

Sally Bromley - Ghana April 2019.

I first considered undertaking a volunteer trip with the Netball Development Trust last summer, after visiting Cape Verde on holiday. Seeing the conditions and spirit of local people there, made me feel very humble and even embarrassed at the flamboyant and materialistic life we all enjoy in this country. I decided that instead of holidaying in such countries, I would prefer to try to offer some sort of help, in whatever small way I could.

I had already learnt of the Netball Development Trust, through Hannah Reed, who has undertaken many trips with the Trust, to Uganda, and I decided this would be something I might like to try. I was already a netball coach and had coached and run my own club for the last 8 years. Then, in October last year, my life was torn wide open in the space of a day and I found myself alone and in the most traumatic and difficult time in my personal life I could ever imagine. I lost all my confidence and all my self-worth plus so much more. Not long after, I saw the trip to Ghana publicised through the Trust's Facebook page, and on a whim decided I was going to sign up for this. I managed to persuade one of my oldest and closest friends that she too might like to sign up and so we both did exactly that. I am not going to lie, there were times in the dark days that followed during February and March, that I almost pulled out, unable to envisage how I could possibly spend time with a group of strangers, in a faraway and totally unknown country, let alone actually be able to offer anything worthwhile to this venture.



But I needn't have worried.



I had hoped that perhaps the trip would help me to put some perspective back into my life, but other than that I did not really have any other expectations. We turned up at Heathrow in April and instantly I knew that I was going to spend the next couple of weeks with an incredible bunch of women; all with their own stories to tell, and all with a personal mission and reason for being on this trip. However, I could never have envisaged just what an impact they, and the trip, would have on me and my life. Right from the moment we landed in Ghana, it was the most full on, mad, crazy, scary, at times sad, but mostly, amazing experience. This was not just about the netball that we coached with the local school children and the training we

delivered to the teachers and volunteers, in the hope of helping provide a legacy for them to continue delivering and developing netball, long after we left from this trip. It was also about seeing a whole different way of life, for people who had so little and yet were so grateful and cheerful for life. It was about seeing the joy on the children's faces when they learnt new skills and when we were able to leave them kit and trainers, generously donated from clubs and players back in the UK. It was the pure joy I felt when my group of school children sang 'happy birthday' for my daughter, and I was able to send this back home to her to make sure she knew the day hadn't gone without us sharing it with her. It was about challenging ourselves, living outside our comfort zone and pushing ourselves to make everything of every opportunity we were getting in the most incredible country. It was also about



seeing the worst of what such poor conditions and opportunities can do to people. It was about facing our fears and overcoming them. In just one crazy day, I faced 3 near death experiences – I stroked a crocodile, I walked high rope bridges (taking inspiration from Julie and her conquering of her own fears) and then I was subjected to the most ridiculous, dangerous, crazy taxi-style minibus ride back to the house. It was 2 hours of high speed, stomach-churning madness, in torrential rain and storms, banging off the sides of other vehicles and fitting through the smallest of gaps imaginable, on roads that at times as best were mud tracks, at worst a fast flowing river. I kid you not. On another night, we returned from an exhausting full day coaching, plus a trip to the local after school club, to another storm - no electricity and no running water. No way of cooking and of course no showers. Despite all these experiences, no one moaned or ever considered this was anything other than great fun and we laughed

for hours, chatted and shared our life experiences. What an incredible and inspiration group of women I was fortunate to have met and to be able to add them to my group of closest friends.



I do not think I appreciated the impact this trip would have on my life until some months later. We have all remained good friends and most of us met up at the recent Netball World Cup in Liverpool. We still laugh and share thoughts (especially around avocado-gate) in our WhatsApp group. For me though, it gave me so much more than just new friendships. It had given me back my confidence, and my self-worth and had focussed my mind; not so much about what I wanted to do in life, but very much about what I didn't want to do. And so when I saw a job opportunity come up that would enable me to work in the sport that has always been my passion, it was the skills and the opportunities I had working in Ghana that I drew on, the confidence that I could and wanted to work giving



something back to netball at a grassroots level, and the belief that I would be good at it, and that perhaps at last, after 35 years of working, I had finally found my dream job and that I was not going to waste a minute more of my life.

And this is where I find myself today; loving life, loving work and loving the amazing people I have chosen to have around me. I certainly didn't realise this at the time, but if I had never been brave enough to take that giant and almost terrifying decision to go volunteering with the Netball Development Trust, I would never have had the courage to take the leap of faith into working full time with England Netball as a Netball Development Community Coach. I will always be truly grateful to Monica and Julie, and all the amazing friends I met on the journey. I would tell anyone and everyone that is willing to listen, even if you only do it once, this is a trip and an opportunity you really should do in your lifetime.



It certainly will not be a one off for me. Thank you, NDT.

