

Connecting Classrooms Project

“Pleased to Meet You”

Durham Trinity School & Sports College (UK) visit to The Komera Centre (Rwanda)



Suzanne Madden Coquet class teacher visited our partner school The Komera Centre in Rwanda. Here are some details of her visit.

On Sunday 19th July I flew from Newcastle to Kigali in Rwanda to visit our Rwandan Partner School, Komera Centre in the East of Rwanda as part of our Connecting Classrooms Project. The project is entitled Pleased to Meet You and is aimed to enable pupils and staff from both schools to find out about each other; their names, food, localities, sports and interests.

On arrival in Kigali Airport on the evening of Sunday 19th July I was met by Fr Eugene Merenzi and Silas (Komera's Co-ordinator and Headteacher). Sunday Evening was spent in a St Francis Guest House which is run by Nuns to provide income for their convent. The next morning I visited the Genocide Memorial in Kigali. On hearing this was part of my itinerary I was pleased as I wanted to pay my respects (both personally and on behalf of the school) to the victims of the horrific events of 1994. The memorial is in a beautiful location with a rose gardens and pathways surrounding mass graves of 250 000 men, women and children who are buried there. The museum tells the story of the history of Rwanda prior to the genocide, the mass killings of the genocide and then the process of healing, justice and reparation which happened afterwards. All though this

place is a central point for remembrance as I travelled through Rwanda I saw each village, town and city has its own Mass Grave and memorial each with different inscriptions but all with the words 'Never Again.'

I travelled by road from Kigali to the Komera Center; although the journey is only about 90km the journey takes around 2 ½ hours due to the hilly terrain and also that the tarmaced road ends 9km from Komera.

On arrival I was greeted by all students and staff in a welcome ceremony and was treated to a display of djemba drumming by some of the older students. I stayed in the Komera Center from Monday until the Saturday Morning; due to the remote location most Komera students board at the school from Monday to Friday; some stay at school for the full term. The school caters for pupils who are deaf and also pupils with learning difficulites. The school supports children with PMLD through its Home Visit Program.

My itinery included visiting and taking part in a variety of lessons; on Tuesday and Wednesday I worked with pupils with learning difficulites. The focus of these students education is to improve their communication and independence skills and also to teach them skills they will need in their homes. I took part in a variety of lessons including naming members of the family, cleaning my teeth, recognising and using household equipment, growing vegetables and looking after cows.

On Thursday I travelled around the local villages to visit children and families who are part of the Home School Visit program accompanied by Komera's school pyschologist Alphonse and Director of Studies Enoch and the driver John. We visited 3 homes; 2 of children with PMLD and one to meet the mother of Clarice, who is a child educated in Komera. Komera was very interested to hear of the work of the PSA in Durham Trinity School and as a result took one parent to meet Clarice's mum so they could meet and chat about their children and compare experiences. That afernoon I visited a local mainstream primary school who work with Komera on including some of their deaf pupils.

On Friday I visited some of the classes for deaf pupils and showed the pupils the work sent by Durham Trinity pupils. I visited maths classes and also a tailoring class. Older deaf students are taught dressmaking to give them a trade they can use on leaving school. That night remaining pupils and staff had a farewell party for me which involved exchange of gifts and also a disco.

Prior to travelling back to Kigali I visited Lake Kivu with Fr. Murenzi and Silas; I also enjoyyed a boat trip to an island in the lake at sunset. All in all it was an amazing visit which I am truly grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in. I hope our partnership can continue to grow and benefit the pupils in both schools.

The next steps in the Project are:

- To evaluate and amend the activities scheduled in the 'Pleased to Meet You' Project.
- To display the work, photographs and artefacts brought back from Rwanda throughout school.
- To deliver assemblies about the visit to Komera Center to Primary and Secondary Pupils.
- To prepare an itinery for the return visit of Komera Headteacher Silas to Durham Trinity School.
- To meet and host Silas for a week (27th Spetember to 4th October).
- To review and evaluate the project at the end of the Calendar Year.
- To discuss with Komera Center arrangements for any future projects.

Suzanne Madden September 2015

