

April 2013

Republic of Congo



I can see again!

'I have two reasons to celebrate.' Boniface said. (Fig. 1)

His first reason was that he could see his wife again. His second reason was that he no longer had to give up his job as a senior officer in the Department of Education. He was relieved that he could continue to support his family. His wife and family were thrilled as well!



Fig 2. First day of Operations



Fig 1. Boniface and his wife

Boniface is one of the first patients we operated on. After several months of fundraising and preparation, we started our surgical service on 14 Jan 2013 (Fig 2). Already we are seeing the joy of many patients and their families as we give the priceless gift of sight!

Happy 1st Birthday, New Sight!

It has been a year since the Samoutou family left their life in the UK and moved to the Congo. 'When we left, many thought that our move was great but kind of crazy.' A year on, I cannot agree more! **It is an absolute privilege to be able to help someone see! To see lives transformed, not just for the patients, but also for their families is a truly great thing!** As you can imagine, there have been several obstacles along the way, from electric shortage to deadly scorpions! They are a constant reminder of just how crazy our lives have become. It is such a different world here! When we came, we told ourselves that whilst it was crazy, it would be crazier if we did not come.

Now face to face with the desperate need of the people around us, we are even more determined to help, whatever 'crazy'



Fig 3. Glimpse of our world: Pygmy village where we distributed food & gifts at Christmas

things come our way. Our supporters often tell us that they don't think that they can ever do what we do. While many probably never will, we also cannot do what *they* do. **We simply cannot do what we do without our supporters!**

We have been blown away by the incredible support that we

have received, from individuals, to pre-schools, to churches, and even dogs who made fundraising calendars! **Thank you so much for empowering us to do what we do! We literally have only just begun. The best is yet to come!**

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

- Mar 12 Medical Supplies & Equipment purchased, packed, shipped from 6 countries
- 17 Apr 12 Samoutou family arrived in Impfondo, Congo with 2 suitcases
- 15 May 12 First Eye Consultation
- 14 Jun 12 First Short Term Volunteer visited Congo for 2 weeks
- 24 Jun 12 First Pygmy Village Medical Outreach
- 27 Jul 12 Solar Electric System installed
- 26 Sep 12 In India, presented at the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness Conference that is held every 4 years
- 3 Nov 12 Won international Excellence in Ophthalmology Vision Award
- 4 Nov 12 Met Mme. Sassou, the First Lady of the Republic of Congo
- 12 Nov 12 Shipment cleared in customs; 110 boxes arrived in Impfondo
- 14 Jan 13 Eye Surgical Service commenced
- 15 Jan 13 First blind patients could see again after surgery!

Prayer Requests:

1. Logistics & Finances for the Construction of our eye centre
2. Find & Train compassionate and capable staff as workload increases
3. Volunteers both in & out of Congo



Fig 4. Mama Hélène

Remember Mama Hélène whom Henri met when he was running (July 12 Newsletter)? (Fig 4) To see her beautiful story unfold, to read more stories like Bokota below, and to find out how the Samoutous are surviving life in the jungle, please visit the Samoutous' personal blog:

www.samoutou.com/blog



Fig 5. Samoutou family

The Boy no-one knew if he could or would ever See: A True Story

As soon as he was born, they knew that he had a problem with his eyes. Bokota's eyes bulged like a goldfish. They looked like they were about to burst any minute. All day, they darted from side to side at the speed of lightning. As the months went by, they also came to know that he was not like the other children. He did not seem to be as alert, responsive or 'nosey' as the other babies in the village. They longed for help, but the only potential help would be in the capital, which was out of their reach. Firstly, there were no roads to the capital. Secondly, even if they could beg and borrow from their family, they would not be able to afford the travelling costs, never mind the astronomical medical fees. They felt trapped and helpless. **Every time they looked at their son's sweet face, they wondered if he could see and worried that he never would.** Every day, that



Fig 6. With mum before surgery

dark fear hung over them like a thick black cloud. One day, they received a message from their uncle in Impfondo that a couple had arrived from abroad and had opened the first non-profit eye surgical centre. Immediately, they did everything they could to raise enough money to set off on their journey. As they carried Bokota along the dirt roads under the scorching sun, they dared not dwell on that flicker of hope lest they extinguish it somehow. When they arrived at New Sight Eye Centre, they met Henri. He told them that Bokota suffered from congenital glaucoma in both eyes. Sadly, Bokota might already have irreversible visual loss. Still, he explained that it would be worthwhile to operate on him to try save whatever

vision he might still have. As Bokota's family could not afford to send him abroad to a paediatric specialist eye centre, Henri promised that by God's grace, he would do his best. He planned to operate on the right eye first and then the left one at a later date.

On 4 February 2013, his parents were very quiet. Worry was written all over his mother, whilst his father tried his best to contain his nerves. **With hands shaking, they gently laid their precious son on the operating table, not at all sure if he could see what was in fact happening.**

The surgery went well. Everyone was relieved that little Bokota tolerated the anaesthetic and that the operation went well. Henri had warned them before the surgery that as it was hard to test vision in babies, it might be several months before they would know how successful the surgery was. So when morning came and Henri started removing Bokota's eye pad, they did not expect any great change. They were encouraged to see that the right eye that was operated on certainly looked much more 'normal' now. (Fig 7) A few



Fig 7. After first surgery (Right Eye)

minutes later, Bokota started looking around the consultation room. To his parents' great surprise, for the first time in his life, he seemed to be taking things in! Could it be that he could see better now? No-one knew. No-one could be sure. **Then the most incredible thing happened!** As Bokota stretched his arms to yawn, he suddenly stopped his arm in mid air.



Fig 8. Discovering the sight of his waving arms

His eyes seemed to be looking straight at his arm. He shook his fist and suddenly, his whole body moved enthusiastically. He stopped moving his arm. He

became very still. Moments later, he shook his fist again and immediately, his whole body responded excitedly once again! He repeated this several times. **It was as if when his hand moved, he could see it moving and was ecstatic by this most amazing discovery!** By now, his mother was smiling. She didn't really know what she felt. She thought that perhaps she was finally allowing herself to feel this thing that she had almost forgotten about. This thing called hope. (Fig 8)

Two months later, they were once again carrying Bokota on the same dirt road, under the same scorching sun. This time, his eyes were not protruding. This time, he was busy looking around. This time, their steps were lighter. This time, when they arrived at the eye centre, they broke into a wide smile as they saw Henri. They told Henri that since Bokota had both his eyes operated, he was like a different child. He was eating better. He was much more energetic. **He started to 'play non-stop' and get into everything. 'Like a boy,' the mother quietly and proudly announced. His father interrupted her in high spirits, 'Yes, like a boy! Like a boy!'** It was still early days, but for now, Henri enjoyed Bokota looking into his eyes.

Source: www.samoutou.com/blog