

# Nicci Maxwell

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## The call in action

Dear friends,

Sitting down to write these letters is a good opportunity to reflect on recent events. The past three months have felt quite difficult. There is mass denial/disbelief around COVID-19, making some everyday interactions very challenging – people frequently gather in large groups without masks. We have struggled with staffing in the medical centre due to maternity leave, sickness, family illnesses and bereavements coinciding with annual leave and staff still away because their course of study has been extended by COVID. We have had to deal with incidents of dishonesty and deception among staff. We have struggled to get some supplies which are usually sourced from overseas – blamed variously on COVID or Brexit! We have admitted three new babies to the crisis centre, sadly representing two maternal deaths and an abandonment. I've had stones thrown at me by children and some days the anticipation of subtle and not-so-subtle comments and taunts from adults while walking in town makes me want to stay at home. Please do pray about all these things!

And yet, God is still at work in Kisoro and that's what I want to spend the bulk of my remaining text telling you about.

We have been getting busier in the medical centre. This is good news because we depend on patient fees for over 90 per cent of the medical centre's running costs. We have continued to see some miraculous recoveries and been able to make a difference to many families. Here are two....

E had only one living child when I met her at the government hospital in late January during her 11th pregnancy. She had high levels of antibodies to her unborn baby's blood group. Working closely with the government hospital team, baby M was delivered early, transferred to Potter's Village and then received multiple blood transfusions, including an exchange transfusion as well as lots of phototherapy treatment. She really tested our skills and resources but she did brilliantly!

J has Down Syndrome and congenital heart disease. Prior to the pandemic, he was due to travel to India for heart surgery but this was delayed. We were very worried he might be too ill to have surgery. A year later than planned, J underwent a successful operation and returned to us at the beginning of March looking very well and having apparently developed a taste for Indian food!

We have been blessed with several items of new equipment for the medical centre. We waited ages to replace our broken bilirubinometer (machine that measures jaundice levels) and we took delivery of a smart new machine at the end of February. It is much easier to use, cheaper to run and does not require expensive imported consumables. We also received a



**Name:** Nicci Maxwell

**Location:** Kisoro, Uganda

**My call:** To use my medical skills to show the love of God to the people of Kisoro, Uganda.

**My role:** Providing paediatric and neonatal medical care to the community, and providing training, mentorship and support to local healthcare workers.



*E on the day she was able to take baby M home.*

*Continued over the page*

new phototherapy light for treating jaundice. Its LED lights are brighter and more cost efficient than our old, unrepairable model. We have also just heard that the marvellous congregation of St Mary's, Princes Risborough, have raised an incredible amount of money this Lent in order to buy another CPAP machine to support sick and preterm babies with breathing difficulties. Huge thanks to them!

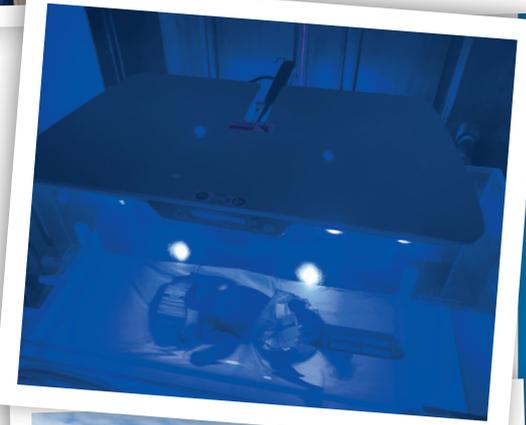
Prior to the pandemic I had been working on offering healthcare to a local Batwa community. The Batwa are the pygmy people who were forcibly moved from their traditional forest homes in the early 1990s in order to make way for gorilla conservation. There are now dozens of Batwa communities settled all across South West Uganda. The group we were hoping to work with are a community of around 160 adults and children living very close to the centre of Kisoro town. They face marginalisation and discrimination from all quarters. Levels of poverty, unemployment, violence and substance abuse are extremely high. They can be highly suspicious of attempts to help them and are often unwilling to engage with health services. I'd been visiting the village to try to assess their needs but it was with some anxiety that I shared with them an idea to offer medical care to children and pregnant women. The community were really interested, asked questions and made some good suggestions. The scheme will be funded by an Australian church that has been involved in this community for a number of years. Within a fortnight we were up and running and we currently have about six ladies receiving antenatal care, one new baby has been safely delivered and a couple of paediatric outpatient visits have occurred.

Something else that had been months in preparation and delayed by COVID was some teaching for health centres that frequently refer babies to us. Some sessions on newborn resuscitation and safe transfer have begun with more in the diary. In the next few weeks I will be starting a regular "visiting clinic" slot at another health centre in one of the more remote corners of the diocese. All part of trying to offer better care to babies and children in this region, even if they are unable to afford the fees at Potter's Village.

I was thrilled to be offered a dose of the Astra Zeneca COVID vaccine in mid-March. I'm very thankful for COVAX which made this possible. I'm hopeful that there will be vaccine available when second doses become due. Sadly vaccine hesitancy and disinformation are rife among Ugandans and it's only been possible to persuade about half our staff that the vaccine is worth having. Uptake among government health staff, teachers and the over 70s is apparently even lower. This is worrying as, although numbers in Uganda are low at present, we see rising numbers in most of our neighbouring countries. Please continue to pray for us as we face the next phase of the pandemic.

Thank you for your continued support and prayers for me and for the work here in Kisoro.

Love, Nicci



*Photos from top to bottom: A big hug from J on his return from heart surgery in India; Some of our staff team after getting their COVID jabs; Our new phototherapy light in action; The Batwa settlement where we are offering healthcare.*

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