

Two months volunteering for Ndi Moyo Palliative Care Centre, Malawi

I have recently returned from 2 months volunteering with Lucy and Tony Finch at the Ndi Moyo Palliative Care Centre. I am a recent chemistry graduate and since finishing in June 2006 I have been applying to go back to university to study medicine, I was fortunate enough to receive a place at UCL to start in September 2007. It was due to my combined interest in travelling and medicine that I was looking for a volunteer opportunity in a small NGO in Africa with a medical side. A friend who grew up with Lisa Finch in Tanzania told me about Ndi Moyo and well, it sounded perfect.



I arrived at Lilongwe airport on the 29th April 2007 to Tony's warm welcome – the 1,001 worries that had been running through my head were soon quelled as we made the drive back to the house via the centre. I arrived just when the now famous curvy wall had been finished and I was in awe of how beautiful the grounds for the centre were – the enormous tree in the middle gives a sense of serenity and permanence to the site that no amount of high rise building or fancy signs could ever give.

My role as a volunteer was very general – anything that needed doing and that I could do I would. I gave computer lessons to the staff, I set up an easy way to stock take the drugs, I drove patients and I accompanied Lucy on home and hospital visits. Throughout all this I asked a million and one questions but Lucy didn't seem to mind too much.

Towards the end of my stay we had the official opening of the centre and it was a fantastic day. The week before we were busy frantically getting invitations out and making information boards, sorting out chairs and a marquee. I'm still not entirely sure how but it all came together on the day and Lucy couldn't help but radiate her happiness on everyone there. I was very touched to see how many patients made the journey to the centre and hear how much they appreciate Lucy and Tony's work.

During my stay I also experienced first hand the frustrations commonly faced with working in Malawi. There was a national shortage of Vincristine – the only treatment normally available for cancer. Tony was managing to find it in drips and drabs from Lilongwe but no one sustainable source so no new patients could be

started – it was heartbreaking to see. I don't know how one national order for Vincristine can go missing. Thankfully, Lucy has now managed to get an order delivered from IDA through the Nchima Trust.

The most wonderful part of Ndi Moyo and the aspect I miss the most is the great team spirit at the centre amongst all the staff. The two nurses Nester and Dominic compliment each other very well – nester is direct and to the point whereas Dominic struck me as a more gentle soul. Both are very skilled and appreciate the fantastic opportunity Lucy has given them to be able to learn to be a palliative care nurse. On reception are Janet, the receptionist, and



Loyce the cleaner – I had many an amusing conversation on reception either teaching me Chichewa or deciding who was more famous, Oprah or Madonna. If you're ever in this situation always say Oprah in front of Janet – the debate got quite heated! Then there is Mike the assistant accountant, a poet and singer in his spare time. The groundsman, Mr Mangolama, Mr Lucius and Mr Nkhoma always busy and ready to help unload the car when we arrived every morning. Towards the end of my stay I also met Catherine, a Ugandan nurse from Hospice Africa Uganda who comes to aid with the training of the staff. A truly fantastic team!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ndi Moyo team for allowing me to have this amazing experience and for making me feel so welcome. I'd especially like to thank Lucy and Tony who really were a family away from home for me – I can't wait to go back in the future and see how Ndi Moyo grows.