



Nicci Maxwell

Link Letter no. 22 | August 2024

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Location: South Sudan



What I do: Providing paediatric and neonatal medical care to local and refugee communities, and training and supporting local paediatric teams

Dear friends,

Hello from Juba, South Sudan!

I arrived in Juba just over a month ago and I'm already beginning to feel at home. I'm living in a compound belonging to a Christian NGO, within a less than 10-minute drive from both the ACROSS offices and the Al Sabbah Children's Hospital where I work for half the week. Our compound is beautifully green with lots of trees and plenty of birdlife.

I occupy a one-bedroom apartment, part of a group of four similar dwellings, near the back of the compound. It's still rather sparsely furnished – any visitors definitely have to bring their own chairs – but I'll work on making it more like a home in the coming months. I have lots of expat neighbours on the compound who have been very welcoming. I've also joined the weekly ladies' Bible study group, which includes expat women from all sorts of organisations across Juba, but I haven't yet found a church community that I feel settled in. Living closely with so many other expats is a new experience for me after my somewhat solitary life in Kisoro. Please pray that it will continue to be a positive experience and that I will form good friendships with both expats and local people in time.

I spent most of the first two weeks in Juba sorting out visas and other paperwork that are necessary for me to live and work legally in South Sudan. It involved parting with multiple passport photos and various amounts of money for each of the different steps involved and there were lots of them! The team at ACROSS have been absolutely brilliant in helping me deal with all the administration but unfortunately, despite everyone's best efforts, my work permit is still in process. Please pray that it will soon be completed because it would give me a lot more peace of mind to know that I have all the documents that are required.

Workwise, at the moment, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I am driven to Al Sabbah Children's Hospital at 7am and I spend the day based mainly in the neonatal ward. The ward cares for babies under a month of age, many of whom have malaria or other infections – around 70 per cent of the hospital's workload is malaria-related – but there are also plenty of other interesting and complicated newborns to deal with. There is a huge amount of both clinical and teaching work for me to do on the unit. I've already introduced a couple of "basic neonatal care" teaching sessions for the interns (doctors in their first year after



Ready to leave with all my stuff at Heathrow (Photo (and transport) credit: Louise Wells).

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graduation) that I will repeat with each new group of doctors... which is currently every two weeks! I was also requested to do a weekly session for the registrars – this seems to be valued by the doctors who attend. The registrars began their three-year training programme about three months ago and are the first group of future paediatricians who will have all their training based locally. I'm excited to be getting involved so close to the beginning of this new venture.

Most premature babies in Juba are cared for adjacent to the maternity unit at Juba Teaching Hospital, which is a short distance away from the children's hospital. I don't yet have an open

invitation to the Teaching Hospital. Clearly the care of premature babies is an area that I'm passionate about so please pray that I will be invited to regularly spend some time at Juba Teaching Hospital and hopefully make a contribution in that unit too.

On Thursdays and Fridays, I join a small team of health workers in an ACROSS Landcruiser for the hour-long journey out of Juba to Gorom Refugee Settlement. The settlement was originally populated mainly by Ethiopian refugees and they have now been joined by a large number of Sudanese people since the war started there in 2023. There are also a small number of people from other African countries and it's not unusual to hear four or five languages during a clinic session. I'm very grateful for the skills of the translators, but I had a couple of lovely moments when I was able to communicate with Congolese families using the Rufumbira/Kinyarwanda that I'd learned in Kisoro... much to the surprise of the translator I was working with, as it was a language he didn't know!

Clinics at Gorom are very busy and there can be as many as 100 people waiting when we arrive. I focus mainly on children under five years of age as well as any children admitted to the small ward, any babies born on the labour ward and any problems identified by the nutrition team among their patients. I am hoping that we can set up a system for review of children who have chronic or complex problems like diabetes, disability and congenital heart disease as well as for those who have recently returned from Juba after being discharged from hospital. There are also plans for me to coordinate some in-service training for the staff team, some of whom are refugees themselves. Please pray that these plans will develop in God's perfect timing.

As you can see, I certainly haven't been bored since I arrived and I know that there will be many more opportunities to get involved in serving the people here. Please pray that I'll have the wisdom to know which of the opportunities I should take up and which may not be for me.

Thank you all for your continued prayers and support which enable me to serve.

Every blessing,

Nicci



Photos from top to bottom: My new little home; African openbill stork among the marvellous bird life in our compound; the primary health centre at Gorom refugee settlement. (Most photography in public places is banned in South Sudan and strictly policed so apologies if some of my pictures are a little uninspiring!)



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