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## PEOPLE AND PLACES VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT REPORT. OCTOBER 2022 - 2 WEEKS

### FUTURES TRAINING FOUNDATION – LISONG BAH of MARYS LITTLE LAMBS, KOLOLI, THE GAMBIA

#### Delivery of a Teacher Training Program relating to The Gambia GOALS ECD Curriculum

As a previous volunteer for People and Places both in situ in The Gambia and e-volunteering, I was only too happy to continue my involvement by working closely with Dianne (from people and places) and Lisong (founder and director of Futures Training Foundation) on a new training program to be delivered to Nursery School Teachers, promoting the Gambian Early Childhood and Development curriculum.

As a nursery owner and Sixth Form College tutor I can strongly identify with the need for good quality training of those who are educating the youngest of children. Having spent 4 weeks in 2019 working at Mary's Little Lambs and my 5 year involvement of another Nursery School in The Gambia, this placement was literally perfect. Opportunities such as this do not come along every day and was therefore one not to be missed.

In 2020 myself, Dianne and Lisong held regular zoom meetings to develop the training program I have just delivered. Unfortunately the Covid pandemic did not allow for this to be implemented until this year, but it was well worth the wait.

People and Places worked hard liaising with Lisong and her husband Adama, to ensure an appropriate venue was secured and that the trainees and myself were well catered for. The venue ITTOG (Institute of Travel and Tourism of the Gambia) loaned us a classroom for the 2 weeks of the course, which was a good size and together with Lisong we had the technological resources needed to present the course using a power point. At this point I must highlight the challenges that that did present. Power in The Gambia is not the best and the electricity can go off several times a day and often for long periods of time. This meant constant improvising and resetting of the projector when power resumed, not to mention the instant overwhelming heat as the ceiling fans stopped working. Nevertheless all challenges and barriers were overcome and the course ran pretty smoothly.

We were privileged to be offered both breakfast and lunch throughout the 2 weeks by another project supported by People and Places, No Woman Left Behind. This is not a project I have worked directly with before until now and I can say that the ladies involved were superb in providing for our hungry trainees (and teachers). Their service of the food was wonderful, always on time and plenty on offer. The 2 week menu for both breakfast and lunch provided a good variety of local dishes, some may not be that appealing to a European and I often had to ask just what was in the dish but I would encourage anyone to try the local food, there are many really tasty dishes. It is worth noting here that if you order a fish dish it will come complete with its head, skin and bones!

Onto the training itself, well what an experience it was. Lisong in addition to owning Mary's Little Lambs is also developing the Futures Training Foundation and it is under the FTF umbrella that this training was delivered. The

1 Naboth's Nursery, Canterbury Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8AX  
tel +44 (0) 8700 460 479 | email [info@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:info@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

[www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

course I had prepared was intense and completely different to any kind of training seen by the nursery teachers over there. As anticipated there were many adjustments to make as we worked through it. Initially it was planned for two 3 hour sessions each day. From day one this didn't happen. It was necessary to move lunchtime back 1 hour 15 minutes to allow for 2pm prayers, something I had not considered. In doing so this made for a much shorter afternoon session as we always aimed to finish the day at 4pm. Notoriously Gambian people have little concept of time and whilst I was already aware of this, it did not prepare me for just how much time we would be waiting for people so we could begin. It is worth noting here though that teachers were travelling each day from far and wide and the road infrastructure and sheer volume of traffic in The Gambia, makes a potential 30 minute journey into a 1-2 hour journey. BUT their lack of time keeping skills very often spilled over into times when we had breakout group work and rest break times. I will be forever grateful to Lisong for continually and persistently rounding the trainees up and bringing them back on task.

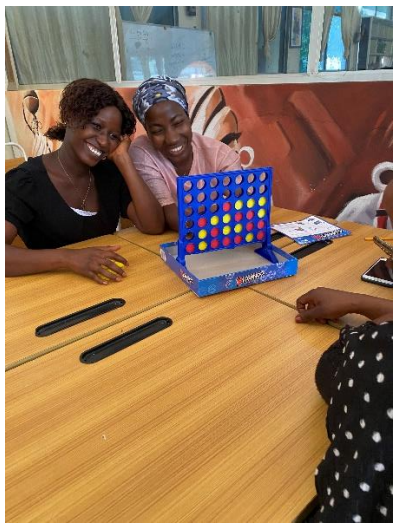
Each time I visit The Gambia I learn something new and this visit was no different. 'Patience' and there is 'a song for any and every event and occasion' was most certainly this visit's lesson to myself. Throughout the 2 weeks my patience was tested by time but this is also a very much loved aspect of The Gambia for me. Ndanka (slowly) is now a favourite word for me, however Gawal (quickly) was my favourite word for them!

As mentioned already many adjustments were made along the way as each day I would observe and assess the needs of the teachers whilst working with them and what was most important to them. Practical activities was most certainly a priority but in saying that a lot of new 'academic' knowledge was gained and retained by them, which was exceptionally pleasing. Each and every day brought a new song or several songs, which whilst initially frustrating was actually very important in terms of helping the teachers to get through the day and you have no choice but to just join in and go with the flow 😊. The songs also contributed to the strong bond and friendships I witnessed developing. The quieter members of the group grew in confidence and the more dominant ones relaxed, there was a very real sense of unity within the group of 19, who were of various ages and from varied backgrounds. That said, there were also moments of debate, at which point the teachers generally reverted from English to local language. Gambian people can be very animated when they are speaking and often you may mistake a general conversation to be an argument, I did begin to recognize the difference during my time there. Lisong to the rescue to diffuse arising situations, which were few thankfully. Here I referenced 'local' language. There are many in The Gambia; Wolof, Mandinka, Fula to name but a few, however generally all adults have a good level of English so communication was not too difficult. Their pronunciation and accent can sometimes leave you asking them to repeat please but in the main communication is good.

Very often during the training I was left bemused. Sometimes the most simple of tasks set would take exceptionally long periods of time to complete and much more explanation necessary, whilst there were more intense areas of the training that the trainees surprisingly took to straight away and really retained the information. There were many aspects of the training left incomplete which was a little frustrating, as had trainees been more time conscious and more focused particularly during group work time, everything would have been achieved. Nevertheless I can say that the bulk of what was planned was covered albeit some more briefly than originally intended.

Reflecting on the two weeks working in The Gambia and this particular training course, it is clear to me what needs to be adjusted for the course to run again with increased success. The trainees were an absolute joy to work with regardless of any mishaps we had along the way. Their enthusiasm, their unity and support for each other was incredible, they also did freely speak their minds if in disagreement with something, hence some good debates at times. Of course there was some reality checks in terms of the lack of resources to implement what was being asked of them but with encouragement and positivity, most began to see the benefits of the potential new way of teaching in early years and if I have managed to inspire even the smallest of changes, then I call that an excellent result. The Gambia will not change overnight no matter how much time, effort and money is poured into it. It is a developing 3<sup>rd</sup> world country with many many issues and barriers to change but through the generosity of volunteers who are able to pass on some knowledge and teach new skills, then aid is getting direct to the people, the heart of the country, exactly where it should be and best placed to have the most impact.













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