

SIGHTBOX AMBASSADOR ANGELA WILLIAMS FULFILLING A DREAM



Me presenting Sightbox on Mersey Ship.



Me with the High Commissioner.



Young boy receiving the first pair of glasses from the first ET Box.

I had a vision. A Vision where we could share good practice and create opportunities for the visually impaired worldwide.

This vision was shared with the Headmaster Dr John Patterson from St Vincent's school for visually impaired in Liverpool. Together we are working to make sure dreams and journeys of peace come true for thousands of visually impaired children.

As Ambassador of Sightbox Trust my dream was to go back to The Gambia and spend time with visually impaired children and young adults developing their communication skills, confidence and independence.

So having given up a full time job, much planning and a programme put together, packed 155kg of equipment which included our clothing, held a bon voyage party to say farewell to family and friends, Nigel, my husband and I took off on November 9th 2019 from Manchester Airport to Banjul, The Gambia for 5 months.

On arrival at Banjul airport we were unexpectedly met at the bottom of the steps of the plane by VIP security. Bags collected and passports stamped we were driven to where we would be staying for the 5 months. Our accommodation was a 2 bed bungalow semi furnished in a secure compound with a 4 x 4 vehicle.

It did not take long to settle in amongst our friends and acclimatise to 11 hours of hot sunshine every day and challenges of daily water and power failure!

Many meetings were planned in our programme – this included meeting various Government Ministers, British High Commissioner, the 5 Rotary Clubs in The Gambia and visiting the compounds of local people and their families, attending Gala dinners, being interviewed on TV and organising a hospitality night.

Sightbox was introduced to Start Now and GOVI (Government Organisation for Visually Impaired) in The Gambia back in Jan 2018 from a visit to St Vincent's school for Visually impaired in Liverpool by Past Assistant Governor Rotarian Minyan Jobe. He could see the educational tools through sport in the box would make a huge difference and empower the lives of the visually impaired in The Gambia - for example Mobility, Confidence, independence, team building, friendship, education, and inclusion. Through inclusion and not segregation comes reverse inclusion as sighted and non sighted students work together and in time become the trainers of the trainers.

All leads to innovation and employment and coming up with new ideas for the box which have not yet been generated.

We are now beginning to see not only National exam results in Maths improve but also covering United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 17,3,4,5,8 & 10. All coming from working with something so simple.

Various presentations have taken place during our 5 months which included white canes, gym kits, projectors, laptops, hand balls with bells, card games in braille. The first eye test box is being put to use to help provide correct glasses for people with Albinism and low vision. I spoke at seminars to make sure people with disabilities whatever they are, are not segregated but included. No one has a disability – it is an ability with a challenge. The hand balls went into rural Gambia where four hubs for blind and visually impaired are being set up by Alieu Jaiteh from Start Now a Gambian winner of Holman Prize Award. The first of these hubs opened on Sat 15th Feb 2020 in Upper Rural Region in the town of Basse. I drove the 350km to Basse as I had been invited to be present at the opening ceremony and give a statement before taking the first training session with the hand balls.

Downtime was also important in the planning so that we could explore the countryside and admire the birds, flowers, animals and sample the good food and wine.

My dream was certainly fulfilled and much, much, more but I am now going to share with you a challenge I had to overcome and one experience that really stood out.

The first meeting at GOVI school I noticed that there was only one sighted teacher at the school and out of the 35 students only three or four had some vision. This was something I had to overcome and overcome fast. Luckily a meeting with Matida aged 17yrs, a past Head Girl from GOVI who I had met back in Jan 2018 had invited us to go and visit her and her family in their compound. Matida has very, very, low vision and was so happy to see us again. She has now been placed in a school for sighted children and is doing very well. I mentioned to her over a small cup of hot condensed milk with mint and lemon grass sat under the Mango tree my concerns. Matida looked at me, took my hand and said " Angela, you have the passion, you have a strong heart, go and teach the teachers and children, I

continued on next page



continued from previous page

know you can do it and they will love you for it as you will be helping to change their lives". To hear those words from a 17yr old who I had only met and taught briefly on my previous visits was very touching. I made a promise to her I would overcome this challenge and succeed – and this I certainly did.

The experience I've chosen to share is of one that took us to Dakar in Senegal. I had done some research prior to Nov 9th and discovered Mercy Ships was docked in Dakar until June 2020. I sent an email explaining who I was and what I was doing and was it possible to board the ship. After some time I received an email to say that we could go on board the ship and have a 2 hour tour to see the work that was being done to improve peoples lives. As you can imagine this would be an experience never to forget. Meeting the crew, surgeons, patients and their families was truly amazing. What made the experience of being on Mercy Ships even more special was I was allowed as Ambassador of Sightbox Trust to present the ship with a Sightbox to help all patients and families on board with sight issues. This box will now remain on board and will travel wherever the ship goes. The new Mercy Ships being built with the help of Rotary and Inner Wheel will also have Sightbox on board. What an honour for Sightbox Trust and also to be allowed to go on board at anytime I wish in the future.

This has certainly been one very special dream and one I will never forget.

Having driven some 4231km I now have to return to the UK on 24th

March. I do so look forward to coming back sometime soon.

Thank you to everyone who made us very welcome and supported us during our 5 month stay. Rotary is certainly one big family as we take care of each other.

BUT

This dream has a different ending –

Coronavirus – COVID-19 and our flight home was cancelled.

Many tourists were able to get home with their airline, but our airline has left us here with no confirmed date of departure.

As there are few of us left here and to keep COVID-19 at bay, the summer season closed a month early which meant hotels, bars, and restaurants are all closed. This included closing schools and universities for 3 weeks.

The airport is only open for emergency supplies of medicines and food.

With the help and assistance of Rotarians we have secured accommodation until we can get home along with extra medication.

We now wait patiently until we hear the sound of the plane that has been agreed to fly in to take us home or when the airport has been opened for normal travel which could be a few months down the line.

We are safe, and well and hopefully someday we will be able to say farewell to everyone we have met here as this part of my dream was taken away from me.

We managed to get a repatriation flight home on 9th April.

If you would like a presentation to your club to see for yourself the impact of this journey and the journey of peace please make contact with me via williams1621@hotmail.co.uk

DISTRICT 1180

MIKE PEPPER PHF - EULOGY – 5th JUNE 2020

I first got to know Mike when he was International Chairman of our Rotary District. He invited me to part of his committee, and I was also privileged to be part of his team when he was District Trainer. When he was an Assistant Governor I got to work with Mike again so I was very lucky to have this lovely man as a mentor and friend. Mike never considered himself chairman or in charge. He was very much a team player and considered us all equal and he encouraged and supported input and new ideas from everyone.

As International chair he achieved so much including his work with the Wheelchair Foundation, and visited Malawi with Milton and Elaine Frary to distribute wheelchairs to those desperately in need. This was something I know he was very proud of. He was always talking about it.

Mike was also heavily involved in the organisation and fundraising for the Tsunami housing project in Sri Lanka with fellow Rotarian PDG Colin James following the mass destruction in 2004. In 2011 Mike and Margaret visited the completed project and went to house no 33 which was funded by Welshpool Rotary Club. An entire family was given a new start in life. We can only imagine what that meant to them.

As if that wasn't enough, Mike was also a huge supporter of Shelterbox and the Polio campaign and worked tirelessly to support all these programmes.

He was also very much a forward thinker and introduced a forward planning strategy in his own club before becoming involved in what is

now known as club visioning, a tool to help clubs evaluate and plan for a successful future.

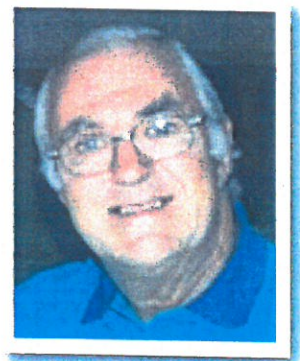
I personally owe a lot to Mike and Margaret. I learned such a lot from Mike over the years and he and Margaret became very strong supporters and mentors as I approached and took the role of District Governor.

He was a true gentleman, a great mentor and friend, and the world will be a sadder place without him.

But there are so many people who are much better off in this world because of Mike Pepper PHF. Some won't even know his name, but his dedication to service and his commitment to those in need will live on in those he helped. A wonderful legacy for a great man, a lovely friend and a true Rotarian.

On behalf of Rotary District 1180 and Rotary International I say a huge thankyou to you Mike for your commitment and dedication to the work of Rotary International.

May you rest in Peace as you pass to higher service. You will never be forgotten.



Molly Youd, Past District Governor

