

CRESS – Trip Summary - October 2018 Fiona Sheldon

Witnessing the building of Emotional Capacity and Resilience.

Just eight months since the conference in January – it was a privilege to meet again, those involved with CRESS Uganda and see the many strands of progress accomplished by them. We have seen the hardship, suffering, pain and disruption that goes with exile – but the joy and increasing resilience that has come with mobilising and growing their strengths has been wonderful to behold.

First, time with Fred Taban at the guest house, where we were able to love and care for him, understand his challenges and perspective and work on his future plans. We also met with a number of university students, hearing their joys and challenges too, before our MAF flight north.

Warm greetings from the CRESS Office team at Arua and Bishop Joseph, who drove us through the town, following some lessons from his trusted driver Eric...with that first assault on our senses as life skimmed past us... colour, struggle, loaded bikes, lorries, buda-buda, and stately women carrying all manner of food and wares.

I am struck by the sense of ‘team’ at the office, created in 8 months with a consummate



leader at the helm. Each have a defined role, enjoy growing spiritually, fresh food grown in the garden outside, a commitment and a sense of belonging to something good, a voice, individual business plans and growing self-confidence.

Receiving gifts, including the ‘Wonderbags’, to help them in their work was a blessing all round. A joy to see a healthy community/‘kurumi’, catching the vision.



Our first night at the White Castle (with a few ‘Fawlty’ issues!) before an early start to visit the huge Imvepi settlement and a number of the agricultural projects,



led by Mama Yunia Yango. There was ceremony – dancing - singing – giving thanks and celebration in the fields with inspection of the crops. The women can now provide more varied nutritious food for their families, earn money from the surplus, whilst learn new skills and experiencing an enormous sense of achievement, evident in their faces. As ever children with bubbles lifted everyone’s spirits.

Meeting the dear Pastors with whom I had shared so much in January when they were broken and dispirited, was an unimaginable joy. Our tears flowed freely and they talked of how they had learnt much and changed; how the emotional resilience they had been able to build was helping in their personal lives and their ability to pastor the families in their churches: strong and confident in their emotional capacity, to be there for others and sleeping well. Bishop Joseph works with 24 pastors in this camp – each tending their flock and erecting a church building. Pastor Jacob, with a regular 700 at his church on a Sunday, talks excitedly of the impact of beginning to study the bible inductively with Precept Ministries. They bore witness to the huge impact it's having on their own walk and pastoral abilities, with the setting up of 80 bible groups studying forgiveness.



Off on the long road to Mijale and the Clinic, with the CRESS team working so well - strictly to the CEO's schedule, instead of 'Africa time'! Pastors and MU ladies gathered on our arrival - the warmth and the depth of the greeting brought forth more tears of joy! Andrew and myself were invited to speak to them, teaching on how to build emotional capacity and Christian Hope.



There were 2 pastors who had previously worked with me 1:1, now strong and restored, able to give much to their communities. A third I was able to see that day for a memorable session in a tukal nearby, with the chickens and a goat, and I trust much healing to be thankful for.

The clinic team led by MO Edward Mika, reported on an increasing output and range of medical care, in far from ideal accommodation, discussing their challenges and future plans with 2 staff tukals nearing completion.



Back to Arua with Edward, to finalise the details about the Children's Accelerated Trauma



Therapy [CATT] Training, with the Ugandan Senior Psychiatric Officer Candia Umar, with whom there is a real sense of co-operation. Following valuable strategic thinking by the CRESS leaders selecting candidates from different communities so that the skills are spread, reaching as many traumatized young as possible.

There has increasingly been a dawning amongst the leaders that emotional health has to underpin all of the other projects that CRESS delivers: whether it is making full use of a sponsored education; being able to learn new skills; build good relationships; contribute to community; having sufficient energy to implement projects; think creatively/strategically

and follow through. It is essential to the future thriving of these people along with the Christian message.

Next day travelling to Moyo, to meet the team and families of Bishop Emmanuel's Diocese of Kajo Keji, with an additional detour to Gobor proved a treasure in our week.

Pastor Eli Mawa, with us in January, has been leading his people in the bush. They have courageously created a community place, a beautiful church and an outdoor school for 183 3-6 year olds, but struggle with insufficient ground to provide food security.

Their inspirational head teacher encouraging the joy of the children singing, dancing, reciting poems was just beautiful. Eli Mawa is not a well man, but still he carries the banner for his people with great courage. Teaching on emotional health and Christian hope and being able to minister to them was such a privilege, while our CEO had a 'short walk' in the bush to see their fields.



In Moyo we discussed cabbages etc and alternative recipes; the transporting of manure; making of compost and fertilizer - to improve productivity. In the evening at the Catholic Mission we met for a CRESS family supper.

Beatrice Kiden (Jane Poggo's sister) joined us from Bellamaling Camp – and what a



transformation since we met in January, when she was deeply depressed. Now fit and strong in spirit and purpose, supporting and counselling women and families in her church in the camp, teaching them the emotional health strategies she has learnt and selected for the CATT training to add to the skills required in her community role.

Bishop Emmanuel's retinue set off for the Morobi Settlement where 34 new MU members were being inducted. 1450 people gathered as more UN carpets were strung up on poles around the church to provide shade for the 4hr service. Worship was led by a number of 'adungu' players and choirs and the customary jumping for joy in worship before the teaching was not missed! Fiona and Andrew taught and preached - it a great day of celebration and joy. The Muryes played host to us in the evening with a meal and the giving of gifts bringing a happy close to the reunion.



In the morning I found myself trying to conduct some individual therapy under the mango tree, but African 'kurumi' makes this difficult...as joined by chattering ladies in beautiful dresses!



Just time to see a new business venture masterminded by Ester



– a Posho Mill, ready to grind the maize meal for the community!

At the airstrip ...the cacophony of children out to see the plane and wave us off – whooping, running and waving until our big bird was gone in the sky.

We left with a lasting sense of people and communities loving and caring, learning and growing, achieving and joyful in the face of many challenges, with an increasing awareness of the opportunities that exile might bring in preparation for a return to their homeland.

May God bless the many ways this trip has been supported – it is definitely far, far more than the sum of its parts.

With grateful thanks. Caroline, Andrew and Fi.