

Link Letter No.7 May 2015

Dear family and friends,

I hope that this finds you all well. It has been a long time since I last wrote a proper link letter and I apologise for that. I hope that you have all been getting my shorter updates; I've tried at least to send them out a little bit more regularly.

Thank you

First and foremost I would like to say thank you to all of you for your prayers, thoughts, love and support. I wouldn't have made it through this time without that.

As I think most of you will know, I am now back in Tanzania. It has been a long and tough recovery from my Carbon Monoxide poisoning which happened at the end of May 2014. I won't go over it all again but I am thankful to be much, much better and starting to get back to real life.

I am back at work part time but probably won't go back to full time for a while. I am slowly increasing the amount that I am doing as I don't want to overdo it and end up going backwards – it's taken so long to get where I am now (almost a year!).



Slowly recovering with my family...



Miriam Knowles CMS mission partner Tanzania

Miriam Knowles is a CMS mission partner working in Tanzania with the local church. She is working as an occupational therapist, primarily with disabled children. Miriam's base is Neema Crafts, in the town of Iringa, but is also developing the work to reach out to local village communities. Her vision is education and helping to dispel the stigma and closedness that surrounds disability. An essential part is the training of people in local communities to support and promote this.

I spent a month in New Zealand and three months in the UK on sick leave to recuperate and get medical attention. It was a blessing to be able to stay and be looked after by family in these two places and have "extra" time with them, and enjoy the cold in both New Zealand and the UK, even though it wasn't under very good circumstances.

A slow recovery, still ongoing...

I am pleased that sleep and eating are much improved and the medication I am on seems to be helping a lot in order to stabilise those things that are helping me get back slowly to normality.

However, it is still a struggle with various things just not being quite right and not being my normal self, but thankfully everything is gradually improving overall. Please continue to keep me in your prayers, especially with regards to tolerating being around people. I still struggle with groups and when I start to get more tired, I find myself getting frustrated and angry very quickly – not a normal characteristic of mine! I'm also finding it hard that although things are getting better slowly, everything goes backwards if my sleep is off a bit and my fatigue, tiredness and stress levels increase even a little. There are times when I feel so out of control in my reactions, when normally I am quite a controlled person.



With my lovely family...

Anyway, while I have been sick I have been very fortunate to have had Chiye who has covered work most of the time. She has been able to continue with the treatment of children and maintain relationships with mothers and children. She was also off for three months as she's had a baby girl called Glory but thankfully one of the staff at Neema (who in the past has helped the physiotherapist) was able to cover, maintaining regular contact and relationships with people. This has ensured that it's not been too difficult for Chiye and I to begin working with them again (only a few of our children and mothers have dropped out in our absence). We are now working at returning to the level we were working at before I got sick and getting some of the children back who have dropped away. Chiye will start to do some home visits to see the children whose parents are unable to bring them to the Neema Centre.

Supporting mothers

One of the best things that we have started – and which Chiye has been able to continue doing without me – is a mothers' support group. As I think I've said before, we have seen that often mothers come in with their disabled child and feel that they are the only ones struggling and that it is their fault. Often the husband/boyfriend has left them because the child has a disability and which has left them



The mothers' support group

feeling that it must be their fault!

We find that the mother's family will also shun her as here in Tanzania, the wife leaves her own family and becomes a part of the husband's family. While we have seen amazing stories of where families do support each other and the father is involved, sadly these are few. We have seen a lot of disabled children being sent back to a grandmother to look after them but who has little means to support them despite ending up being the carer.

The feedback and stories from the support group has been great.

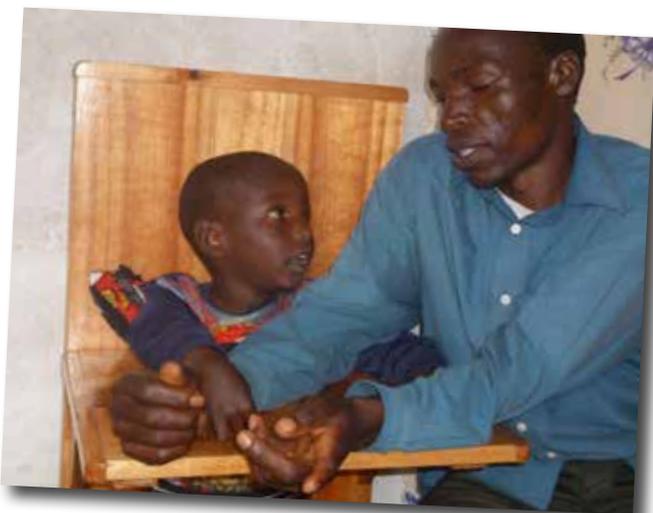
We have been running them once a month but we are looking to increase this to every two weeks if possible. It is such a source of encouragement to mothers not to give up. And it's not just us telling them to love their child and persevere but other mothers who are going through a similar thing, or have gone through the same struggle – the struggle of having a child with disability in a culture where children are normally independent at a young age and able to help out with the younger children or look after their parents. This is especially the case where they are not the youngest child and the mother is pregnant or has another child/children who is/are her priority.



One of the families we are working with, where the father is very involved and loves his child a lot!

The mothers encourage each other to love their children and to persevere with doing home exercise programmes with them and not to “give up” or “get tired”; to provide their children with time to change positions of play and to interact with them, and to give each child the best opportunity to experience life and further development. The way we “play” with our children in the UK is so different to here. So a lot of what we are doing is teaching the mother and other members of the family to interact with the child, not to just leave them lying on their backs all day looking up at the ceiling and then wonder why they aren't “getting better” but instead worse!

The photos on this page shows one of the families where the father is very involved and loves his child a lot – it is so lovely to see. We provided this family with a standing frame to use at home. This little boy lives with his family outside of the Iringa Township and has cerebral palsy, probably due to trauma at the time of his birth. It takes us over an hour and a half



Father and son

in the car to get to their home and it can be longer during/after the rains when the road is worse! The mum has quite a large goitre on her neck and struggles to attend therapy at Neema Crafts Centre because it is painful to carry her son on her back. This is because the cloth she uses to secure him onto her back digs into her neck where the goitre is, but there is no other way to get him to town, so we only see him when I am able to make the drive out to their home. He is one of the children who I really want to get out and see but I am still finding that driving takes a lot of focus and energy

and I have to be careful when I'm tired. Although driving around town is okay, driving over badly potholed roads is challenging even at the best of times!

Being back...

I am really pleased to be back in Tanzania and although it is frustrating that I am not back to full strength and able to fully engage with work, I know that this will continue to improve. I am trying to exercise patience and not get angry about it. The mothers are so pleased that both Chipe and I are back and although they don't fully understand what the problem is (as I look well) they understand that I want to be back but can't always fully engage with them. Speaking Kiswahili and treating children is getting easier and less taxing but I am still pretty exhausted by the end of a morning.

I do thank God for my recovery so far and although as I've said it has been a really tough time, I try not to focus on that and instead try to look at things moving forwards not backwards. Honestly, there are times when I just don't know what I'm doing here and I think "maybe I should just go back to the UK... it would be so much easier" but I know that this is the right place for me to be and there is so much work to be done.

Please do continue to pray for full healing and recovery. Not just for sleeping and fatigue but for my moods and tolerance of being around people, engaging with them and giving to them, and not to get frustrated and angry so quickly.

Again, many, many thanks to all of you who are praying and thinking of me. It has been encouraging to know that there are so many people that care for me and who are praying for my healing. I am sorry that I did not get to see many of you while I was in the UK on sick leave but once I started to get a bit better I felt that it was right to come back to Tanzania and continue to recover here. Partly as no-one knows how long full recovery will take and partly because I felt that I was "giving up" on being able to return!

As I said in my last update, I hope to return to the UK sometime early next year for my home leave. Once I know the dates I will contact people about church visits and meeting up.

Please pray that the rest of this year would be positive and that I would be able to work to a place where I can leave for my home leave. Pray also that plans can be made for me (hopefully) coming back for a further three years and what we hope to do with work in those next three years. Please pray also that I would continue to improve as I would really love to get back to full time work within the next eight-nine months.

God bless you all,

Much love,

Mim x

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