its wake up, wash at the lake, eat nsima and sit or play, all day every day. The kids have been wondering around the village without their parents their whole lives, quite literally since they could walk (which is perfectly safe as everybody knows everybody). However this lack of home life structure means the children are extremely difficult to control!

Classroom control has by far been the biggest challenge I have faced in the past six months... the kids are very different in the classroom vs. the playground. There was a time where I completely lost it with my class sometime in November, screamed at them that I'm going back to the UK and then left them for a very long cry. There have also been numerous days where I've come home from school to collapse on my bed in tears! Negativity never lasts too long in Malawi though – it's too much of a colourful, relaxed and smiley place for anyone to feel down for long. My three partners and I have also become as close as family and we're always there to pick each other up!

Despite moments of despair with the craziness of the kids I have had some amazing days with them – I quite feel on top of the world after really successful engaging lessons! I'm feeling as though I have hit a turning point with my students as they have been good as gold this term and really interested in our English theme (Ancient Egypt). I adore all of my kids and it's been such fun getting to know all their little characters. It's been great to see how much they have progressed since September; teaching is very rewarding work.

Getting to know the kids has been easy as we're barely a minute's walk from Bolera Village. I've found that visiting my students and spending time with them outside of lessons really improves their behaviour in the classroom. Some of my student's families almost feel like my own, they're so unbelievably welcoming. On January 2nd the Mother (Stelia) of one of my student's (Umali) had a baby girl which I was given the privilege of naming! I named her Joanna – my Mum's name. I've also been going to Church every Sunday (something I never did in the UK) with the family of my student Davis. Church is brilliant – so much singing, dancing and the playing of bongos. Davis' mother is genuinely the most happy, welcoming, smiley woman I've ever met. I spend many afternoons sitting with her learning Chiyao and Chichewa. It's extremely confusing needing to learn two languages at once. Whilst Malawi's official language is English many tribal languages are spoken in the villages (Chichewa in the towns and cities). In Bolera the villagers speak Chiyao, 'chi' meaning "the language of" and 'yao' being the yao people. I can now just about speak both conversationally.

The village has been a very eye opening place to spend time. Bolera is in one of the poorest regions of Malawi whilst Malawi is the poorest country in the world. Most of my students live in a very basic mud hut; one room for living and one where the whole family sleeps – bare in mind my students have many siblings as contraception still isn't widely used. Hunger has been a serious issue this year because of the draught meaning families weren't able to grow their maize which was heart breaking. One of my partners did some online fundraising and raised £1000 which bought maize for 160 families in Bolera for a month. It was a privilege to help organise and I had the most brilliant day helping to hand out the maize – everyone was so so grateful.

To sum up, spending time in the village has hit home that simple living can be enough, an attitude that seems far from the minds of anyone in the UK. Western Society is very much geared towards a successful career with money behind it being the most important part of life. I very much felt the pressure of this being a student in the UK. Malawi has taught me that there are more important things to life such as the friendships we form with people and just being happy because we are alive! Malawians live for today and that's why I have fallen in love with the place and the people.