

June 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

In 2017/18 I went to South Africa with the educational charity Project Trust. Your trust was kind and generous enough to contribute to my fundraising target and I wanted to thank you once more.

I have included letters dated January and September 2018, which regrettably I have only just rediscovered to provide you with updates of my year.

I have just completed my first year at Edinburgh University, and if it was not for my year overseas I would not now know what my carer goals were going to be. I hope that with my experience and degree in Government Policy and Society that I will be able to go on and work in policy making in developing countries, with a specific aim to improve services for disabled individuals.

Once more, I cannot thank you enough for helping me reach Helen Bishop Home - the experience was invaluable.

Kind regards,  
Mia Noquet



January 2018

Dear Trustees,

Firstly, I would like to say thank you as without the support of The Nineveh Charitable Trust, I would not have raised the funds required to currently be fulfilling my year overseas with Project Trust.

I thought I would get in touch to give you an update of what I have been up to since arriving in South Africa last September.

I was placed by Project at Helen Bishop Home in Kimberley. This is a city, in the middle of the desert and temperatures reach the 40s, which can be quite a difficult climate to work in. Though, I could not imagine being anywhere else. The residents of the home range between 7 months and 33 years, all of whom have a severe disability (mainly cerebral palsy or spina bifida). Most of the children are orphaned, or have been placed here through the courts, but there are around 10 who still have a family presence in their lives. I feel the work I am doing is more beneficial for both the children and myself than I would ever have expected.

My work day starts at 7am, every Monday - Friday. I feed around 3/4 children each morning, and the same again at lunch. At first, this was a big challenge as there is varying abilities amongst each individual, so a lot of patience and care is required. That said, now the care giving aspect of the volunteering I do, is one of my favourites. This side also includes daily toothbrushing and some personal care throughout the day. The bulk of my day is made up of 3 sessions. Usually consisting of; 1 in the classroom where I work one to one with a child on basic skills, this ranges from working on hand grip and eye movement to numbers/colours; another session takes place in the "snuzzle room", which is designed to stimulate senses with a variety of textures, sounds and lights; the third session rotates daily between taking children to the garden, hydrobaths or on the therapy horse.

The Home is relatively well funded, and the facilities are excellent versus what one may expect. Though, Helen Bishop is very understaffed and there are almost 60 children (only around 12 of whom can independently move themselves around), meaning time for one to one development and support is very low. As a volunteer, my role really focuses on giving the children attention that they wouldn't ordinarily receive. My three fellow volunteers and I are responsible for making sure each and every resident gets the time and opportunity to progress that they deserve.

I can pin point two stand out moments in my year so far. Firstly, I have been working with a 2 year old boy who when I arrived was known for looking very grumpy, all the time. His disability seemed to impact his ability to communicate in any way, bar crying. I have spent countless sessions in the snuzzle room with this boy, and have noticed massive progress, as have other members of staff. Now, he smiles and seems to recognise people better than ever before, this could be due to his own personal development, though without the extra attention I have been able to facilitate, staff do not believe he would have come as far as he has in this time. Another highlight has to be working with a 14 year old boy on writing his name. When I arrived, he was not attending school (only 8 of the children here do), due to an operation and within the first couple of months he has practiced endlessly and now has overcome this struggle. This boy has also started attending school again, which is a massive opportunity to explore further his capabilities.



My role here at Helen Bishop is that of a teacher, career, friend and sibling to these children. I feel living on site means we are an extra layer of support, at all times. Whilst also giving me the chance to really understand what it is like for the residents, and how aspects of the health and care systems here in South Africa work. The positive impact the work we are doing here is really endless, as every win no matter how small, is actually a massive one. For these children, what seem like the most simple of tasks/movements/skills to most are the ones we are here to help develop and thrive, and in reality this support can be life changing.

I would like to thank you once again for your generosity, and for aiding me to gain this invaluable life experience. I cannot put into words how rewarding my time so far has been, and I am sure it will continue to be.

Regards,  
Mia Noquet



Dear Sir/Madam,

As a recipient of financial support from The Nineveh Charitable Trust, I wanted to thank you for this as well as give a final report on my year volunteering in South Africa.

On first arrival at Helen Bishop Home (HBH), I never would have imagined the impact it would ultimately have on my life. I look back on my first day, when my fellow volunteers and I were thrown in the deep end and it seemed as though everyone expected us to know exactly what we should be doing. Now, we are definitely mind readers, nor were we at all trained with working with young people with disabilities, but we learnt quickly and before I knew it, the daily routine became the norm that I grew to love.

The Home had a total of 65 children during my stay. The residents were either born with or as a result of an accident developed a physical and/or mental disability - primarily cerebral palsy or spina bifida. Over the year I heard many heartbreaking stories about how and why they came to live at Helen Bishop, often involving neglect and all forms of abuse. As you can imagine, not many of our children received visits as often they were removed from their home circumstances by the courts. That said, they do not allow their pasts affect their happiness. I have never met such amazing children, who's day is brightened by a simple smile and a 10 minute session in the classroom. The volunteers at HBH are vital in providing the children with one to one attention that the caregivers do not have the time provide.

HBH is currently at, if not over, full capacity with 61 children ranging for 1 to 33 years old. Of them all - 14 can communicate in varying levels in both English and Afrikaans, 7 attend local schools, 12 can independently push their wheelchairs and 7 can walk. This gives you an idea of the mixed abilities in the Home, and so time spent in the classroom is different for each child. It was incredibly rewarding to work towards each individuals goals throughout the year.

Kimberley is a city rich in history, culture and diamonds, which was a pleasure to explore. Although, much like anywhere else, also has its problems. Towards the end of my year overseas the people of Kimberley began peaceful protests over electricity prices and corruption within the local council. These soon turned violent and the city went into shut down. For around a week, we were not able to leave the site of the Home. A lot of staff could not make it into work, so us volunteers were heavily relied on to ensure all of the children's basic needs were met. One day we worked from 7am - 9pm, with only 3 other caregivers (usually there is at least 18). It is a really shocking thought that if were not for the volunteer flat being on site, the staff would have had to "make do".

Personally, my confidence has improved hugely. Moving away from home and living with 3 girls I had only met once before was certainly a challenge but one I embraced. There is not a thing I would have done differently, and I will always look back on my time in South Africa so positively.



In September I will begin studying Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh. I learnt that HBH is the only Home of its kind in the Northern Cape, and if it had ten times the space, there would still be children waiting for a place. So, my goal now is to graduate and look towards opening another Home, or to help facilitate some much needed change within South Africans social care system.

It is difficult to find the words to describe how grateful I am for being given the opportunity to volunteer at HBH. The children and staff became my family, and the Home became my home. So thank you once again, as without the support from your trust, I may not have been able to do so.

Kind regards,  
Mia Noquet