

Jack Wyatt's two month gap session teaching in Mwanhala 2010

Jack visited the Tabora Region with Cranbrook School in the summer of 2009 working hard on the MCH clinics in Nyasa and Maboha in Urambo District. He decided to take a Gap Year between school and university and, wanting to do something worthwhile, volunteered to spend two months in Mwanhala working at the secondary school. This is his report.

My time in Tanzania in August and September of 2010 was very different to the visit I took with the school the previous summer. I departed straight after receiving my A level results. Like all things in Tanzania, but perhaps especially the Tabora region, my journey to Mwanhala was a bit hairy at the best of times. I think it was a good sign of the adventure to come. I arrived in Mwanhala after a day in Tabora where I met Mr Masatu before heading to the village. I was met with open arms by Neema Malyeli, my mama Africa as she became known who welcomed me into her home as if I was her own son. I quickly got integrated with the secondary school the next day. The head teacher was very excited to have a native speaker in the school, however his enthusiasm lulled slightly when he found out I was not a professional teacher but he soon came to realise how at ease I was in the classroom and was supportive throughout my stay.

I began by teaching Forms 1 and 3 English, these were the years that didn't have any exams so it was much easier for them to drift a bit from the curriculum. To start with it was very difficult to get the children to engage and break from their normal lessons. In my very first lesson I tried to get them to stand up to and talk to the class which was something they had never done before and coaxing the shyer ones out of their shells was hard. The school has between 20 and 30 books for all the children. I found it upsetting that the primary school just down the road was literally overflowing with books while

the secondary school was so underfunded. My first lesson finished with me reading a play to the students with one book whilst the rest of the class of about 30 all crowded around the other two. Neema kindly lent me her bicycle and I would ride back and forth from school 'mambo-poa-ing' the local children and Shikamoo-ing the older people. I never encountered hostility in my time and without wanting to sound overly optimistic, the people I met along the way were incredibly kind and good hearted.



**Jack and the FDC staff outside Mwanhala FDC.
Neema Malyeli, the principal is on the right.**

My time quickly fell into a pattern. I would ride to school, teach and return for lunch when I had finished. After a week I also started teaching maths to the third form. I especially enjoyed maths, even when a student was really stuck we could work back from a quadratic equation to 2 times 2 and the look when it dawned on a student was second to none. The lessons in general were always a laugh and the students were so responsive even if they were hard to break out of their routine. Sadly the majority of the lessons were conducted by a teacher holding the only book and copying it onto the board where the children copied it into their books. One day I decided to write the date and title on the board then write 'do not copy this sentence'. Only one boy got the joke and started laughing, so I got him to explain it in Swahili. That shook things up and slowly during my time the level of English spoken and the level of interaction improved.



Jack in full teaching mode at Mwanhala Secondary School

I also met with the village water committee to discuss charging for the water from the new FUM funded borehole. This is situated in the grounds of the FDC and Neema has paid for a small hut around the pump. The water committee agreed to charge 100 shillings (5p) for 60 litres of water which the whole village seemed to agree on. They were incredibly grateful for having the pump because without it, during the dry season, they would have had to travel to the next village to get water. There was talk about getting the water piped to the standpipes around the village but they said it would be harder to charge for this and would see how it went with the first charging system.

It is hard to explain how humbling the experience was. It was totally different from the normal Cranbrook trips, but so much more that it was one of the best things I have ever done with my life and I really miss the village and the people. Neema was so kind to me and the level of care she showed really made the trip. The trip with her to Mwanza was a highlight and I was pleased to meet her family.

I would like to thank Neema for her hospitality and I would also like to thank FUM for enabling me to have this link.