

Why Netball? Julie Smith talks about NDT and Making a difference through netball



Why not go do HIV work, or give them clean water or food?

I've been asked this about the Trust, and in fact challenge myself on it from time to time.

Sometimes I know there is an amazing reason why I travel the world teaching netball, but I just can't find the right words to explain it to someone who hasn't been and done what I have, and hasn't seen the smiles on the kids' faces.

Firstly, I'm not saying my beloved netball is more important than a mosquito net or a bottle of clean water...but it has its place.

There are dozens of inspiring charities out there doing their bit to get these essentials to these poverty stricken places. But they need more than this, as we all do. They're humans. They have needs and rights, like the rest of us.

Enough of the heart strings stuff. So why do we give up our time and effort and money and fight to let these kids play netball.

There are so many reasons... and here are a few:

Play is fun!

These kids need to play. They need some fun times in their lives. Their school lives are focused on learning, so they can break the cycle of poverty. Their home lives are about living and surviving. A few hours a day playing sport, meeting people from another country (known as “mzungus” in Uganda) and laughing cannot be a bad thing.

Healthy children

Our fellow charities can help them with malaria nets, drugs, inoculations and clean water, and we can help their hearts and lungs stay healthy; keep their weight where it should be and improve their strength and fitness.

Life skills

Through playing team sports, whatever the sport maybe, we learn skills for life, not just the technical elements of the game.

Our children play together in mixed gender groups, in mixed abilities, mixed backgrounds and mixed disabilities, which many have never done before.

They learn teamwork, to work together with whoever they are playing with to achieve the greatest good.

They learn to follow directions from coaches, umpires and their captain (a peer).

They learn to communicate and cooperate with others.

They learn to cope with competition and with both winning and losing; and so learn sportsmanship skills.

They work with all types of people (deaf, girls, boys, older, richer, poorer).

Those who become team captains learn aspects of leadership, delegation and organisation.

These are skills that set them up for the rest of their lives. I really believe we help these children gain life skills and help them become more rounded people.

Add to this the pride in themselves at competing and learning a new sport.

Coaching and Umpiring

We work with local adults and young leaders to enable them to coach and umpire. This gives them new skills and offers them the opportunity for employment or voluntary work in their own community. They are encouraged to gain qualifications, which then open up the chance to travel.

Put Uganda on the netball map

One of our goals is to put Ugandan netball back on the map. They have so much talent in the country, but it's not being seen. Political unrest and corruption has badly affected the netball federation, which means the international girls we work with just don't get as many opportunities to play at international level as they deserve to.

We want to help them to push forward their national federation. This would undoubtedly boost national pride and let the top players play on the international scene where they deserve to be. And furthermore, we will help the children we work with to see their opportunity to climb the ladder to represent their country.

So the list is endless. And what's more, we as volunteers gain huge amounts of skills, memories and new friends, so it's not just the locals who benefit from our little project.

*By Julie Smith – Uganda Tour Co-ordinator, NDT
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