

# *Experience!*

News from volunteers on the Experience Exchange Programme (EEP)

ISSUE 4, 2007



***Experience!*** is the newsletter of the Experience Exchange Programme, a programme run jointly by USPG and the Methodist Church which offers volunteers from Britain and Ireland the opportunity to spend between six months and a year living and working alongside the church overseas.

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Cover: Alex, a student painted by EEP volunteer Rebecca Pennells while at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, in Kitwe, Zambia.



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# Editorial

**A** popular expression used in Christian mission, as well as by many humanitarian and aid charities, is: 'Make a difference!' It is claimed that 'You can make a difference', 'You can change lives', 'You can save the world', and so forth.

This kind of motivation is fine. However, what is often forgotten by those making such claims is the difference that cross-cultural exchanges can have on all parties.

Those of us who oversee the *Experience Exchange Programme* believe that God is the prime mover in all genuine transformation in the world – and this includes the transformation of EEP volunteers.

During the EEP preparation process, volunteers are reminded that they will notice signs of 'difference' and 'change' in themselves before they see any change in those they are working alongside.

Our volunteers are advised not to set themselves up with high expectations that might lead to disappointment. This is because there is usually not enough time on a short-term placement to detect change or discern authentic 'difference and transformation'.

Some are sent to prepare the ground, some to sow the seeds, others to reap – but all are doing essential work in the mission field. The one who really brings in the harvest and makes the 'difference' is God.

Being used by God as an agent in 'making a difference' is a humbling privilege, and



Having a ball on Cebu Island, Philippines.

those who put themselves forward to be used in this way should always acknowledge the prime mover in the venture.

In this edition of the EEP magazine, some of our volunteers reflect on the profound life-changing effect that happened as a result of the EEP experience. Their stories are amazing, challenging and enormously encouraging. This is what volunteering for the programme is all about – it might make a difference to you!

Habib Nader  
EEP co-ordinator

# A day in the life of

Civil engineer **Tom Wilkinson**, from Yorkshire, taught at St Thomas' College, in Gurutalawa, Sri Lanka. Tom is now exploring his calling and career options while serving with the L'Arche community in Liverpool.

**G**urutalawa – or Guru, as it's known locally – is a small Muslim village, high in the hilly rural countryside where the world-renowned Ceylon tea is grown.

Let me take you through a typical day.

At 5am, the village mosque sounds the call to prayer, then the school bell rings and the people start to go about their business (except me, if I can help it – it is very early!). Shortly after comes the dawn chorus, and then a slow repetitive clunk starts up next door as my neighbour begins crushing spices.

While the boys do homework, I rise, hoping there will be water and electricity for a hot shower and toast – luxuries that most people don't have.

If it's my turn, I lead chapel devotions at 7.45am, with Bible readings in Sinhala, Tamil and English, followed by a two-minute talk and prayers. These devotions are compulsory for the 35 Christian boys at the college. The other 300 boys meet for worship according to their own religions: Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. The school is a fine example of how Sinhalese and Tamil and Christian and Muslim can live happily together.

My first English class is at 8am. I teach English to Years 6 through to 10. The school has a reasonable supply of textbooks, but it is lacking in infrastructure, maintenance and IT facilities (there is no

access to the internet).

At lunch I sit with the boys in the dining hall and chat with them to help improve their English. Dinner is always rice and curry. Fortunately, I can afford to supplement it with garden vegetables, pineapples, bananas and mangoes bought in the village.

At 3pm we take afternoon tea, then it's time for sports and games. If I'm not otherwise engaged in English discussion groups, I join in with cricket, volleyball, basketball, badminton, swimming or, my favourite, rugby. My fitness has certainly improved.

The late evening is my own. I spend it catching up on world news or, if I must, marking books.

Housekeeping chores such as hand-washing clothes, sweeping down the cobwebs and washing the floor are done when necessary – I do so long for mod cons.

Some days I hop on the *fumey*, sweaty bus and go to the local town, Welimada. It is so overcrowded that people hang out of the doors, and each driver seems to invent his own set of road rules.

There are very few foreigners here. At first it was difficult to be constantly stared at, although I realised it was only innocent curiosity. Indeed, there have been occasions when parents have called their

# an EEP volunteer!

children over so they didn't miss the chance to see a foreigner in the flesh. On the plus side, everyone seems to remember me and be friendly.

Welimada is quite an experience – a place where you can get almost anything if you look hard enough through its dusty, ramshackle streets. Afterwards, I'm happy to return to the sanctuary of the school where I'm just 'Tom, Sir'.

The school is privately owned by the Church of Ceylon, but has fallen on hard times since the murder of its headmaster in 1989 in the headmaster's bungalow. There is still speculation over whether the killing was politically motivated or something more personal but, either way, the story seems to have deterred students from attending. Combined with the isolated rural setting, it is easy to see why the school finds it difficult to recruit qualified staff.

The school has been 'plundered' and is a mere shadow of its former glory. Currently

it is teetering on the edge of closure due to its unsustainable financial position – the teacher student ratio is too high. It would be a great shame if the school were to close. Some of the students are well off, but some are desperately poor. The poorest boys receive bursaries from the Church of Ceylon. For some students, the school is the only way for them to escape the increasing violence and get a solid Christian education.

I settle into bed about 10pm (late by Sri Lankan standards) and listen to the strange and exotic sounds from the forest: the dogs howling and the animals in the attic (polecats or rats?).

As I go off to sleep, I thank God for this wonderful experience. There have been difficult times and joyous times. I will be very happy to return home to a safe comfortable existence, but I'll miss St Thomas' dearly. ■

The Seema Malaka Buddhist temple, Beira Lake, Colombo, Sri Lanka.



Credit: Tom Wilkinson

# Volunteering changed my life

A placement at a children's home in Zimbabwe turned **Mandy Spalding** into a happier and more confident person.



**I**n 1999, I was 48 years old and had made a bit of a mess of my life: I lacked self-confidence, would say anything to avoid an argument, and was plodding through life with no real purpose.

Eight years later, I'm enthusiastic and assertive (almost too much!), I have a job that I love and I am making the most of every minute.

This change was brought about by the adventure I had as an EEP volunteer.

My placement was at a children's home in Zimbabwe. It was an amazing 10 months. Not only did I grow in confidence, but also my faith grew in leaps and bounds.

I experienced many highs and lows in Zimbabwe. I was used to being dependent on friends and colleagues, but in Zimbabwe I had no one to lean on, so I had to learn to trust God more and more. I came to realise that, whereas friends can let you down or not be there when you need them, God never wavers or judges and is always there when you call out to him.

I found it difficult to settle when I came home from Zimbabwe. In fact, I found coming home tougher than going out. Initially, I didn't feel that I had changed at all (that realisation came later).

After a year in England, I returned to Zimbabwe to see friends, and then I went on a mad backpacking trip around the world. My friends thought I was crazy, but I had a great time. I had been bitten by the travel bug.

It was shortly after that that the new me started to emerge. I took a job supporting families in the community, mainly working with special needs children, and, five years on, I'm still there. The hours are crazy and the pay is lousy, but I'm happy and, to me, that's important.

I still have strong links with the children's home in Zimbabwe – I'm on the home's executive committee and I'm a trustee for a support group here in England.

I went back to Zimbabwe for a second visit in 2005 and I'm planning another visit next year.

So, that's what EEP did for me. The change in me wasn't instant, but came gradually over the years. I'm a much happier person now and much more focused in my aims and ambitions.

If anyone reading this is considering becoming a volunteer, my advice is this: don't be put off by your age, past life or circumstances. Just go for it and I'm sure, like me, you'll find it a life-changing experience and the best thing you ever did. ■

# God was taking me beyond myself

Primary school teacher **Maureen O’Ryan**, from Hepdun Bridge, in north-east England, spent six months in Madagascar helping at schools run by the Anglican Church.



**I flew out of Manchester on Monday 9 January 2006 at 6.15am. I can still remember my feelings as the plane took off: I was well and truly out of my comfort zone.**

We had been advised during training not to have any expectations, and I certainly did not know what to expect. This was the next step on my journey: an open, empty book, with each page waiting to be filled with new and different experiences.

Before I left England, I was teaching at a small independent school with classes of no more than 22 children, and the furthest I had travelled was France for family holidays. What I experienced in Madagascar was very different.

My time in Madagascar had many highs and, yes, some lows. There were times when I felt blessed and privileged and times when I just wanted to curl up in bed and forget the outside world.

My book began to take shape as my placement took on an order and a routine that bore little resemblance to my life in England.

To get to the schools where I was teaching I had to catch two buses, travel

for at least an hour-and-a-half, then walk along dusty tracks for another 25 minutes – it was all very far removed from jumping in a car and driving in comfort along smooth roads for 30 minutes.

There were times, too, when I did not recognise myself. Was this really me standing in front of 73 adolescents waiting to hear my pearls of wisdom on the English language?

Over the months, I realised that I was not alone – God guiding me, challenging me and helping me to see qualities in myself that I was not aware of. This was a very humbling feeling, but also a feeling of great comfort and reassurance. God was taking me beyond myself, sheltering me under his wing and nurturing me.

The six months flew by and my thoughts began to turn to England and re-entry. Again, I did not know what to expect. My two sons had had birthdays while I was away; my younger son had also taken his GCSEs. Would they look any different? Would they have grown? Would they see any difference in me?

The book is not finished, but very significant and life-changing chapters have been written. ■

# I will never be the same again



**Muriel Rogers**, from Bury St Edmunds, completed a placement in Fiji in 2004. Through the experience, Muriel discovered new talents and interests.

**W**hen I went as an EEP volunteer to Fiji, I was asked to work with the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools and Colleges on a project looking at violence against women as a theological issue.

On my arrival, I was told the co-ordinator of the project had resigned, so I would be taking her place. I had expected just to be a pair of helping hands. Instead, I found myself heading up a committee comprising reverends, doctors and principals of theological colleges – all men in a strongly patriarchal and hierarchical society. My role was to help them to become aware of how their theological beliefs and training were contributing towards the violation of women.

As someone who has spent her life working in children's special education, I was outside my area of expertise.

One of my tasks was to organise a weeklong workshop for lecturers from schools and colleges in 23 countries, representing many different languages and 12 denominations. The logistics were a nightmare. I also had the difficult task of persuading college principles that it was a good idea to release key lecturers for a full week.

The workshop went ahead and a

diploma course was written looking at violence against women from a theological perspective. To use the terminology of the workshop, small fires were lit over the Pacific that now need to grow.

Although EEP volunteers are told not to expect to make a difference during training, the fact is that, on this occasion, I made a difference. This is not arrogance, it is factual, and also very humbling because I was only able to make a difference due to the immense courage of those people I was working with. I may have helped to 'light fires' in the Pacific, but the islanders themselves are the ones who must make them grow.

What effect did all of this have on me? While in Fiji I decided I would take an MA in pastoral theology, which I have now completed. I also discovered that I can write. In Fiji I wrote two workshop manuals and found myself writing my autobiography. I do not know where any of this will lead, but I do know I have discovered skills and resources that I did not know I had.

There has been great change, both for me and for my friends in Oceania. Where any of this might lead remains to be seen, but I will never be the same again, and nor will my new friends. ■

# I returned a different person

**Henrietta Blackmore**, from London, spent a year working with the Anglican Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She writes about how the experience has transformed her. She has since been offered a job with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Addis.

**A**fter 12 months as an EEP volunteer in Ethiopia, have I been transformed? Most certainly!

I come from prosperous and opportunity-rich city, so it is easy to see how living in Addis Ababa made me see myself and the world through different eyes.

In Addis I was surrounded by cloying poverty and desperation. I hated myself when the death of a beggar outside a local shop failed to move me to tears, but I discovered that developing a certain hardness was part of my transformation. I also found in me a practicality, focus and sympathy.

Aside from the poverty, there were flashes of promise: new businesses set up by the Ethiopian Diaspora, articulate civil society organisations, and university students committed to their education and each other in ways that put my own experience to shame. One reason that westerners should visit developing countries is to encourage such signs of promise and support those qualities that all countries need to grow: peace, stability, freedom and equality.

The EEP programme isn't just about 'experience', it is also about 'exchange':

building relationships between people from different parts of the world can be transforming for all concerned, even for communities as a whole.

I can't say whether my placement has had a big impact on communities in Addis, but I know that I am different from the person that flew out to Addis 12 months ago. I am more unsure at times – saddened and tired perhaps – but stronger, and more faithful and hopeful for Ethiopia and myself. ■

Credit: Henrietta Blackmore



Ethiopian Orthodox priests celebrate Meskel (The Finding of the True Cross).

# Strangers became my friends

**Ros Leigh** is a retired grants administrator and local preacher from Gloucester. She writes from South India where she is helping at the Arulagam Hostel for destitute women.

**D**uring my first few weeks on placement at the Arulagam Hostel, in South India, everything seemed unfamiliar and overwhelming: the heat, the huge numbers of people, the food, the noise, the routines – a bewildering set of circumstances.

But now I am coming to the end of my stay, the place feels like 'home'. I move around happily and find my way about untroubled. I have learned a great deal, not only about Arulagam and its people, but also about myself.

Inevitably, living in a hostel for destitute women, I have discovered a great deal about the position of women, especially poor women, in Indian society. Dalit women, in particular, have few opportunities and are considered by many as the lowest of the low.

In daring to stand up for justice, some of these spunky, sparky women are undertaking a dangerous course of action and risking a great deal, in rural parts of India in particular. I felt humbled to meet these women.

In a hospice I watched – and felt the

pain – of a grandmother as she nursed her small granddaughter, who was dying of AIDS. The women's daughter had already succumbed to the disease.

I sat with a mother in the hut she calls home, where she was trying to bring up four daughters in a ghastly slum, with no facilities except a lot of love and grinding hard work.

I have puzzled and wrestled with the sheer injustice of it all and wondered how such wrongs can be righted. I can't say I have the answers, except an enduring feeling that the poor must be empowered to fight for their rights, with the support of the wider global community.

It has been fascinating to live in a place where life is conducted 'in community'. This is difficult at times, when every move you make is watched and noted, and every detail of your life is considered open for discussion. Yet, with such a teeming population, how can the individual be valued without losing a sense of community? Not an easy balance to strike.

As for myself, I found resources within myself that I did not know I had. I have



Credit: Ros Leigh

tried to deal with situations by drawing on previous experiences and adapting them to the Indian way. I have missed my family, but not material things. I have glimpsed what it means to be a Christian in a society where you are very much the minority faith. I have sometimes been perplexed by decision-making, but learned not to always look at a situation through European spectacles (I wonder how often international diplomacy is

Dalit women in India have few opportunities and are considered by many to be the lowest of the low. Ros is on the far right.

plagued by this problem?).

I have been very lucky to have this opportunity later in life. On my return to England, I hope I can find a suitable way to continue working for the rights of Indian women – women who were strangers six months ago, but whom I grew to love and respect. ■

# Sharing in our common humanity

School librarian **Helen Ledger**, from Fleet in Hampshire, spent six months in South India and three months in Sri Lanka. She writes here about some of the highlights.

**I**n India, my placement was at the **Women Workers' Training Centre, Nagalapuram, in rural Tamil Nadu, the southern most state in India. The centre runs a range of programmes, all with one specific aim, which is to share the love of Jesus with everyone, regardless of caste or faith.**

Programmes run by the centre include a Bible cum vocational training school for teenagers and young women, development projects in 52 villages, a boarding school for girls and a village ministry to local Christians.

The centre is run by three selfless and hard-working Sisters from the Church of

South India: Kasthuri, Chellakani and Suthanthirakani. All three became friends.

Kasthuri, the centre's superintendent, is remarkable in the way she leads the whole organisation. Chellakani was the first woman pastor in her diocese and is a wonderful woman of prayer who gently challenged my faith by her total reliance on God and her constant raising of people and situations to God in prayer. Sweet and shy Suthanthirakani was extremely dedicated and tireless in her work, despite great risk to her personal health.

Happy memories include the lovely children and the delightful visitors to the day care centre for the elderly, whose smiles and welcome made me feel so at home.

A difficult memory was visiting the family of a 10-year-old boy who had died from an incurable illness only a few days before. The home was a one-room shack with no furniture and only a mud shelf for pots and pans. The parents were not there, but the grandmother was in tears. I felt so hopeless. All I could do was hold her hand and ask God to support this distraught family.



Helen with children who are supported by the Church of South India.

Opposite: a well in Nagalapuram.



Credit: Leah Gordon

In Sri Lanka, I met people who lived a more westernised way of life. I had the lovely experience of sharing a home with Dinusha, a young graduate starting a career as a librarian. I helped Dinusha to find her feet and I started an archive project for the Anglican Diocese of Kurunagala.

The people here were fearful about the escalating violence in their country – and I hear the violence is worsening. I have happy memories from Sri Lanka, though it is a deeply troubled country.

Taking up the challenge of being an EEP was so worthwhile: it was wonderful, sometimes sad, often inspirational and frequently filled with laughter. It was incredible to observe people with so little materially as they struggle with the hardships of daily life, and then to realise that their relationships are holding them together. To be among people, sharing our common humanity is probably the most important lesson I have come away with from my time as an EEP volunteer. ■

# ‘Now you are an African woman’

**Ann Porter** looks back on her experience teaching English at St Mark’s Theological College, in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Ann is retired and lives in Carlisle.

**Tanzanians care about people and have time for each other and the ‘stranger in their midst’. I was not a stranger for long.**

‘Welcome home,’ said my Tanzanian neighbour when I returned from a brief holiday. ‘Now you are an African woman,’ said the same woman as she put a kanga around my shoulders before I went to see the former president Julius Nyerere lying in state.

And, while I taught most classes in college, even those students I didn’t teach would stop by my office to talk.

Ordinary conversation in Tanzania often focuses on what God is doing in peoples’ lives and the trust that people have for his continued support. People sing hymns as

they work or walk down the street. My prayer time became more profound and my Bible reading more regular.

On Sundays, I listened to Anglican services in Swahili. Though I understood little, I felt able to worship with my neighbours.

While acutely aware of poverty in the country, I was also able to visit beautiful places during my placement and see wild animals, swim in the warm sea and observe the luxuries that only foreign holidaymakers can afford.

My farewell party was a lovely but humbling occasion with many expressions of gratitude and gifts from all sorts of people.

I came home with happy memories. Through email, it has been possible to communicate with some of the lovely Christian friends I made. This has made it possible to receive requests for prayers or send speedy replies to requests for financial help. I have also received visitors from Tanzania.

Going to Tanzania was a blessing for which I thank God continually. ■



Women’s church group in Tanzania.



# A rollercoaster experience

Currently between A Levels and university, sports enthusiast **Gareth Braisdell**, from Wrexham, reports from his placement with the Methodist Church in Belize, where he is working on church-run sports programmes.

**M**y interest in the EEP programme began when I picked up a promotional leaflet at the annual Greenbelt Festival.

I eventually sent off for more information and applied to take part in an 'Exploration Weekend' in Birmingham. I enjoyed the weekend and really felt the programme was for me, so I applied.

During my interview in London I tried to present an accurate portrayal of myself. The day went well and I was accepted. Soon after, I received the offer of a placement in Belize, helping with church-run sports programmes.

Never having travelled before, I think that I might have agreed to go anywhere. But having been sent to Belize, I can't imagine many places I would rather be.

After accepting my placement, I started to raise funds and get ready for the trip. I attended a 10-day preparation course in Birmingham, which is compulsory for EEP volunteers and has since proved invaluable.

I finally left for Belize on 2 January 2007, just a few days short of my 19th birthday. I was leaving behind family and friends and my girlfriend of a year-and-a-

half and, scariest of all, I was leaving my comfort zone.

I arrived in Belize as a stranger, having only spoken to a handful of people by email and just one person by phone. But since my arrival, I have met some amazing people and had experiences I couldn't have imagined.

I enjoy the work so much. I am teaching cricket and football at Wesley College, and I coach football at Trinity Methodist Church. I am also getting involved as much as possible in the life of the church, especially with young adults.

There have been days when I have felt a little down, but they are few and far between and totally outweighed by the good times.

Crossing cultures is hard work – you have to pick up on things pretty quickly – but, for the most part, people are respectful and understanding.

I have four months left in Belize and I know that, if the first three months are anything to go by, they will be filled with amazing things – my faith has grown and will continue to grow, and my eyes will be opened wider each day.

The EEP experience is a rollercoaster, but definitely worth the ride. ■

# Seeking peace

**Janina Zang** first went to Jerusalem as an EEP volunteer. She now lives there with her husband Johannes as USPG mission companions working on peace programmes.

**B**ecoming an EEP volunteer was, for me, a calling from God. When I applied, I was new in my Christian faith and longing to understand more about it.

I travelled to Jerusalem with much curiosity and a sincere willingness to understand the conflict, the various cultures and languages, and the importance of this region in global politics.

I discovered that the conflict between Israel and Palestine had more layers than the media was willing to portray. I understood that somehow we were all involved. I knew that Germany's attack on the Jewish community during the World War II was horrific, but I also came to realise that further pain was being caused

by the ongoing silence of the rest world towards the ongoing suffering of Palestinians under the Israeli occupation.

I learned that Jesus is still weeping over the city of Jerusalem.

Yet, despite the apparent hopelessness of the on-going conflict, I have come to see so much potential for this land to really become the Holy Land, and for its people to become a light to the nations.

I would like to quote Dr Maher Ayyad, the Palestinian medical director of the Anglican Hospital in Gaza, who said: 'The whole world should encourage the people of this land to make peace. People should be more open and believe that this is the land of God, which was given to all of us.'



The Tree of Life, by Janina Zang. This image shows Jesus' eyes and an olive tree, with the city of Bethlehem surrounded by the Israeli Separation Wall. The left side of the tree has died because of the pain caused by division and barriers. The pain reminds us of the crucifixion. Yet, the right side of the tree, which shows Jesus' birth, is filled with life and hope. Opposite: Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem.



Credit: Janina Zang

We can live together! They cannot dismiss all Palestinians, and we cannot dismiss all Israelis. Let us live and grow together. Killing will not solve anything! All who draw the sword will die by the sword! Let our children grow in a better atmosphere! Let us make this land the Holy Land!

Living now in Jerusalem, I pray that we

may all have some of the courage that Jesus showed in the midst of injustice. Just as he was, we need to be ready to change the world, even at the cost of our own lives. We need to be ready to be changed by God's grace and ready to leave hatred, ignorance and non-forgiveness behind. Only then can we finally live in abundance. ■

# Poetic reflections o

**Laura Jansson**, nee Smith, wrote this reflection after a year working on publications for the South Pacific Association for Theological Schools, in Suva, Fiji.

**A year ago, I hadn't been to Fiji, the Cooks, French Polynesia, Tonga, New Zealand or Vanuatu,**

I had never taught a class,  
Swum in a waterfall,  
Sat on a bus without windows,  
Danced in a tropical rainstorm,  
Kept a house on my own.  
I couldn't open a coconut except with a hammer.  
I hated bargaining.  
I took tap water for granted.  
I spoke more loudly.  
It was important for me to go out a lot.  
I was in the dark about colonialism and globalisation,  
Secure in my ideas of 'home', 'self' and 'culture',  
Convinced democracy was the only viable way,  
And much more 'sure' of the future.

**Before, I didn't know the difference between Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.**

No longer – because I have friends from each of these regions.  
I had never heard of Kiribati and certainly didn't know how to pronounce it.  
No longer – I can spot an I-Kiribati and tell her apart from a Tongan.  
I couldn't say 'hello' in Fijian.  
No longer – I can have a whole conversation and sometimes fool people

on the phone.  
I could happily stand to talk with a sitting person.  
No longer – I feel odd if I don't stoop, crawl and mutter 'tilou'.

**A year ago, I might have joked about men wearing skirts.**

Now I would notice more if a man were wearing something else.  
A year ago, I wore shoes and socks every day.  
Now anything but mud on my feet feels restrictive.  
A year ago, I thought 'cold' was when you got the scarf and gloves out.  
Now I feel cold at 24 degrees!

**Once, the people I considered friends were all of my own generation.**

Today, some of those closest to me are three times my age.  
Once, I could talk freely to an unmarried man.  
Today it feels odd for a man even to look me in the eye.  
Once, I had never met these people.  
Today, they are some of my best friends.

**Then, I would take a surreptitious look at a person whose skin was a different colour to my own.**

But now, I stare at white people because they look odd and incomplete.  
I believed racism was when dark-skinned

# n a year in Fiji



people were less likely to get a job. But now, my definition and my eyes have widened through my experience of racism directed at me.

**My understanding was that humans are individual things responsible mainly for themselves.**

But now, I have seen that one can represent many and many can act as one. Poverty and development seemed strictly economic categories.

But now, I understand that poor in GDP can be richer than the poor in spirit. I believed that the law and the police force

had superhuman objectivity and fairness. But now, I think things can be manipulated. I thought of the earth as a dead, passive thing. But now, it is vital to my spirituality. I had never seriously talked theology with someone of another faith. But now, I do so most days, even with shopkeepers and taxi drivers. I knew many things in my head that I didn't understand in my heart. But now, I have found more balance.

**A year – an eternity.**

**A year – the blink of an eye. ■**

# Return to Zambia was difficult

Journalist **Claire Price** spent six months teaching media students at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, in Kitwe, Zambia, in 2006. She returned for a brief visit in 2007, but was surprised by what she encountered.

**L**eaving Zambia was the hardest part of my placement. Harder even than arriving or settling in. So when I left in September 2006, I promised myself I'd return.

I kept to that promise in April 2007. It was wonderful to see my old friends again, from my host's family in Chimwemwe to the staff and volunteers at Mindolo. And it was great to be thrown back into the life of the college by being asked to facilitate a module for the media participants.

But my visit was difficult in ways I hadn't expected. I was braced to fall in love with Zambia again – to want to stay beyond the 10 days I'd planned – but instead I felt the opposite.

From the issues of poverty and

exploitation to AIDS and corruption, I felt burdened by Zambia's problems. In just 10 days I managed to forget about hope.

But I was reminded about hope by an email I received on my return home. It was sent by a colleague at Mindolo and contained six articles written by the media students I'd been teaching. Each student wrote about the challenges they faced in their daily lives, as well as their hopes for the future.

It moved me to hear their voices. These were young people who had been brought up among such hardships but who still believed in a bright future. They hoped to write freely in the press, to own a house and a car and to raise a family in peace.

I find it harder to feel hopeful for Zambia now that I can see its problems more clearly. But that's surely when hope becomes imperative.

My second visit hasn't left me longing to return, as before. It has, however, deepened my understanding of the challenges facing Zambia, and my respect for those who overcome them. ■



Claire Price found Zambia to be a different place the second time she visited.

# Experience God's transforming love

Nurse **Gillian Portch**, from London, writes about her six-month placement at the Anglican Eye Clinic, in Jachie near Kumasi, Ghana.



**M**y placement made me aware of just how much God can use ordinary people to further his plans for transformation.

The Ghanaian staff at the clinic put all of their skills, energy and enthusiasm at the clinic's disposal. What was particularly noticeable was the sheer numbers of hours they put in: no 30-hour working week here – more like 50-60 hours. And this time was not given for personal profit, but to God, for the general good.

This commitment has enabled the clinic to reach out to rural villages and schools where ophthalmic intervention had not previously been offered – places where children struggled with eye disease and blindness as well as poor vision. On a typical visit, a whole school and village could be seen, sometimes over 100 people.

After work, the staff continued giving by helping with church services and other church activities.

While on placement, I was greatly helped by an auxiliary nurse who, on top of her clinic and family duties, helped me with cooking, cleaning, shopping and other chores. This was extremely useful for a

volunteer struggling to work and keep on top of housework without such handy devices as a washing machine or a vacuum cleaner.

Ghanaians look for signs of God's will in every circumstance. You encounter it everywhere and it is very refreshing. A taxi, for example, might have a text written on the windscreen, or a shop might display a sign reading 'By His Grace'.

It is quite different in England, where it is difficult to see the influence of Christians and Christianity because most service provision comes from the state or secular organisations. However, my experience in Ghana makes me think that we should at least look for the presence and influence of the gospel in daily life, if only to assure us that God is at work in the secular world as much as in church.

While in Ghana I met volunteers from a variety of countries. What they all had in common was love, energy and enthusiasm. And so I would like to say to anyone considering an EEP placement that God will use you to help further the work He has in hand. Being an EEP volunteer is not just a 'work placement' – it is a chance to experience God's transforming love. ■

# EEP placement led to a new job



**Laura Barber**, from Stoke-on-Trent, looks back on her six-month placement with the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Cape Town, South Africa. She is now a youth and children's worker.

**I sensed I was being called to go abroad after university. The placement offered was with the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd, in Grassy Park, near Cape Town, South Africa.**

Life in South Africa was very different from what I was used to. While I always had water, and had electricity most of the time, just two doors down from where I was staying there were houses made of corrugated iron with no access to amenities.

At first I was not allowed to go anywhere alone so, until I learned the ropes, my first two months were characterised by frustration at my lack of freedom. I had to learn to act as if I was a local. A friend asked me how I coped and I replied that 'everyday is a challenge yet to be overcome'.

A word of advice: don't become a volunteer to get away from things. Being 6,000 miles from home can be incredibly difficult, especially when family members back home are ill. But God was with me and I always had the support of friends and family, at home and in South Africa.

In South Africa, religion is a normal part

of everyday life. It became normal for me to say grace before every meal and insert 'God willing' into sentences.

I had a variety of roles and did many things. I worked in the church office and went on pastoral visits. I attended a service with 5,000 people when the region of False Bay became a diocese. I organised a 'bin bag' fashion parade at the Parish Planning Day. I became a confirmation instructor, played my flute in the worship band, and worked as a classroom assistant. Among other things, I also became a senior youth group leader and helped to organise a youth concert.

But it wasn't all work. I loved the 'braais', which are South African barbeques, and I visited Kruger National Park and Lesotho.

After returning to England, I had a strong sense that I was being called to work with young people in a Christian setting. I spent six months looking for the right position while doing various jobs, and eventually received a phone call from a South African vicar in Kent inviting me to become a youth and children's worker at St Laurence's, in Hawkhurst, Kent. The job came as a direct result of my EEP experience. ■

# Hosting volunteers

St John the Baptist Anglican Church in Walmer, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, has hosted several EEP volunteers. Here are Reflections from the host and visitor.

## **T**he Revd Robert Penrith, of St John's, writes:

St John's has hosted a number of young and enthusiastic EEP volunteers over the years. Each time, when finalising arrangements for a new volunteer through USPG, I found myself a little apprehensive about who might be coming our way. But, on every occasion, the volunteer has brought a dynamic and a gifting that has benefited both them and us.

It has been wonderful to receive young people who come with a real intention to learn and to serve. On one occasion we were blessed with a precious musician (Alison Fowler) who ministered regularly with her violin during times of worship and in a healing ministry team.

On another occasion we received a young woman (Kathryn Mowatt) with partial hearing who helped us to be sensitive to the needs of those with similar needs. She was loved by the young folk she served.

Faye Woollard was our most recent EEP blessing. She came with a mind and a heart determined to know more about her own journey in the faith. What a blessing it was to share with someone who intentionally used the period to enquire and share. Faye served in our youth department and at our Centre of Concern alongside orphan children – some of them with HIV/AIDS and all of them in need of

love and care. She also helped us to set up a crèche for disadvantaged children. Faye was a delight to have with us for the short time she was here.

But the EEP programme is about much more than people having a good time together. The strength of the programme is that it affords these young folk a gap year in which to be challenged and encouraged in their faith and in their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. For the receiving parish, it is a blessing to be able to give to our visitors, and it is wonderful to receive the blessing that they are to us.

## **Volunteer Faye Wollard said:**

If ever your faith is weak or you are in need of tangible assurance that our Lord reigns, just come and see what St John's is doing and you will see that our Lord is most definitely at work in people's lives. ■

The Revd Robert Penrith (centre) with church staff and Faye Woollard (in red).



# Getting ready to go

**Val Ogden** and **George Wauchope** of the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies (SOCMS), part of the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, write about the EEP preparation programme.

**Yes, people do just leap on a plane and go, but USPG and the Methodist Church offer EEP volunteers a week-long residential preparation programme at SOCMS before departure for three very good reasons.**

- ▶ Our volunteers are worth it! We take your motivations, questions, anxieties and needs very seriously.
- ▶ God's church is worth it! We want to model good partnership with our companion churches and projects worldwide by helping EEPs prepare in body, mind and spirit.
- ▶ God's world is worth it! We believe that thinking seriously about global and cultural issues is vital for anyone about to be immersed into a very different place and life.

## **So what actually happens during the preparation programme?**

Day by day, we follow a programme of worship and prayer, seminars, visits, discussions, activities and group work, all designed to be interactive, participatory and thought provoking. Training topics include:

- Crossing cultures with awareness and care
- Communicating cross-culturally;
- The bible and mission;
- Regional briefings;
- Staying healthy physically and spiritually;
- Poverty, wealth and globalisation;
- Worshipping in a different context;
- Seeing God through different eyes;
- Understanding a multi faith context;
- Education, children and young people;
- Photography, newsletters and communications;
- Exploring departure and re-entry.

We present a variety of perspectives on mission and explore how we can learn from encountering difference.

We also learn a great deal from one another. Every group of EEP volunteers is full of people with experience, wisdom and good ideas already, and every training week builds on that, and promises a firm foundation for friendships, learning and a lifelong interest in global mission. ■





# Volunteers 2007

**Sandra Wilson, Brazil:** A radiographer and local preacher from Cheshire, is attached to the Methodist Community of Street People in Sao Paulo.

**Dan Knights, Mauritius:** Before starting medical school, Dan from Newcastle is helping with youth work in the Anglican Diocese of Mauritius.

**Sally Chapman, Ethiopia:** Social housing worker Sally is taking a career break to support the work of the Anglican Church with refugees in Addis Ababa.

**Adrian Hendry, Zambia:** A farmer from Mullion Heston, Cornwall. Adrian is based at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation helping with their outreach and farming projects.

**Kiran Griffin, Mauritius:** Kiran, a special needs teacher from Dublin, Ireland, is teaching and helping with the Anglican Diocese's children's work.

**Joanne Dolman, Kenya:** Jo, a nursery nurse from Stoke-on-Trent, is helping at the Meru Children's home.

**Becky-Ann Williams, Ghana:** An ophthalmic nurse from Bournemouth, Dorset, is helping at the Anglican Eye Clinic in Kumasi.

**Claire Rawlinson, Gambia:** A primary school teacher from Stoke-on-Trent, is helping with the Methodist Church school.

**Valerie Young, South Africa:** An experienced nurse and trainer from Aylesbury, is based at St Mark's Anglican Church, Cape Town and helping with life skills training and workshops.

**George and Mione Goldspink, India:**

A retired lecturer and a retired GP respectively from Bishop Stortford, are helping at a rural development project.

**Emma Culliford, The Bahamas:** Emma, from Aberdare, South Wales, is spending her gap year with the the Anglican Church in The Bahamas Youth work team.

**Lizzie Poole, Peru:** Lizzie, from Ashford, Kent, is helping with the ministry to young people of the Anglican Church in Lima.

**Marion Evans, Ghana:** A retired head teacher from Welshpool Powys, is teaching at the Wesley Girls High School, Cape Coast.

**Hannah Facey, Ghana:** On her gap year before going to study anthropology, Hannah, from Epsom, Surrey, is helping at the Methodist Nursery at Nkanfoa.

**Fiona McLees, South Africa:** Fiona, a nurse and careers adviser from London, is helping at the HIV/AIDS outreach project of the Anglican Holy Trinity Church in Port Elizabeth.

**Thomas Jones, South India:** From Yeovil, Somerset, Thomas is helping at a rural development project in Tamil Nadu during his gap year before starting a career in the Army.

**Emmanuela Williams, Uruguay/Cuba:** A final year student from Roehampton University, Emmanuela is helping with youth work in the Anglican Churches and practicing her Spanish.

# >> Aims of the Experience Exchange Programme

**The programme offers opportunities for individuals to serve as volunteers in another part of the world for six to 12 months.**

- >> **Learn** from the experience of living alongside Christians in a community from another culture.
- >> **Share in the life** and mission of a local church and, in so doing, develop personal and spiritual gifts.
- >> **Share sensitively** your own faith and gifts in offering service to that community.
- >> **Deepen your understanding** of issues of global development and justice in relation to your faith.
- >> **Raise awareness** among members of the churches in Britain and Ireland about the practical and spiritual realities of the lives of people in other parts of the world.



Children at St Thomas' Church, photographed by Sue Finney in Lomahasha, Swaziland.

# All you need to know about EEP

## **What is the Experience Exchange Programme (EEP)?**

EEP is run jointly by USPG and the Methodist Church. It is a programme which enables volunteers, who must be resident in Britain or Ireland, an opportunity to work in a different culture and environment, and experience the church in another part of the world.

## **What do EEP volunteers do?**

Previous volunteers have taught in schools, worked on agricultural, building and health projects, helped in vocation and rehabilitation institutions, and assisted in administration and children's and youth work schemes, according to the needs and requirements of the placement and the local church.

## **Where are the EEP placements?**

EEP placements could be anywhere in the world. Placements are negotiated by the programme for each volunteer, taking into account personal preferences and availability. To date, we have placed EEP volunteers in countries in Africa, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and Oceania.

## **How long do EEP volunteers spend overseas?**

Six months minimum, up to 12 months maximum.

## **What skills are required?**

No special professional skills are necessary. However, where the volunteer has professional skills that may be considered during the search for a placement.

## **Is there a denominational requirement?**

EEP volunteers come from all denominations and church backgrounds.

## **How much does it cost?**

Volunteers are self-funded. The programme offers a grant towards airfares. EEP volunteers usually have to raise about £2,500 to cover airfares, health insurance, some living allowances, training and preparation.

## **What is the age requirement?**

EEP volunteers must be 18 years or older at the time of travel, but there is no upper age limit. We have sent volunteers aged over 70 years.

## **How can I find out more?**

Contact the following staff:

### ***At USPG:***

Habib Nader, USPG: Anglicans in World Mission, 200 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4YB  
Tel: 020 7378 5677  
Fax: 020 7378 5650  
e-mail: [eep@uspg.org.uk](mailto:eep@uspg.org.uk)

### ***At the Methodist Church:***

Jane Cullen, The Methodist Church, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR  
Tel: 020 7486 5502  
Fax: 020 7467 5283  
e-mail: [eep@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:eep@methodistchurch.org.uk)



# Visit us at Greenbelt

Come and visit the **Experience Exchange Programme (EEP)** stall at the annual Greenbelt Arts Festival.

This is your chance to meet EEP volunteers and find out how an overseas placement with the world church could change your life.

**For more information about EEP, phone Habib Nader on 020 7378 5677 or Jane Cullen on 020 7486 5502. Alternatively e-mail [eep@uspg.org.uk](mailto:eep@uspg.org.uk) or [eep@methodistchurchorg.uk](mailto:eep@methodistchurchorg.uk)**