**Potter’s Village (PV) March 2021**

1. A view of the inside of PV; the logo; view of the Medical Centre

2. For those who don’t know PV is in Africa, in Uganda, in the far SW of the country, in the town of

3. Kisoro, under the shadow of these dormant volcanoes, right on the border with the Congo

4. I’d like to introduce you to Idah Kyarimpa who is the Administrator at Potter’s Village in Kisoro, Uganda. Idah has been the administrator since the beginning of 2020 and her first big challenge has been managing the impact of Coronavirus. She has done an excellent job and thanks to her leadership and the generosity of folk in the UK, the work has never stopped all year and all the staff have kept their jobs.

Because we have not been able to visit this year, she has kindly sent me some photos and videos that I would like to share with you to bring you up to date with what’s going on out there. Where possible I will keep quoting her.

5. So let’s start by hearing from her: “We have gone through a lot, especially this time of Covid, but we want to thank the Lord so much that we kept running and the programmes went on well. We sincerely appreciate your support, your love and your encouragement. And Potter’s Village is what it is today because of your support. May God bless you.”

6. At Potter’s Village we run two major programmes. One is the Medical Centre and the other is the Children’s Home. The different services offered are listed and the organisations that PV works with.

7. Idah tells us that “The neonatal baby unit at Potter’s Village is the only one in the whole District -

Actually the only one in the whole of western Uganda!”

8. Here’s a baby in one of the incubators in the neonatal unit for premature babies and sick newborn babies. The unit has 6 or 7 incubators. There are none at the local hospital.

9. The majority of children are seen in outpatients

Prior to Covid 19 we were seeing around 500 children a month with around 100 inpatients and 15-20 in the Neonatal unit. However in 2020 during the first lockdown we went down to only 140 children seen a month, of whom 19 were inpatients and 13 were neonates. The numbers are picking up now and it helps that we have Dr Nicci, a white doctor, in residence again as this draws patients.

10. There are two wards for older sick babies and children, and we have a dormitory for the mothers to sleep in so they can attend to their children on the wards.

11. The Medical Centre has 26 staff and is headed by Jovia, the senior nursing officer and two Clinical Officers Davis and Rodgers. These three folk have done a great job keeping the Medical Centre running throughout the 2020 lockdown whilst Dr Nicci was stuck in South Africa. She only returned to Potter’s just before Christmas. They do the day to day running of all the services we offer in the Medical Centre.

12. The Rehabilitation Unit is the newest part of PV and has been running for just over a year. It helps children with conditions like cerebral palsy, spina bifida and hydrocephalus. It is run by Nurse Judith with support from Janie Robson, an English Physiotherapist. Normally Janie lives at PV but because of the impact of Covid on the travel insurance industry, the Physio has not been able to return to PV since January 2020.

13. Lots of children have been helped. Here is Prince, who was 3 years old when he first came last January. His parents work in the capital city Kampala so he is looked after by his Grandma. When he first came he couldn’t stand, only sit. So he was given exercises for crawling, kneeling and then standing and now he can take some steps holding his Grandma’s hand.

14. Potter’s Village all started 13 years ago as a Children’s crisis centre for abandoned babies. It can have up to 18 babies in residence but in March 2021 there were 14. We have two houses on site where the children live and at times it can get noisy! The carers love singing to the children and encouraging them. Most mothers do not normally play with their children as too much work has to be done, so PV has had to teach the carers to play with the children.

15. Because many do not access antenatal care they are often malnourished prior to the birth and the shock of giving birth leads to bleeding and death. Other mothers have chronic sickness either physical like TB or mental. There is no real mental health service locally and anything that can’t be explained is deemed to be witchcraft. Unfortunately a significant number are unwanted and abandoned on the street or down drains.

16. Once the babies are weaned we look to resettle them back into the community, ideally with their families.

17. If the family is too poor, or their relatives are too old, the child often becomes malnourished. If the mother’s mental health relapses then again the child suffers. During the Covid lockdown in 2020 several of our mothers were unable to have their monthly injections because the psychiatric nurse was not allowed to visit them at home to treat them. Finally there is a big challenge for those that have been abandoned. Our social work team work with the community and agencies to try to find out which family the baby comes from and whether they will take the baby and look after it once it is weaned. Sometimes the baby is from a neighbouring Rwanda or Congo, or the UN refugee camp.

18. Fostering is not common, but…

PV needs your help with supporting these children. At the moment we have about 60 children in the community that we support and some of them need sponsors to help provide for their daily needs. We are always looking for extra help.

19. Once lockdown eased in 2020 building work restarted. PV’s incinerator had broken sometime ago, but we struggled to get approval for the design of the new one and we needed some extra land which the church kindly donated.

20. PV had an issue with security as one part of the perimeter wall was only a hedge with a couple of holes in it! Also when it rains, the football field behind PV floods and the water pours into PV. Completing with wall will help with both these problems.

21. Once a week all the staff meet together for a short service of singing and prayers followed by a staff meeting. All the resident babies attend this too. This picture is taken just as the meeting has finished.

22. The compound team is lead by Richard in the fawn overalls. They maintain the grass, the plants and the animals.

23. They keep the place clean and tidy, cutting the grass by hand with a scythe-like tool!

24. They grow all the vegetables for the children and if there is too much for the children, then they sell the extra in the market to make some money for PV. PV also has banana trees for the same reason.

25. They look after the pigs. There are 9 pigs at the moment. This is an important income generating project because they have baby piglets which can then be sold to the public, or to a family who is going to look after one of our babies.

26. And so we come back to the Medical Centre. Idah says they have two challenges at the moment in relation to the Medical Centre. One relates to equipment and one to transport.

27. These children need a lot of monitoring and medication to keep them well and often they need special equipment to help with breathing or give drugs. Unfortunately it is hard to maintain these machines, especially if they have come from abroad. PV has a plan of trying to buy things within the country as this saves on taxes and import problems and makes it easier to get spare parts.

28. These two babies are having their pulse and oxygen saturations monitored with a Lifebox Pulse Oximeter. These come from Taiwan and have to be sent there, via the UK, for servicing!

29. The other challenge is that sometimes sick babies need to be referred to a hospital in the capital city of Kampala to get specialist advice. This is difficult for PV because they do not have the right vehicle to transport an unwell child for 10 hours to Kampala so they have to hire a vehicle. Unfortunately there isn’t always a vehicle available. Also accommodation has to be found in Kampala for the night before and the night after the appointment.

Some of you might have heard about Alex who had heart surgery in Germany. He has to go for 6 monthly checks to Kampala. In January 2021 one little boy died on the way to Kampala. His heart couldn’t cope with the drop in oxygen levels owing to the height of the hills that have to be crossed on the journey and unfortunately the oxygen machine stopped working for a short time. PV is at 6,000 feet above sea level before any hills have been crossed!

30. So we are coming the end of what Idah wanted to tell you all. She has outlined the good work that has been done in this last year and told you of some of the needs and challenges going forward. She says: We pray that we shall be able to always give that excellent service that the community needs

31. **Idah says** “Finally I want to thank everybody that has participated in the wellbeing of this place; everybody that has participated in the wellbeing of the babies./+/ We are so glad that these children have been given hope; these children have been helped to survive.”

32. Friends of Potter’s Village is based in the UK and raises funds to support the work of PV. Do get in touch if you want to know more or want to contribute in some way.

33.**Idah says** “We thank you all. Thank you for your love and for your support. God bless you.”