



# ProjectsAbroadPRO

Qualified volunteers in action

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The three "Rs": Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic – that's what children need to be taught and fancy subjects like computing and design are luxuries that most people in the developing world don't need and can't afford. This traditional view is being challenged by an organisation called iSchoolAfrica with whom we are working to provide inspiring IT lessons for pupils in South Africa. This month's feature article sheds some light on this new project and the way in which we are striving for equal access to technology and the benefits it provides for all students, regardless of income or geographical location.

It's an interesting debate and one can see the merits in the argument that schools have to get the basics right first before moving on to other areas. However, when you consider the number of pupils in developing nations who miss out on the chance of careers in areas such as IT because they were denied access to computers when they were younger, iSchoolAfrica's point becomes much more compelling. You can decide for yourself after reading the article on page 6.

Elsewhere in the July edition of Pro Active, British physiotherapy volunteer Lara Finbow shares her story from Nepal where she has been able to put her knowledge of the Ponseti technique to good use, treating patients with club foot. We also hear from the General Manager of Cantonments Football Club in Ghana, Mr Dominic Baltisser, who has been impressed with the Projects Abroad Pro volunteers who have been placed with the club over the last few months.

Finally, we continue with the Ghanaian theme by visiting Country Director Tom Davis for a chat about the country and why they need skilled volunteers.

Until next month,

The Editor

Over the years Projects Abroad has sent a large number of volunteers to Cantonments Football Club in Accra, Ghana, to help coach players and bring new ideas. I myself was originally a volunteer back in 2008 and now work as the club's General Manager; overseeing volunteers and administration. All volunteers bring something new to the project, be it enthusiasm, knowledge or simply donations of equipment. However, the effect of a Projects Abroad Pro volunteer immediately stands out as something very different.



During the month of July this year we were joined in Accra by Pro volunteer Mark Ryan who has years of experience coaching grassroots football in the UK. As a skilled and qualified volunteer he was not only able to help coach the players, but also work with our coaches to improve their levels of performance. Given that Ghana does not regularly run the coach education programmes that are common place in Europe and America, it is incredibly

beneficial to have a volunteer who is knowledgeable enough to provide a similar service.

However, as Mark found out straight away, there are problems to overcome for Pro volunteers. The very fact that you are coming from overseas and being deemed 'the expert' means that local people are naturally wary. While some people might have a problem with this, Mark managed to win the respect and confidence of our coaches and players by showing them that he was only interested in helping and also wanted to learn from them and their culture.

I hope that more people are inspired by the example of Mark and our other Pro volunteers to sign up and put their skills to good use. I will certainly be looking forward to our next arrival.

Dominic Baltisser  
General Manager, Cantonments FC

## Lara Finbow, Kathmandu, Nepal

I am a band 6 paediatric physiotherapist. Last year I went to Manchester to attend a Ponseti training day for the management of club foot. The course was really good but more importantly it was here I first heard about the possibilities of using these skills to help support therapists in the developing world.

For the rest of the year I worked alongside my senior plastering a small number of babies using the Ponseti technique. I really enjoyed the challenge and practical nature of treating club foot using Ponseti and waited patiently for new referrals to come in. At the end of the year I had successfully treated 6 children but I desperately wanted the chance to continue to develop my plastering skills further.



Being good at the technique requires confidence not only in applying the plaster itself but in understanding what is going on underneath the plaster. I needed more practice. I sat down to think about exactly how I could get this opportunity and remembered what I had heard in Manchester. I decided to volunteer with Projects Abroad Pro.

In January 2010 I arrived in Banepa, Nepal at the Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children (HRDC). The HRDC is a tertiary care hospital supported by a nongovernmental organisation, the Friends of the Disabled. It is the only hospital in the country providing treatment for children with club foot and as a result many children travel from all parts of the country to be seen, often a journey which will take several days.

At the HRDC I got exactly the opportunity I was looking for. I spent 2 months working alongside local physiotherapists applying Ponseti casts on up to 20 children a day. The steady stream arriving each day formed an orderly queue and waited patiently to be seen. It was the perfect chance to practice applying the plaster and get some tips from therapists who had been using the technique for years. Many of the team had attended Ponseti training similar to that I had back in Manchester and were keen to swap advice.



Although some of the tools and materials were a challenge, being a little more basic than those I was used to, the technique and skills needed are absolutely the same.

Particularly shocking was the number of children living in Nepal with neglected club foot. Back at home the oldest child we had cast was 6 months yet in Nepal many of the children I saw were over 6 years! It took a lot more plaster and a lot more effort, still amazingly, many of these children achieved a positive result with the Ponseti technique and seeing the pleasure on the faces of these children and their parents after taking off the many, many, layers of plaster needed made all the hard work worthwhile!

I am now back in the UK and although I am not currently working in a job which involves using the Ponseti technique, the experience I have gained could prove invaluable in helping me to do so in the future.

Never will I forget the excitement of the physiotherapy team when I turned up on my first day at the HRDC and I told them I was Ponseti trained and here to help. The gratitude from the staff and the children and their families was immense yet I couldn't help feeling it was I who should be grateful to them for allowing me to have the opportunity to develop my clinical skills in a way that is simply unavailable to me back home in the UK.

We always like to highlight new projects on offer for Pro volunteers, and this month sees the launch of arguably our most exciting opportunity yet. Projects Abroad Pro is teaming up with iSchoolAfrica in an attempt to get qualified teachers and IT specialists to work in deprived schools in South Africa. Unlike many of our teaching projects which are based on all round education or staples such as literacy and numeracy, this programme focuses on using IT skills to help empower students and open their minds to new possibilities.



iSchoolAfrica has been working in South Africa since 2009 with the brief of using top quality Apple Mac products to help children and teachers learn. The basic rationale is that if ‘learning’ is the desired outcome, then why put obstacles in place such as poor facilities and old computers? iSchoolAfrica believes that if only pupils in countries such as Europe and America are using the latest

technology then they will gain even more of an unfair advantage over children in developing nations.

But it is not only about facilities – the organisation believes that top quality software allowing children to express themselves through use of photos, videos and presentations will inspire them to take more of an active role in lessons. If children enjoy their classes and feel that the subject matter is relevant to them then they are much more likely to engage with their teachers and excel.

This all sounds impressive, but with a lack of infrastructure, qualified IT teachers and even power supply, how is it going to work? Thankfully, the organisation have developed a system whereby skilled ‘facilitators’ travel to schools with a mobile classroom containing laptops, video cameras and a projector. Their job is to help train the teachers and children to use the Apple Mac hardware and software and show them ways in which the equipment can develop creative and critical thinking skills.



The main problem they face is that while there are a limited number of available facilitators, there are still huge swathes of the country that could benefit from this type of work. Projects Abroad Pro Director Scott McQuarrie shared his thoughts on the project. “This is where we hope Projects Abroad Pro can help,” he said. “Qualified teachers with experience of working with Apple Mac products will be able to fit in straight away as facilitators and help to reach even more pupils. There is also a huge long term benefit to this kind of work because one of the key goals is to take the most suitable local teacher from each school and train them to become a facilitator. In this way,

schools will eventually be able to run the projects themselves so we will be laying down a lasting legacy.”

Perhaps the most striking argument in support of iSchoolAfrica is that their focus is not on improving infrastructure but improving learning. Many people will question the need for computers when basic skills are still at a low level. However, their argument is that by using the latest technology in an inspiring and motivating way, students are empowered and their learning rates improve rapidly. The pupils’ aspirations are also raised, with many poor students who would normally consider a career in IT as beyond them being given the opportunity to show what they can do. If you remove barriers to learning such as poor equipment and uninspiring lessons then there are no more excuses and children will thrive.

If you would like to find out more information about iSchoolAfrica then you can visit their website at the following address: [www.ischoolafrica.com](http://www.ischoolafrica.com).



**Name:** Tom Davis

**Position:** Director for Ghana

**Based:** Accra, Ghana

**Home Town:** Cape Coast, Ghana

**Tom, how long have you been working for Projects Abroad?**

It's been a long time, around 11 years!

**And what did you do for a living before this?**

I worked as an electrical engineer.

**How many people work with you in the Ghana office?**

There are around 25 staff members in total.

**If you could travel to any place in Ghana, where would it be?**

Back home to Cape Coast, due to the tourist attractions there.

**OK, can you describe Ghana using only three words?**

Attractive, Welcoming, Challenging

**What kinds of skilled volunteers are needed the most in Ghana?**

Ghana is a big country but I would say that volunteers with medical and social work skills are most needed.

**How can these volunteers help in Ghana?**

In two ways: firstly they add 'value' to the projects by being able to contribute with knowledge and experience. They also help to ease problems on the placements where maybe they need an extra pair of hands.