

Medcare Team Visit



Journey from Entebbe to Masaka

Sunday 5th May: Pauline and Geoff Hutchinson flew out to Uganda as representatives of the Medcare Board of Trustees.

Monday 6th May: On arrival in Entebbe airport on the afternoon of Monday 6th May, they were met by their driver, Joshua, and Geoff Coleman - CEO of Mildmay UK.

After successfully retrieving our bags, containing many donated goods given by members of Kings Church, Frodsham, we exchanged our sterling into Ugandan shillings (and became millionaires within minutes!) and set off for Masaka and our hotel. Unfortunately, due to our slightly late arrival in Entebbe, we had to travel the majority of our journey in the dark, with Joshua playing chicken with other road users, including large lorries and buses!

Geoff H (seen right) decided to sleep in the back of the van - as far away of oncoming traffic as possible!



Geoff Coleman



Busy waiting room



Very busy physiotherapy department

Tuesday 7th May: First thing on Tuesday morning, Pauline took Geoff H and Geoff C on a tour of the Medical Centre to introduce them to all the departments and staff. The clinic waiting room was packed with patients - the majority of the children suffering with malaria. Triage was very efficient, the nurses being assisted by Florence, our recently appointed Triage Assistant.

The Physiotherapy Department was also full to capacity. Ibrahim and Pascal, the Wellspring physiotherapists, were greatly assisted by 2 physiotherapy students on placement from Mbarara University.

A number of children with complicated presentations and disabilities were brought to Pauline and Geoff in clinic for advice on further management.

Here are 4 of the cases seen that morning:

- This little girl is 7-month-old. Her mother is a teenager. When first seen at Wellspring she was suffering from malnutrition. Now this has been addressed the decision needs to be made regarding her future management. She has been born with a congenital heart defect. Cardiac surgery will save this little girl's life but her mother does not have the funds to provide for such surgery. She is to be referred to Samaritan's Purse in the US to see if she could be added to their Ugandan cardiac surgery programme.



Divera, a little girl with congenital heart complaint



Linet, a young girl with serious osteomyelitis

- This 12-year-old girl developed osteomyelitis one year ago. Despite treatment with various antibiotics, the condition has deteriorated. She now walks with a crutch because she cannot weight bear. On examination the bones in the lower leg were visible, with no overlying skin, muscle or tendons. This child must have been in extreme pain for 12 months. Sadly, it is now too late to save her leg and it has been advised that she will need an amputation. Such a procedure will save her life.

- This 12-month-old girl was born with abnormal presentation of her toes and fingers. She has 4 siblings, one of which suffers from cerebral palsy and another with partial blindness. The father has abandoned the family leaving the mother to care for her family alone.



Gloria, a little girl with abnormal development of feet and hands

Despite the abnormalities, on examination it was advised that Gloria should cope well as she grows up, since she has both her thumbs and big toes, which will mean she will eventually be able to walk and use her hands for writing, eating etc. The Wellspring Sponsorship team are to visit her home and, following a report on the family situation, which is to be sent to the UK, her sibling suffering from cerebral palsy, may be put on the Wellspring Child Sponsorship waiting list.



Jason, a little boy with a rare syndrome

- At first glance this 18-month-old boy looks normal and well developed, and large for his age. However, on examination it was discovered that he suffers from a very rare syndrome which is causing him to develop adult male characteristics as a child. He appears to be an adolescent in a young child's body. He has facial and body hair, his voice has become deep, he suffers from serious tantrums, and he looks sexually like an adolescent.

Such development is going to cause him to be ridiculed and seen as cursed in his community. He is being urgently referred to a hospital in Kampala for their advice. His mother was crying in clinic because she is fearful about his future.



Meeting the sponsored children and their guardians

After clinic we headed to the 'Canopy' - where the COIN days are held. The room was packed with children and their guardians and everyone was cheerful and so happy to see us. After various talks etc we assisted in the handing out of their monthly food allowances - a really fun thing to do.

At 1pm the children and guardians all had some lunch prepared by the Wellspring cook. We left to visit Noeline and the children in the Wellspring Home for Disabled Children. All the children were laughing and lively and dressed in bright red uniforms. The home was in very good condition and clean and tidy. They now have many animals, 3 cows, 6 goats, 5 pigs, numerous chickens, and rabbits (for eating!). The children all sang a song which they had obviously been practicing - the song was a song of thanks for all we had given them and asking God's blessings on us and all Medicare supporters. Such a beautiful performance to see and hear. Even the deaf children were trying to join in!

Here are some of the more seriously handicapped cerebral palsy children cared for by Noeline and her helpers.



Some of Noeline's children



Hakim, a self harmer, content with his carer

Great improvements were observed in many of the children since the last Medicare visit July 2023. One child with cerebral palsy who was a self harmer, now rests quietly with his carer - a miraculous change in his condition. Last year he was seen to be covered in cuts and bruises and had to be bound tightly so he did not harm himself.

Before returning to the hotel Pauline and the 2 Geoff's travelled for half an hour to visit the home of 3 desperately needy children. Their father had abandoned the family a number of years ago when he discovered his son had cerebral palsy. Sadly, 3 weeks ago, their mother died from AIDS.

Their house is made of mud and sticks and leaks when it rains. They have no source of support and have to rely on a neighbor, who has children of his own, to give them food once a day. They also sleep at his house to keep them safe at night. We observed that the children had no belongings in their house, hadn't eaten all day and looked tremendously sad. They seemed to have lost all hope. Funds were given to provide bedding and food for the children and Allen, the Wellspring social worker, is to try to find relatives who may take these children into their home. Sponsorship of the boy with cerebral palsy could also help these desperately needy children.



3 orphaned children

On arriving back at our hotel at around 7pm, Geoff H sat down and simply fell asleep! However, a meal of fish and chips (Tilapia or Nile Perch!) soon revived him, and we spent a pleasant evening discussing future plans for the long-term development of the Wellspring services.

Wednesday 8th May: Early in the morning Geoff C left us and travelled to Kampala for his next appointment. Pauline and Geoff were taken on a 45 minute journey to visit an outlying Catholic Health Centre, where the CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation) project was holding an outreach clinic. On arrival, once again the room was filled to capacity with disabled children and their guardians.

Disabilities seen included cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, microcephaly, Down's Syndrome, clubbed feet, serious keloid scarring following burns, amputees and other congenital disorders. The 2 Wellspring physiotherapists and their 2 students worked from 9am - late afternoon examining and treating over 60 children. A talk was also given by Allen (social worker) explaining the special nature of all the children who were attending and teaching about the care of children who are disabled.



Geoff asleep - again!



CBR Project



Serious advanced cerebral palsy



A child with Down's syndrome



A child with hydrocephalus



Child with 6 toes



A child with keloid scarring after burns



Cerebral palsy child cared for by his brother

During the afternoon, Pauline and Geoff visited 2 village homes - each isolated and 10 miles from the Medical Centre.

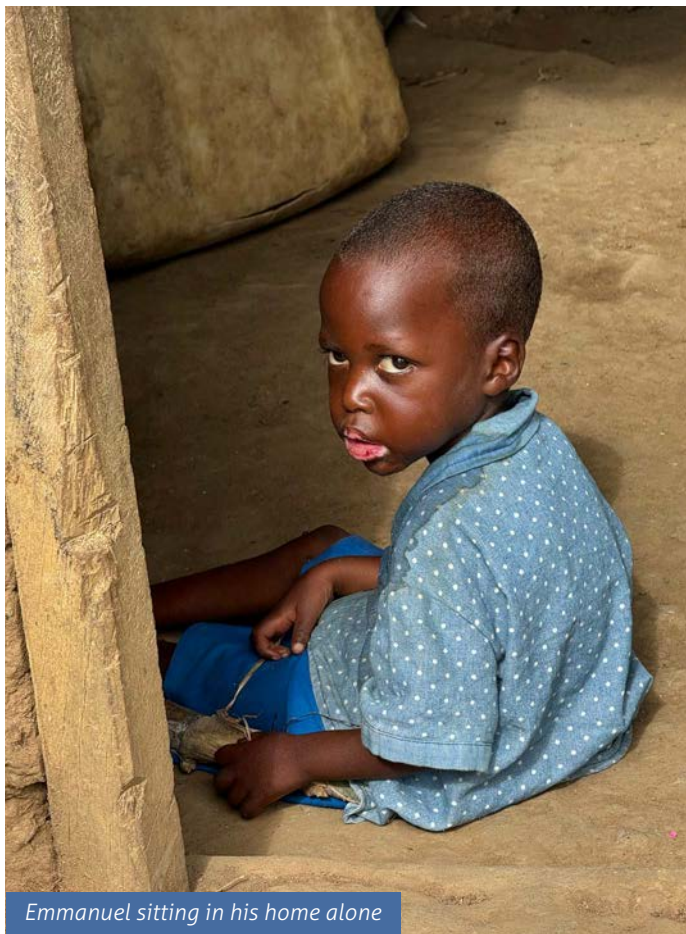
Andrew suffers from cerebral palsy. He lives with his mother, step father and 7 siblings. This large family has no house of their own and have been allowed to live in a one roomed house by a neighbor. The house is in very poor condition and leaks when it rains.

The room is very small and some of the children have to sleep with their legs outside the house so they can all fit in. They have no bedding and often go hungry. There is also a concern for the wellbeing of the oldest daughter who is 14 years old.

Bedding and food were purchased and taken to the family the following day. Andrew is to be put on the Wellspring Child Sponsorship list and an appeal is to be made in the UK in order to raise funds to build a new house for this family. The cost of such a build is £3,000.



Family of 11 outside their house



Emmanuel sitting in his home alone

Emma (Emmanuel) is 8 years of age and suffers from cerebral palsy. He was abandoned by both his parents when he was 2 years old and he is presently being cared for by a neighbor, who has 3 children of her own. On examination Andrew was found to have very painful sores on his lips making it difficult to feed. He was extremely miserable and was found sitting on his own in his carer's home, where he had been all day.

Once again bedding and food was provided. However, his long term welfare remains a concern, since he is obviously suffers from extreme neglect. Allen is making enquiries and an application for Emma to be admitted to the Wellspring Home for Disabled Children, under the care of Noeline. He also will benefit by sponsorship.



Ibrahim, one of our physios, enjoying his tilapia

Back at the hotel that evening we shared a meal with 3 of our senior staff, William, Ibrahim (physiotherapist) and Allen. It was good to treat them to a large tilapia each!

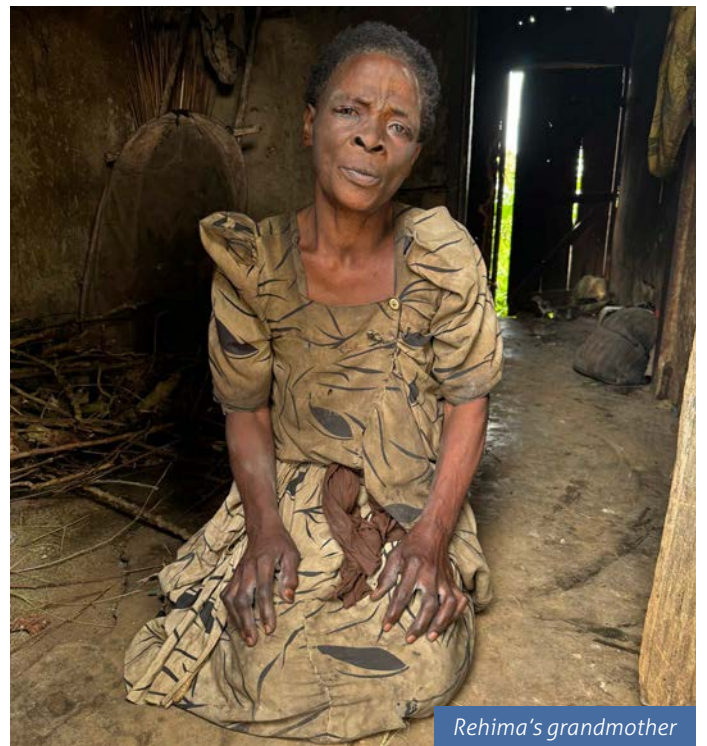


Thursday 9th May: Early in the morning, Pauline and Geoff were taken to the home of a very needy child, named Rehima. She lives with her grandmother in extreme poverty. Rehima is HIV+ve and both her parents have died from AIDS. Her grandmother was seriously maltreated and beaten by her husband which has affected her health. They have no means of support and have to rely on the good nature of neighbours to provide them with food. They frequently go without and, at the time of the visit, had not eaten for 24 hours.

The house was almost completely bare, with no bedding or cooking utensils. Rehima only had the clothes she was wearing at the time. When she needs her ARV's (life saving HIV medication) every month, she walks 10 miles to the Medical Centre. This puts her at very great risk. They have no house of their own. Sponsorship would transform and could save Rehima's life.



Rehima inside her house



Rehima's grandmother

Following this visit we provided a special lunch for all Wellspring staff. This was combined with a staff meeting, when we discussed together all matters relating to the running of the Medical Centre and the present needs of the staff. The obvious respect and support each member of staff has for each other was wonderful to observe. Team spirits are high, and everyone works with great enthusiasm within their own areas of responsibility. We concluded with prayer and the following statement:

“Together, with God’s help, the lives of children living in the Kalungu and surrounding districts can be transformed so that they can grow and develop, receive a normal childhood and all that entails, and reach their full potential in life, with hope for the future, security in their own identity and a knowledge that each child is special in the eyes of God and has a future which will not only provide for all their needs but will help them to understand God’s very great love for them.”

At 4pm, Geoff and Pauline joined the Wellspring Medical Committee meeting, held at Wellspring. This group of medical professionals are responsible for the day to day running of all Wellspring services. A considerable amount of time, within this 2-hour meeting, was spent on discussing the future developments planned for Wellspring. A very encouraging and successful meeting.



Friday 10th May: Geoff and Pauline flew back to the UK. This visit, albeit short, was packed with activities, clinics and meetings, with much information gathered, many children assisted, and yet again confirming the essential and urgent nature of the work of Medcare through the Wellspring Children’s Medical Centre and associated activities.

Many thanks to all who assisted in this visit, for funding and goods provided and for your support and prayers.

Pauline and Geoff Hutchinson