



Maisie and Rebecca high five children in Uganda



Graeme Robertson/GCE UK

Young Ambassadors diary from Uganda

Maisie le Masurier and Rebecca Unwin are the 2014 Young Ambassadors for the Send My Friend to School campaign. They have just returned from Uganda, with the charity Sightsavers and the Global Campaign for Education where 22% of primary aged children don't go to school. Worldwide 1 in 3 children missing out on school have a disability. Maisie and Rebecca met some of these children who face enormous obstacles in getting to school and also saw some steps towards progress. Here is an extract from their diary...

Arriving in Kampala

After a long journey we arrived in Kampala and caught a glimpse of Ugandan culture and way of life as we bolted along the chaotic roads to our hotel. There we met Juliet, the Sightsavers Education Programme Officer who made us feel extremely welcome.

Hearing about the challenges

Today we met with a number of organisations campaigning hard to get education for all. Again and again we heard the same obstacles for disabled children; lack of special schools, long distances to existing schools; school fees; lack of equipment, materials and facilities; and a lack of trained special needs teachers. And worse still, there is a strong feeling amongst many people that children with disabilities aren't worth educating!

Meeting inspiring young campaigners

And then we met three visually impaired young campaigners. We were very inspired by the great work they are doing to change negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and to give young people a voice so they have



Rebecca and Maisie talk to pupils at Bishop Willis Primary



Kate McCoy/Sightsavers

Rebecca and Maisie with Peter at Bishop Willis School

a say in their own education. They run radio programmes, leadership training and educate students on their rights.

Children out of school in rural Iganga

When we arrived to visit Nabirye we were surrounded by local schoolchildren laughing and giving us high fives. It was incredibly eye-opening to see the harsh divide between these happy children and then, to see Nabirye, huddled on the floor, barely raising a smile.

Nabirye, 15, had to drop out of school when she was 10 because she couldn't see the chalkboard, and her school was unable to help her. Nabirye told us how isolated she felt, and longs to go to a school where other pupils have disabilities so she wouldn't feel like this and would get better support, but there are no schools like that nearby.

Dreaming of going to school

Hamza's father is also blind and struggles to support the family so can't afford the fees to send Hamza to a school equipped for visually impaired children. He told us how lonely he feels when his friends head off to school; he sits on the same chair all day, every day, thinking of the morning he'll wake and be told he can go to school.

Meeting these children today has been upsetting, but filled us with more motivation to help.

Visiting inclusive schools

We visited the friendly Bishop Willis Primary School where there are 56 visually impaired students who all participate in classes with sighted children - integrating with society. There is also a special unit to support individual needs. The materials were basic, with only 2 braille machines, but we were heart-warmed to see how they made the best of the few things they did have.

Send ALL My Friends to School

It was there we met Peter, and it is children like him who made us want to become Ambassadors for the Send My Friend campaign. Despite not being able to see who, or what, is around him in class, Peter is happy - singing little melodies under his breath as he works.

Peter's teachers looked beyond his disability, and invested in educating him. He now has a great future. But what about the other children who's potential is not being realised?

It is so important that all children across the world to have the right to an education - we can all play a part in campaigning for that right.



Rebecca and Maisie in Iganga secondary school

Graeme Robertson/GCE UK

Join Rebecca and Maisie on this year's Send ALL My Friends to School campaign. For a free schools pack www.sendmyfriend.org