

Uganda TeamMED trip 2017/2018

Team Uganda 2017/2018 travelled to Uganda in January 2018, where we enjoyed an absolutely amazing and incredibly rewarding volunteer experience. As we saw in Uganda, medical care (and particularly supplies) are greatly needed in remote regions. Our trip involved fundraising and gathering medical supplies for a community clinic, running medical exercise days for local communities, and participating in dental awareness workshops for children in regional villages.

Thanks to the generosity of friends and family, colleagues, and various organisations, we raised over \$10,000 for the Suubi Community Health Centre and the Centre for Youth–Driven Development Initiatives (CFYDDI). Both the Suubi Centre and CFYDDI are Ugandan grassroots organisations that aim to improve the health outcomes of local communities. The Suubi Centre is partnered with Help Us Grow (HUG), an Australian non–profit organisation that places great emphasis on sustainable, community–driven initiatives. We also sourced approximately 80 kilograms of much–needed medical supplies for the Suubi Community Health Centre, and over 2 000 toothbrushes and toothpaste for CFYDDI’s dental day workshops. All these, along with us five eager medical students, arrived in Entebbe airport in early January 2018.

We began our trip with a three–day safari, which was an excellent way to bond as a team, see gorgeous wildlife, and become acclimatised to Ugandan culture.

The team then travelled to the Suubi Centre in the rural village of Lubanda, in the Lwengo District in Uganda. The Suubi Centre is now ten years old, and has established itself as a community organisation that offers medical care (at the health clinic), as well as education (at the Suubi secondary school) and vocational training for local youths. The staff at the Suubi Centre were so welcoming, and we were all eager to learn from each other as we set up for the annual TeamMED medical exercise clinics.

During our stay at the Suubi Centre, we performed screening tests for common infectious diseases and collected data on disease prevalence. We also conducted two outreach clinics to remote villages; these communities would have not otherwise received healthcare, so these clinics were particularly rewarding. In total, we saw over 200 patients, and provided medical supplies and funding to diagnose and treat many more. We spent our free days enjoying local foods and sights in the village, as well as visiting the Suubi Secondary School. The team was also lucky enough to participate in a traditional introduction ceremony (sort of like a Ugandan engagement party) where gifts were given and received by both families.

Our next stop was CFYDDI, where we conducted 8 dental workshops with local communities, teaching children the importance of dental hygiene and how to brush our teeth. We even had the opportunity to visit villages on a remote island in Uganda, where availability and access to even the most basic medical care is extremely limited.

We were then blessed by the rains (and dust!) in Uganda as we spent our final night in Entebbe.

The TeamMED Uganda trip was a unique opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the country, learn about healthcare and community health issues, and actively engage in a worthwhile global health initiative. Funds and supplies will help alleviate resource shortages in the Suubi Centre, and allow it to expand its scope. For example, staff at the centre soon hope to provide dental care for local communities.

At times, seeing first-hand the lack of access to medical care and cultural differences in Uganda makes for a confronting experience. However, as a team, we were able to work through them and reflect on this opportunity to broaden our horizons. After having gone on this trip, it is safe to say that we are all inspired to continue contributing to global health initiatives. I strongly recommend the TeamMED Uganda trip to anyone passionate about global health and looking for an opportunity to become actively involved in such a rewarding way.

Amy Yang

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