

Joe and Lois Ovenden

Spring Greetings

April 2021

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Dearest friends,

Greetings from the UK! That's right, we made it! The travel was inevitably more complicated than usual, but all went smoothly in the end. After a genuinely wonderful and restful quarantine in a house generously provided by our church in Sheffield, we are now with Joe's parents in North Yorkshire. We were truly blessed by friends and family in making our quarantine such a lovely time and it feels good to be back and to see loved ones again, even if it's at a distance. Seeing the joy of the cubs reunited with grandparents has been wonderful. We haven't yet seen Lois' family, although we are hoping with easing of restrictions that we will be able to see them soon, even if not able to hug them just yet.

The run up to leaving was extra-busy with trying to leave things set up for us being away whilst also getting things prepared for Home Assignment. Lois and Isaac were working on re-establishing some therapy groups, starting with Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy (see photo), which were really well attended. The Gulu Down Syndrome Support Group, with the help of Isaac, hosted a celebration for World Down Syndrome Day again. Lois was disappointed not to have been able to attend as we were already back in the UK.



Miriam, our therapy assistant, is now on maternity after the safe arrival of her little boy, for which we are very grateful. We are really pleased that Beatrice, the nursing assistant who previously helped Lois in clinic, is joining the team again whilst Miriam is away. It's great to have her back with us.

One of the barriers to the speech therapy work in Gulu is a lack of access to paediatric audiology. Currently audiology patients need to travel to Kampala which is often prohibitively expensive. We are therefore delighted that Isaac has managed to get a place on a weekend audiology diploma course. This will be a lot of work for Isaac: running clinic in the week and travelling to Kampala to study at the weekends. He is still waiting for the course to start, but please pray for him as he prepares for his studies.

Schools have finally started to reopen in Uganda and we are hopeful that by the end of June all school years will be open. This process is not straightforward and there are a lot of barriers to children returning to school. In Uganda, you have to pass end-of-year examinations before being able to progress to the next year-group. Children are being required to take exams despite not having attended school for a year and families will still need to pay fees and 'requirements' both for this year and last! Please pray that barriers will be overcome so that children return to school quickly. This is particularly an issue for girls whose families may no longer choose, or be able, to send them. Praise God that in March Uganda received its first consignment of Covid-19 vaccines. Please pray for the roll out of vaccinations which, at the moment, seems somewhat unclear.

Thank you for your prayers about finding a new office space for the team. Significant progress has been made on this front and we're hoping to be able to make formal announcements soon. Progress is a little slow-going, and now that Joe is not in-country some elements are inevitably made trickier. Pray that God continues to make a way and that progress will continue whilst we are away.

Home assignment is going to look a lot different this year as now all of our visits will be online. We have already met virtually with 5 churches, and it has been lovely to see old and new faces, even if it is over a screen. We would value your prayers as we share with other churches. Pray that we will be effective communicators. One advantage of not doing in-person visits is that it means we are doing a lot less travelling than usual, which we hope will mean a more restful and refreshing home assignment. We both feel in need of physical, emotional and spiritual refreshment.



Home school continues whilst we are back, although we haven't found a good rhythm for this yet. The sheer contrast of life here to our home in Gulu is an education in itself. At the moment home school has a distinctly 'Forest School' feel with den building being top of the subject list. We are really blessed with the rural location of Joe's family allowing the children to be outside for much of the day, even in temperatures 30°C below what

they're accustomed. The British spring is being generous in its variety of weather: the children were thrilled with a tiny amount of snow and quickly set about making a miniature snowman (see picture).



We missed getting this letter to you before Easter, but we hope that for you it was a time of celebration and renewed hope after what a friend aptly described as a 'yearlong lent'. We pray in this new season, that you will encounter the Risen Jesus and new life. In the UK it's spring and in Uganda the rains have come, marking the end of dry season. New life abounds. Our prayer for you is also a prayer for ourselves, that Jesus would bring new life to parched places in our souls, blossom onto our bare branches and fresh fruit in our lives and the lives of the ones we love.

*See! The winter is past, the rains are over and gone,
flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come.* (Song of Songs 2:11-12)

With much love and every blessing

Joe, Lois, Connie, Reuben and Eleanor

xxxxx

If you would like to support Joe and Lois Ovenden by prayer and committed regular giving, visit bmsworldmission.org/partners or call 01235 517617 for a 24:7 Partners leaflet.

