

LYNN EARLEY – EMMANUEL

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It is with a smile on my face that I start writing this report regarding my time at Emmanuel Advice and Care Centre. I am a Child Protection Social Worker in the UK so my experience is working with children and families.

I travelled to PE, South Africa for a month from 24 July to 20 August 2010 – the time flew by and a month is not long enough – I would definitely go for longer next time.

The trip was booked in November 2009 after having discussions with Kate on the telephone and I travelled with my husband.

Note from people and places: Lynn's husband, Michael, worked in Isaac Booie School

Neither of us had done anything like this before and my mood changed from being very excited to very nervous. Kate was very reassuring and confident in my ability even when I felt that I was not. I had received and read numerous volunteer reports but none particularly specific to my social work role. The reports did however give a good understanding of the Centre but everyone has a different starting point emotionally and experience wise so I read the reports in a very objective manner. In the end, I was just ready to go and face the experience.

The orientation by Calabash was vital as it gave a real flavour of PE. It highlighted the different types of townships – black, coloured, Afrikaans – as well as the more wealthy white South African suburbs. The tour lasted a morning and Nelson was very informative and energetic in his presentation. I had the opportunity to meet my colleagues at Emmanuel and this was comforting to me in that I finally had faces to go with names. In the afternoon there was a scheduled meeting with Paul at Calabash to hear the up-to-date news from the various projects. Mobile phones were handed out and these were vital to keep in touch with Calabash and other volunteers.

Where do I start with a summary of my time at Emmanuel? I think the easiest way for me to talk about my experiences is to divide it up into the different parts of my day – nursery, home visits and OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children). I had to be quite proactive in ensuring my time was spent in a productive manner and after a couple of days had managed to divide it quite well, for me and for Emmanuel. One could easily spend a lot of time doing nothing and it is down to the individual to instigate the work.

Note from people and places: some level of self-motivation is certainly helpful in getting things done. While all volunteers receive fairly detailed information from us about their project and placement, well before they travel, every placement will be enhanced by the volunteer's own observations. Be prepared to be proactive and discuss ideas with your local work colleagues and project management team.

Nursery – How can anyone not enjoy working with 20-40 (20 if it was raining and 40 if the sun was out) 3-5 year olds who are like sponges and want to learn songs, dances and be creative. The children are desperate for attention as generally children in SA are seen and not heard. I think it is really easy not to instil discipline with the children as you may feel sorry that they have HIV, are orphans and unkempt but that is not fair and the children are sparky enough to take advantage of that type of attitude! Pumesa is the nursery teacher (no formal training – only her own parenting) and she is under the watchful eye of Nellie (grandmother type figure who also prepares food in the kitchen). Nellie can resort to using her 'stick' to threaten the children as a form of discipline whereas Pumesa is learning that the respect she holds with the children can also command discipline. Pumesa is more tactile with the children and both Nellie and Pumesa care for the

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children dearly. I have respect for their role within the nursery as being in such a confined space with a room full of children is very, very difficult. I was left on occasions in charge and had chaos within minutes. What I did manage to help with was show the teachers how to interact with children creatively and get down to their level. I had taken a 'play parachute' with me and showed the teachers how all the children could hold the parachute and sing, make waves, make clouds, hide under it, wrap themselves in it and generally have fun. I also took some bean bags and showed the teachers how to do bean bag races, pretend the bean bag is a hot potato game, balance bean bag on the head or hide the bean bag games!

Note from people and places: learning through play – great for the children and for the staff!

The children had a good routine in the nursery which started with English and Xhosa prayers and hymns. I bought a CD for the nursery as the children just love to dance – it was a huge success. I bought 2 CDs which were worn out by the time I left but the children would listen and learn the nursery rhymes – Old Macdonald Had a Farm was very loud and the favourite with Rockin Robin a close 2nd!! One of the CDs had lullabies on it with my bright idea that the children could listen to that when they had their afternoon nap. It was all too exciting though and the afternoon nap was easier without!! The children generally have 3 meals a day in nursery – porridge, their own lunch (sandwich or fat cake – local yummy dumpling) and dinner which they ate or took home. Some children would bring more lunch than others and this was divided between the other children who hardly had anything. If the children left any piece of lunch (crusts from bread generally) it went in a bowl which the OVCs would then take from in the afternoon – which is difficult to watch.



The children went berzerk if I took my camera out to take photos. It would be very easy to create a dependency for a child by hugging them and carrying them around but this needs to be done carefully as when you leave this cannot be sustained and is unfair for the children. The nursery is soon to be split into 2 groups – 3-4 year olds then pre-school. This will be much better as the needs of a 3 year old are very different to that of a 5 year old. There were some very dominant characters within the nursery and the children use lots of smacking, fighting and posturing to challenge one another. I generally spent 2-3 hours a day in the nursery and loved every minute.

I was overwhelmed with the carers making me feel welcome and felt slightly under pressure when Estolene, Project Manager, said I had a 'free rein' to change anything. It took me days to try to understand how Emmanuel operates and really it is a bit 'random'. There is no record of the fact that a client is visited but then needs a follow-up visit – if the carer remembers themselves then that's good but if they are away, no visit would take place. Other volunteers have devised paper systems for keeping track of how many people were visited and by whom but, in my opinion, a lot of the paperwork completed was done just for the sake of completing the forms. It is difficult for the carers if the paperwork is frequently changed by different volunteers and so I did not interfere with this area.

Note from people and places: previous volunteers have tried hard to establish a system of record keeping which the carers are comfortable with – we shall continue to monitor this, and future volunteers may be able to 'tweak' the systems to make them more comfortable and therefore more effective.

I had to ask loads of questions and the carers were so patient with me. The best way to understand how Emmanuel works is to just go out with the carers and 'get on with it'. My visits ranged from visiting a man with TB who had been bed bound for weeks with no support for allowing him to toilet. I went on numerous visits to grandmothers who cared for their grandchildren when the parents had died. I visited lots of mothers with HIV who were trying to support a family on little or no income. The worst two visits were witnessing a cow head-butt a toddler into the air and fortunately watching the toddler bounce up OK, and talking to a grandmother (in a wheelchair) being looked after by her grand-daughter (who had a stroke) and then looking down to see a dog at my feet who had just been run over with its leg hanging off – somehow I managed to stay focussed on the family.

Other more light-hearted things occurred during visits - a pig and piglet entering a shack and a donkey mating another donkey at the door. I would always ask the carers who was on the list to be visited that day but the list was always invisible and even if I was told details of the list it would always change as we wandered through the townships and just dropped by to see people. In some ways that is the essence of the support that the carers provide – they just care for everyone and the majority of their work is informal counselling (even though they do not realise that themselves).

It is imperative to appreciate that the carers live and work within their own community. The carers themselves have difficult and complex lives and then come to work for R600 (c.£55) a month to help others with their problems – it is very heart-warming to see their dedication. With this in mind, I realised very quickly that without the carers there is no Emmanuel and I spoke with Estolene about how this could be acknowledged. The carers do not understand what a mammoth task they have and how proud they should be of themselves. Estolene said it was National Women's Day and as this was a Bank Holiday she would give all the carers a day off and organise a supper in the evening by way of reward. I wanted to mark this occasion with a memento and Estolene suggested that a personalised plate would be wonderful – part of my contribution went on these plates. With this in mind I took a photo of every carer and arranged for 26 plates to be made up within 2 days for the evening! The evening was amazing albeit starting an hour and a half late (which is normal for South Africa). I had the honour of presenting the plates to the carers who then said that they had something to cherish and could not believe that I would want to mark the occasion with such a gift especially for them. It was a very small gesture from me and I could not have imagined the impact that it had on the carers. The evening was such fun and I was very honoured to be a part of it.

I tried to guide the carers into realising that they cannot take on everyone else's problems and they cannot solve everything – this led to the workshops. Estolene had asked if I could do a workshop on Crisis Management and Stress Management – this was to all carers – 28 in total with carers from satellite centres. With some trepidation I did the Crisis Workshop to very blank faces and little response. Estolene had said that the workshop was too short – 40 minutes – but any longer and I would have lost the plot, and I thought they would too. I tried to impart my knowledge as to how to

categorise a crisis and how to be objective in situations. I left that day a bit down as I felt I should have approached it a bit differently. It was only the next day at the weekly meeting with Paul that the carers were talking about how fab the workshop was and were able to state very clearly what they had learned – I asked why they were so quiet yesterday and they laughed. I then had confidence for my Stress Management Workshop. It was the day after the party and I started the talk by saying that the carers were vocal last night and that was what I expected during the talk – I was not disappointed. The talk went on for 2 hours culminating in the carers doing hand massages on each other and then me demonstrating yoga and the carers joining in – I could not have imagined such a response!

The carers try to do the social worker's job and even though this is admirable I again tried to reiterate to them that they cannot do everything. The Social Worker referral form had been filed away and was not used because the Social Worker does not always turn up. After chatting with the carers we decided to try to use it again as it indicates a need for the social work service and is also a referral for the social worker to take away with her when she does attend the clinics. During my 3rd week a clinic had been arranged and 20 people turned up to see the social worker – unfortunately she did not turn up. I then sat with a carer and took all the details from everyone who had already waited for 2 hours so that their visit had not been wasted. No-one complained and instead thanked me for trying to help!

Note from people and places: local needs are so great, and resources and skills for clinics etc are so stretched, that long waits are commonplace – this is a fact of life that local people live with. Their patience and fortitude are impressive, and humbling.

I got to go to the local clinic (about 45 minute walk away). The clinic treats babies, children and adults together with a TB and HIV clinic. I was initially refused entry as the security thought I was from the local newspapers and one of the carers had to explain my role. I had gone with a lady who had not taken HIV treatment for 3 years – she said there was no point as she had no food and without food the treatment does not work. I had set up for her to have food from the vegetable plot at Emmanuel and soup from the kitchen and she was eagerly awaiting me at 8am in the morning – I was over the moon as I did not think she would turn up! We spent 5 hours at the clinic waiting to see the doctor, have blood tests and get the medication but we did it and sang all the way home. I saw the lady the following week and she was being supported by people in her community to take the medication and eat properly. I think about her a lot.



Picture of our walk home

Orphans and Vulnerable Children – no-one can prepare you for an afternoon at Emmanuel when the children turn up with a bowl waiting for their food. No-one argues, fights or gets agitated if the food is not ready – they just wait in line. Emmanuel has funding for 75 children a day and on most days there were 300 children – when the food runs out, that is it. I spent a couple of days dishing up a stew for the children and cannot believe that the food can be stretched so far.

My work with the OVCs was to focus on some basic forms of counselling for some children who had been bereaved. I had taken some specific books from the UK to use and workbooks too that the children could complete themselves. This was more difficult than I imaged due to the language barrier and even though I did some work with 3 children I did not want to delve into any formal counselling as this would do more harm than good. I got the impression that the supervisor in charge of OVCs expected that I would perform magic and that within days a child would overcome a bereavement. It took time to explain that this was not the case – when I was doing some work with one child all the carers came to look at what I was doing (even though I had gone through it with them beforehand) – I think they expected the child to say – oh I am fine now! I did not witness anyone else completing any work with an OVC and I got the feeling that work only took place when a volunteer was present – I may be wrong.

Note from people and places: the carers simply do not have the professional training and experience to carry out such delicate and skilled work. Small and gentle examples of best practise, as done by Lynn, will gradually build the carers' abilities and confidence.

As word got round that a volunteer was at Emmanuel my groups got bigger and bigger. The worst occasion was on a strike day (school teachers were on strike) and 2 other volunteers were at Emmanuel. The three of us were entertaining 110 children between us.

Note from people and places: when the schools are closed, there is really nowhere else for the children to go for attention, play, food etc

After that day I was more strict with how many children I worked with and unfortunately some children were disappointed. I generally had a core group of 20. We did lots of confidence building work through play – hand prints, clapping games, parachute games and bean bag games. These children were very special and on my last day one of the mothers came to Emmanuel to thank me for my work saying that her daughter had been really happy to talk about her work at Emmanuel.



In my last week it was decided on the spur of the moment that Roseline (carer) would now also be responsible for the OVCs so she helped me and I left her with a big list of games for the children. Roseline is a very special lady who is very able to carry out the task. She has huge insight into child development and behaviour – I just hope she gets the right support to carry out this mammoth task and cannot be run by one person.

Note from people and places: it's really helpful when volunteers are able to identify the potential in the people they're working with. Future volunteers can continue to build on such potential, and the skills share and learning can be extended to others.

I also had the opportunity to take a child to the dentist. She had been complaining of toothache for many months so I went with another carer to collect her from school and go to the clinic. By the time all the paperwork had been completed from school to say she was a scholar we got to the clinic just in time. There was a queue of children with tissues over their mouths waiting and screams coming from inside the surgery. The child was seen within 5 minutes and I had the opportunity to speak with the white South African dentist who explained that fillings are rare and most teeth are just taken out. This child had 2 teeth removed and was given 2 injections for the pain. I told the child to say to the dentist if she could feel any pain and she did and was given another injection. I am not sure if this was done just because I was there. There was no after care information given to the child so when we got back to Emmanuel I ensured the child had pain killers and was able to swill her mouth out with salt water. I have re-stocked the First Aid box at Emmanuel so it came in handy.

One day when the children were coming for their dinner a child was knocked over by a mini-bus outside Emmanuel. As I turned to look the child was being picked up by someone and made to stand. I took a carer with me to explain that the child should just be laid on the ground. Within seconds a hundred people had gathered around. The boy's leg was hurt and Voyo (carer) got me a piece of wood and I got a bandage and put it around his leg until the ambulance turned up – about 45 minutes later. It was a very difficult moment as I was a white person telling all these black people that the child should be kept warm and wait for the ambulance. His brother just wanted to carry him home but the child was also in shock.

My last day at Emmanuel was party time and I was overwhelmed with the send-off that I received. A top table was laid and food was prepared. The nursery children sang, followed by the Emmanuel choir, then the OVCs sang a song they had written, a play was acted out by OVCs, poems read by an OVC – all this went on for 3 hours. I got presented with a gift from Emmanuel and then everyone to say something about me – unfortunately I had no tissues only a toilet roll to hand! A representative from Calabash came whom I had not met before to present me with a gift – she unfortunately got my name wrong 3 times but no-one seemed to notice! I then left through a guard of honour which was lovely. I totally understand that this send-off is part of Emmanuel but I felt overwhelmed. I think a send-off is good but maybe it could be toned down for future volunteers to reduce the impact on the children.

Note from people and places: all projects really want to show their gratitude for volunteers' work and company – such a send-off is traditional in the local culture. A small part of the volunteer's financial contribution enables local people to show their appreciation in their own way.

We were so lucky to be in PE with 2 other great volunteers – one of whom we lived with. The leisure time was either spent at our home after work having a de-brief and a chat for a couple of hours. Sometimes we would take a minibus to the beach for a coffee or beer but this didn't feel right when we had left such deprivation. The Boardwalk in Summerstrand is an American style area where people can eat and drink – we only used it for the internet cafe. On the first occasion we could not believe that we were only 20 minutes away from poverty – but that's South Africa. Evenings were spent chatting with Mickey's family and friends with blankets around us as it got very chilly! We went to Plettenburg Bay for the weekend – hiring our own car and this was great –

got to see whales in the ocean whilst eating breakfast. We just booked into a B&B from the Rough Guide - £35 per night with amazing 3 course breakfast. We also went to Addo on a day off and again hired a car – much cheaper than taking a tour. The cars can be picked up at the airport and you can just ring the day before. A taxi can be taken to the airport to get the car – it is so easy.

Note from people and places: our local project management team can offer help and advice with all sorts of arrangements for trips and excursions – they are award-winning responsible tour operators

Living with Mickey was the icing on the cake. The experience would not have been the same by living in a hotel. The township embraced us and a walk down the street to catch a minibus was always long as we stopped and chatted to everyone. By living in a township you get to understand how people really live. I did not once feel unsafe or threatened by anyone – even though some people at home and in South Africa had told me I would be mugged, raped or murdered by living in a township. It was quite the opposite and obviously people who say such things have never had the privilege to live in a township. People wanted to know where we were working and who we were living with – word soon got round! Mickey's cooking was great and she was very prescriptive with what jobs she would expect you to do which was fine. My job in the evening was to dish up dinner – if someone else popped by at that time another plate would come out and the food would just be stretched a little further.

My advice to any future volunteer is to embrace every opportunity. You have to be open with people and put yourself 'out there' to get to know them and they will take you into their hearts. I think Emmanuel is quite unique in the way it operates. There is no point in going there and keep on changing things just because you think it might work better – they need a period of stability to get to grips with how they operate and to build their confidence. Without Emmanuel the community would suffer. It is difficult to put into words everything that they do but they are respected within the community and the carers are seen as a huge form of support. The carers are often powerless to do anything regarding grants or medical appointments but what they do is give their time and listen and that is priceless.

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