

ONE YEAR IN BENIN

It's a surprising fact but we have just completed one full year of our contract with the EPM Benin. So much has happened in this first year that it feels as if we have already done 3 years!!!

In this time we have;

- settled in our new accommodation (EPMB Galilee Compound – PK 6)
- started to learn French and managed to communicate (haltingly) with the people
- learnt our way around Cotonou and Porto Novo
- been introduced to the myriad of problems at Polyclinique du Bon Samaritaine (PBS)
- found workable solutions for the problems at PBS
- started projects to carry out the solutions to the problems of PBS
- the children have completed one school year and have started their second school year
- faced the challenges of health issues

Our accommodation

In our last blog post we described our accommodation and its surroundings in full. Therefore, it is safe to say our accommodation can no longer be called 'new'. In this time, we have had a change of neighbours as the pastors were changed. In addition, we had to do many renovations to facilitate our needs and making it more comfortable. We have made many friends in the families we come in daily contact with and feel a real sense of community with them. We pray that God will sustain us all, as per His wisdom, as we continue to strive to live together fraternally and peacefully.

In order to manage the day to day grind we decided to get some help from Sierra Leone. We managed to invite and transport our ward who have been helpful in managing the daily domestic duties as we busily commute between Cotonou and Porto Novo for work and the school run. We hope this change in geography will also afford him the opportunity to learn a new language and to continue his studies in the West African school system.

New language



Colleagues from French Class

Well, the most that can be said is, its early days learning French. We realised, only after we arrived, that many of the local people we live and work with do not speak French but instead spoke the local languages of Fon and Fon. Anyway, this did not deter us to communicate with them. Hand gestures have become very helpful!!

Learning to live in Benin



Motor cycles a permanent feature on the roads.

We learnt very early that Benin is a country of paper work and bureaucratic rules! The last blog outlined the stress we faced to complete the mountains of forms for Resident Permits, driver's license and work permits. These documents are very necessary as woe betide us if we are stopped and asked to produce them!!! So, to

reduce the stress that would definitely befall us if this situation arose, we kept within the law. This took us the better half of 3-6 months to complete. To top it all, in the case of the Resident permit, this has to be done annually!

We thank God we have found a driver who is experienced and able to handle the rigors of driving in Benin as we spend more than the average amount of time on its roads. This is because although we live and go to school in Cotonou, our place of work (PBS) is in Porto Novo (over 30 miles away). We, therefore, cover our fair share of kilometres in a week. This is not an easy feat, as the Beninose road code is only evident in theory!! So having a driver who can manage these roads was compulsory and God provided a miracle in sending someone who is capable. As with every miracle, the story is a long one and will not be covered in this blog.

Our Work – PBS



Polyclinique du Bon Samaritaine

In our last blog we had outlined extensively the problems we met at PBS. These were:

- Lack of infrastructure (buildings) as the hospital is housed in a 3- storey building, but there is no elevator. We have seen on many occasions the very sick (unable to climb the stairs) being carried up (or down) on the back of a porter or a relative!!



With Directrice (l) and
interpreter (r)

There is not enough space to house all the service and administrative departments and so the space for patients is cramped and uncomfortable. We have seen 2 newly

delivered mums on one bed! We have seen new-born infants of mothers delivered by C-section being held by a relative until the mum can manage to care for them! To get the necessary history, we had to have extensive staff interviews and observe the daily hospital activities before we understood the real problems; the reasons behind the problems to gain the relevant workable solutions to the problem. In doing so we have worked with the staff to be able to facilitate projects to solve some of the problems. These have been:

- Renovating an existing ward to hold up to 10 beds for a proper Postnatal ward
- Building a simple structure for outpatient's clinic to better facilitate antenatal and Under 5's clinics.
- Drawing up plans for a more permanent structure to house the administration building and the outpatient's department
- Putting in place procedures to improve accounting and financial information

These are just a few of the solutions that need to become reality, then we move on to solving and improving other situations.

Our Work – EPMB



Joey & Dr Antoinette doing a health talk at a local church

In our last blog we briefly outlined the health promotion presentations which we have been helping the local church to organise and promote. This is in addition to working with the hospital. So far, 5 churches in Porto Novo have been given presentations on 'Diabetes' by health professionals who are members of their local churches. This was communicated in the local language and involved the health committees of these 5 churches.

The plan now is to extend and include 5 new churches in which the presentations on 'Diabetes' will continue. The original 5 pilot churches are to move onto the next topic of 'Hypertension'. Presentations of the new topic is planned to start by the end of October. So, by the end of the year, we hope to have covered 2 topics (Diabetes and Hypertension) and to have done so in 10 churches. So, by the end of the year, we hope to have covered 2 topics (Diabetes and Hypertension) and to have done so in 10 churches.

The children



The girls at a Saturday bakery class with their friends

Our girls are growing quickly and enjoying school. Their school's syllabus follows the UK Cambridge syllabus which will prepare them for settling back into the UK system when we return. Joelle is now in Year 5 and Janelle in Year 1. So far, their health has been good and they enjoy socializing with children both at school and on our home compound. We pray that they will learn the French language very soon.



Joelle & Janelle



Our health



Joelle with some of her class mates
and Mrs Carsky their headteacher

Generally, we have been keeping very good health. However, there arose the need for Joanna to have surgery to alleviate a long standing health issue. This was facilitated by the family going to the UK in July. In this time Joanna had major surgery, saw good recovery and was fit and able enough to return to the mission field in September. Overall, we thank God and praise Him for an uneventful medical experience. It's only left for her to have regular check-ups and this will be done according to medical advice.



Joelle at a school event



Last year's Christmas play

Please help us to pray for:

- Strength to make the daily commute to and from Cotonou and Porto Novo
 - Protection on the Benin road
 - Patience and Wisdom to help to facilitate the changes in the systems at PBS that will help to make it more efficient
 - Finances and other resources that are needed to make the necessary changes at PBS
 - The information given at the church health talks to be effective in improving the health of the congregants
 - The right persons to be used in the presentation of the church health talks
 - Good health to be maintained for us, our family and friends (near and far)
- The children to continue to blossom and grow academically, socially and spiritually