

# Heshima Newsletter

## December 2016

### Volunteering at Heshima A Family's Experience



*Eva and two nursery children on the Heshima site*

For a long time we have harboured a desire to travel. Not just a couple of weeks here and there, but something more substantial. When we had children we put these plans on the back burner, but never forgot them entirely. As our children, Rosie and Eva, grew up we realised that family and travelling were not mutually exclusive, and indeed the experiences would really benefit and educate the girls. Once they reached the ages of 9 and 5 we realised it was now or never; they were young enough to be open to spending large amounts of time with their parents but old enough

to understand what we were doing and (hopefully) form some lasting memories. The decision to volunteer, rather than just travel, came from a desire to get involved with a community and get to know them and the area they live in, rather than simply visiting a place as a tourist and then moving on. This is where Heshima came in. Ellie had worked with Alison in the UK, before she and Steve set up Heshima, and had always remembered her last day working with her when she said, 'if you get the opportunity, please come and spend some time with us in Africa'. A decade on, we took her up on the offer!



*Eva with the nursery children*

We planned to be out of the UK for around 4 or 5 months. So



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before leaving we had a considerable amount to do; packing up our house, handing over our jobs to jealous colleagues, negotiating with our children's school, and as a result we had little time to really research where we were going in any depth. We landed in a dusty, chaotic town, having lost bags and missed planes. But at every difficulty we had been met with calm helpful people, happy to go out of their way to make sure this tired British family eventually reached their destination in one piece. By the time we arrived at Heshima we were already greatly endeared to people of Tanzania. Before we left the UK a colleague said; 'Africa is a beautiful community, it really gets under your skin'. At the time we dismissed it but it was starting to happen already.



*The new minibus with children, teachers and Zack*

Heshima is located in Kisongo, about 15km outside Arusha. It is

on the main tourist route to the Serengeti. Most tourists pass through at great speed in huge Land-Rovers on their way to expensive safari lodges. As a result they never meet the people of this small village. We feel privileged to have spent time working among them. Kisongo is the village that most of the children and adults at Heshima come from. It is a poor community many of whom are from the Maasai. They have little access to most of the things we take for granted, and struggle to look after their families. Heshima offers a community base where the women can develop textile skills to enable them to earn an independent living and children have the opportunity to learn basic maths and English.



*Constantine's classroom*

Tucked away in Kisongo is Zack's duca (these are the tiny shops that line the streets of Tanzanian villages). As well as



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running the duca with his brother, Zack is Heshima's site manager, bus driver, security guard, you name it he does it. He lives on site at Heshima. He was our first point of contact and showed us around the school and workshops. He introduced us to Constantine, who cycles the round trip from Arusha every day to teach the older children in the school, and Mwamvita, who works with the younger children and runs the textiles workshop and shop.

Everyone we met welcomed us warmly and made us feel at home. But no one told us what they wanted us to do while we were there! A little frustrated by this we sat in on a few lessons, and, as teachers ourselves, soon identified areas we could improve in the classrooms. We asked Mwamvita and Constantine to teach outside for a day while we put storage areas into their classrooms, organised resources, repainted and put up display boards. It was then that we realised how volunteering at Heshima works; no one is going to give you a list of jobs: you need to identify a need or an area you can improve with your skills, and then get on with it. This meant we had a sense of

pride in the things we managed to achieve as they were our initiatives, and it got us really involved with the local community, sourcing supplies and figuring out how to get things done with no electricity, limited water and an aging safari bus for transportation.



*Ellie hard at work!*

While we were busy doing this, Rosie and Eva were in the classrooms with the children. Eva quickly made friends and helped pupils with their work in Constantine's class, she particularly enjoyed football at break times. Rosie took quite naturally to helping in the



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classroom, and, by the end of our time, was confidently leading classes and teaching at the blackboard. We are so proud of them and enjoyed watching them grow in confidence.



*Nursery children at play*

A few weeks into our stay we asked Zack what he needed to make his daily work easier, expecting him to say, an electric water pump or more text books. 'A mop for the boys' toilets would be great' came the reply. While discussing the male of the species' inability to urinate in a straight line, we handed over the equivalent of £2 for two mops. Joking aside, this made us realise how small an amount of money could make someone's life much easier. This led to us setting up a Just Giving page to allow our friends and family to donate what they could. To our astonishment we raised over £1000.



*Rosie with nursery children*

This money allowed us to have an even bigger impact at Heshima and we are really grateful to the friends and family who put their hands in their pockets and gave so much more than we expected. In consultation with Alison, Steve, Alan, Zack, Mwamvita and Constantine we identified some key areas that would push the project forward as well as invest in the Heshima community. We arranged for a solar panel company to survey the site and paid for the organisation's first solar panels. Currently only Zack can drive the school bus which means that Mwamvita has to bring piles of textiles to the site by local transport, so we decided to pay for her to get a driving licence. Constantine and Mwamvita were keen to develop a sports programme for the children so we bought them a t-shirt each, printed with the Heshima logo, to wear during their sports sessions. At present



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Zack, his wife and his two children live in a single room at the back of Mwamvita's classroom. We will be using the remainder of the money raised to go towards the building of a new classroom, which Mwamvita can move into, allowing Zack and his family to take over the whole of her current classroom.



We were really made to feel a part of this community of people and this was made clearest when Rosie celebrated her 10th birthday towards the end of our time in Tanzania. We were worried that being away from home for this milestone birthday would make her sad. On the contrary, she was made to feel so special by all the staff and

children. The ladies in the textiles workshop made her a dress and the children sang songs and made cards for her. They were careful not to leave Eva out too and made her a fantastic pair of zebra pattern shorts that she has pretty much refused to take off since.



*Mwamvita and children*

While in Tanzania we also wanted to explore this beautiful country. We were lucky enough to be able to visit the Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater and see the wildlife there. A truly magical experience.

On our final day Zack and his wife invited us round to his place at the back of Mwamvita's



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classroom for a solar powered meal. It has formed one of our fondest memories, an evening with warm conversation between good friends. Our children played together and there were tears when they had to part. Rosie and Eva still talk about their shared friendship with 'Nico and Shedly'. The conversation generally begins; 'do you remember the time Nico / Shedly said /did...'. It always ends; 'When we go back we can...'. The attachment we feel, as a family, to this community means that we will certainly be returning. Tanzania has indeed got under our skin.

*Grateful thanks from all at Heshima for all that Mike, Ellie and the girls did during their stay. Please come back again!*

### **Schools' visits**

#### **Eltham Hill**

This summer, students from Eltham Hill School, in south-east London volunteered at Heshima. They raised funds to buy arts and craft equipment for the pre-school. The students worked at Heshima for three days. They planned and delivered fun activities for the pre-school: music, drama and creative play. They also built an outdoor water

play area for the children. Eltham Hill students loved volunteering and working with the children. They were inspired by their time at Heshima and feel it is an experience that will stay with them for ever.

### **George Herriot School**



In mid-June, a group of 27 Heriot's pupils ventured into Northern Tanzania. We were there for 12 days taking part in community work at a charity called Heshima, a cycling expedition, cultural visits and safaris in many of Tanzania's most famous national parks.

Whilst at Heshima, we plastered a new community computer room, fixed the swings, painted the playground area, designed a mural and played with the children. Our £600 of fundraising money bought the materials we needed. An additional £1600 we raised



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will help to equip their new computing room in the future. There is also a textile workshop there that employs local women so they can learn useful skills and be more independent. A few of us joined in and helped to make washable/reusable sanitary pads, which helps girls to be able to go to school when they have their periods, so that they can improve their education.

For the second half of our trip, we drove around the Tarangire, Lake Manyara and Ngorogoro Crater National Parks looking out intently for any sign of a lion. We saw a variety of incredible wildlife including elephants, hippos, a rhino, warthogs, baboons, giraffes, flamingos, a python, wildebeest, buffalo, lions and more zebras than you can imagine.



*Erin, Daisy and Hammad at George Herriot's Christmas fair, which raised £352 for Heshima.*

Overall, this trip opened our eyes to a different culture and made us appreciate what we have here. We all left with fond memories of Tanzania and it will certainly be a trip we will never forget.



*Thanks to these two schools, and one from Taiwan, for all that they did at Heshima, including their amazing fund-raising*

### **Saturday School**

Saturday school for local children is still going well, after Patrick and Minesh left. Braeburn teachers Fiona and Allison, together with one Heshima member of staff now run the primary section, and Braeburn teacher Janelle, sixth form volunteers and a young man Chidi run the secondary section. Children start queuing from 8am to get in as we have capped the numbers so we can



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offer a quality service. The children are helped to develop their English and Maths, and get the opportunity to have swimming lessons.

### **General**

The textile project, now under the direction of Mwamvita (Maja and her family having returned to the UK), is finding new outlets for their wonderful products.



*One of the Maasai women at work*



*Some of the textiles on display in the shop*

As reported above, the nursery school is thriving, taught by Constantine and Mwamvita. In addition, solar panels have been

installed in the site manager's (Zack) house, so his family now have lights AND (much to the delight of his children) a TV! The main building houses the textile centre downstairs and the shop upstairs, with the large classroom almost finished. This will allow the next exciting phase of the Heshima project to be fulfilled.



*The main building*

The aim is to equip the classroom with computers, to be used therefore as a training centre for adults to learn computer skills, and also as a homework room for local children. We have started discussion with a Tanzanian charity which has years of experience of equipping schools etc with a computer lab, and which also provides training of teachers.

Best Wishes and grateful thanks from *All of us at Heshima !*



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