

# Delivering crucial dental aid in Uganda

**W**hen **Barbara Koffman** first got involved with Christian Relief Uganda her dental hygienist experience and education training showed her a need to facilitate the development of dental services in Uganda.

Since 2005 Barbara has been taking dental teams out twice a year to educate and to provide essential treatment. From March, over a period of five weeks, she led two separate teams comprising six dentists, two therapists, two dental nurses, four hygienists, an ex-marine and a violinist!

The following extracts from Barbara's diaries give a picture of the work (and play!) encountered:

## 27th March

"We are due at Kampiringeesa, a children's Prison, where the authorities 'put' the street children of Kampala out of the way when there are visiting dignitaries. We arrive by 9.30 am and the children are there waiting to greet us.

"We set up Triage – this is a department where each patient is interviewed to see exactly what the problem is. It gives an opportunity to talk to a qualified dental professional and have the necessary treatment explained. I allocate everyone a job and very quickly the team settles into his or her respective role. Our ex-marine non-dental team member is very busy; there are shouts of: "Sam, can you find this?", "Sam, we need batteries in the torches," "Sam, can you take a photo of this please," and so on. Before Sam came out he was unsure if he would be busy enough – I think his doubts have been answered.

"One of the dental nurses is appointed as oral health educator to give as much information as possible to prevent dental problems, and she gives each child a toothbrush and toothpaste. Work continues until everyone who has a dental need is seen.

"Our guest house has English tea ready for us, most welcome. Time for a shower and a rest before dinner – meat stew, cabbage, rice, pumpkin, beans and pineapple – delicious!



## 3rd April

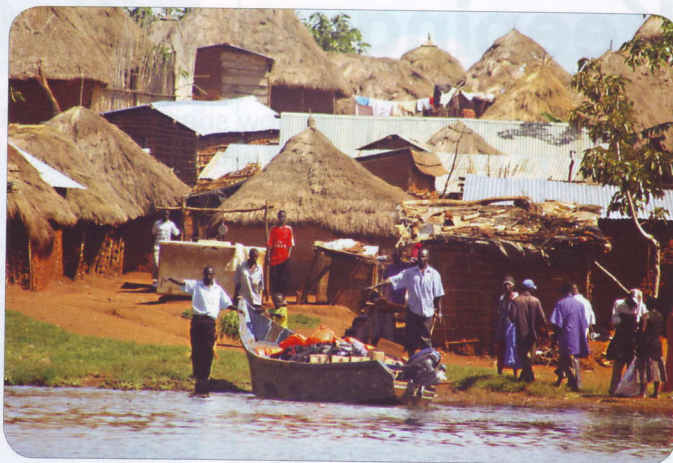
"Today we are tourists and we go out to Bugarri Falls. This is a beautiful area with grade 5 rapids. Some of us go on a boat tour; the bird life is very good here. We go to Black Lantern, a restaurant nearby, where the food is good, overlooking the Nile. A very pleasant day.

**7th April**

"An early start as we are taking the boat over to Bavuma Island. We are only allowed to take a few personal possessions as space is needed for the equipment and everything that we need in order to survive for the next few days. We are going to Namagongo, still part of Jinja mainland, but there is an impenetrable forest preventing us from driving there. There are many people waiting for us.

"I am asked to decide where we will set up clinic. We walk through the village and come out at a clearing under two very big trees, there is a fabulous view of the lake so I make the decision that this is where it should be. I declare this tree 'Triage', that tree 'Clinic', and this area back near Triage, 'Post op'. All we have to do now is carry everything through the village!

"This is the first ever dental clinic held here and we are remote for sure. It is actually quite pleasant working outside under the trees. We keep going all day until it is time to leave. We have to pack up, load up and get over to where we are sleeping. We have all local food including rice, beans, cabbage, posho, sweet potato, and cassava. Plenty of choice for all. I tell them that sunrise is worth getting up for at 6 a.m.



**12th April**

"Today we are in Bugiri, which is a drive of 45 mins. I send the four hygienists over to the nearby school to give oral hygiene talks. Someone goes over to another school and invites the teachers and students to come and see us. Slowly our patient base increases. Ex-marine Sam has brought a tightrope with him; he sets it up just near the clinic and the kids love it. Fred takes his violin outside and starts to play, so today is a very different day with lots of non-dental activities. We treat 75 people, give OHI lectures to a whole school and screen many more people with a dental check up. Not a bad day's work."

**How do I find out more?**

Visit the website: [www.christianreliefuganda.org](http://www.christianreliefuganda.org) or email Barbara at: [bkoffmancru@hotmail.com](mailto:bkoffmancru@hotmail.com) or call 07970 163798. Barbara Koffman is a Christian full-time volunteer worker for the charity Christian Relief Uganda.

