

Nicci Maxwell

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The call in action

Dear family and friends,

My previous letter was written in the midst of a COVID peak under strict lockdown, with full hospitals and dwindling oxygen supplies. Praise God that things have settled down again and lockdown rules have been significantly relaxed. Schools remain closed but plans are underway to reopen fully in January. The youngest children have not been at school since March 2020 and one estimate is that there will be 7 million children eligible to start their first year of primary school in January. Please pray that there will be sufficient resources for all these new pupils and that the older children who have been away from school for so long will return. Churches are open and social gatherings are almost unrestricted again. Practically, in Kisoro, the national rules feel almost irrelevant as people get on with daily life without much thought about COVID.

God protected our team during the peak in amazing ways. A young local man who was volunteering with us continued to come to work every day while hiding the fact that he was unwell, in the eight days that he waited for his PCR test result and for two days after he knew he was positive (until someone else told us what they thought we should know!). The paediatric ward at the government hospital closed completely for two weeks in July because every staff member had COVID. Yet not one member of our team became ill. I am conscious that it is only by God's grace that we can stand as a team in prayer each morning with everyone in good health. Most of our team have now had two doses of the Astra Zeneca vaccine. One or two are still reluctant to accept the vaccine at all, but when viewed against a total of just under 1 million people in the country having been fully vaccinated and vaccine uptake among health workers thought to be around 30 per cent, we are doing ok!

I don't really want to say much more about the work at Potter's Village in this letter, even though much has been happening – some of the photos will show you more and there's always more on my blog. The work at Potter's is well established and serves a population of people who are able to pay something for their healthcare, but it doesn't provide for the poorest families in Kisoro for whom good quality paediatric care is not accessible at all. One of the most marginalised groups in our region are the Batwa. You may recall that the Batwa are the pygmy people who were forcibly moved from their traditional forest homes in the early 1990s to make way for gorilla conservation. There are now dozens of Batwa communities settled all across south west Uganda. The group I have been privileged to interact with are



Name: Nicci Maxwell

Location: Kisoro, Uganda

My call: To use my medical skills to show the love of God to the people of Kisoro, Uganda.

My role: Providing paediatric and neonatal medical care to the community, and providing training, mentorship and support to local healthcare workers.



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My visits to Mikingo village are always escorted by groups of Batwa children.

a community of around 160 people living near the centre of Kisoro town in Mikingo village. They are a very deprived community that suffer discrimination in all aspects of life. Levels of poverty, unemployment, violence, substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases are extremely high. They are suspicious of attempts to help them and are often unwilling to engage with health services. The Diocese of Muhabura runs some outreach activities in the community, particularly with respect to agriculture and, during lockdown, some basic literacy and numeracy for small groups of children.

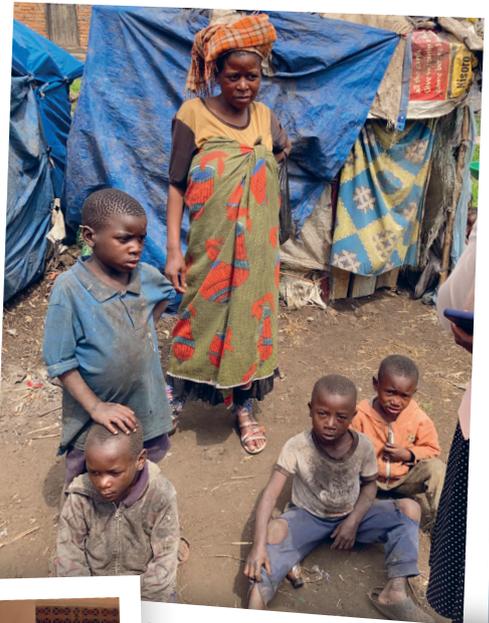
Early this year, with financial support from a project based in Australia, we added healthcare to the support offered to this Batwa community by the diocese. Community members, particularly children and pregnant women, can now receive care at Potter's Village free of charge with costs paid by the Australian group. Initially the Potter's staff team were somewhat reluctant to interact with these marginalised people, but they have adapted wonderfully and over the past few months the number of Batwa attending has been growing steadily. We have safely delivered at least one baby each month and many children have received outpatient care with several being admitted. The ability to provide food and other practical needs for mothers while they or their children are admitted (something that is not given to other patients) is a real attraction for the Batwa, who are not usually the recipients of special treatment.

In addition to the clinic-based care, I also visit the village regularly which allows me to get to know people more personally and identify children or adults in need of care. On one occasion I walked with a young mum and her sick newborn back to Potter's Village so the child could be admitted for antibiotics. If we hadn't found her, I don't know if the baby would have survived. Mostly I just end up identifying children needing immunisations or treatment for skin infections and trying to do some simple, opportunistic health education. Over the coming months we aim to target the high prevalence of syphilis in the community by offering education, testing and treatment to anyone who wants it. Please pray that the community will take up this offer.

There's probably a lot more to say but I'm running out of space! By the time you read this letter it will be very close to Christmas (or even after!), so I wish you a very joyous and peaceful Christmas and a blessed 2022. I hope to be able to meet up with many of you in person in a period of "home assignment" in the UK in the first part of the new year.

With love to you all,

Nicci



Photos from top to bottom: A Batwa mum in front of her home with children from the village; The Potter's Village staff team looking smart and COVID-ready; Staff at Kisoro Hospital were delighted to receive a copy of the British National Formulary to help with safe prescribing; (left to right) Bishop Cranmer, our administrator Idah and diocesan secretary Stephen at the commissioning of a new consulting room at Potter's Village.

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If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

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