

Following OMPACO's visit to Msimbazi Mseto Autism Unit in July-August 2011, sponsored by OMPACO and the Ministry of Education, Ms Grace Mtunguja, who administers autism spectrum disorders in the schools in Tanzania, invited us to return in 2013 to run another training session for teachers of children on the autism spectrum and other developmental disorders.

The Team from OMPACO was varied and experienced in this field and we were fortunate to have Dr. Philip Altekruise, child and adolescent psychiatrist, Ms. Jill A. Morris, retired teacher of children with special needs in the Boston School Department and a founder of the special needs division in the Ministry of Education in Kuwait, Ms. Deborah Arin, OMPACO board member and speech and language pathologist and speech therapist who had visited Msimbazi Mseto Autism Unit in 200- ,Ms. Amanda A. Martinage, OMPACO board member and occupational therapist who had been part of the team of 2011, Dr. Amanda M. Canarella, psychologist who worked with families of children with disabilities including autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Dr. Martha Collins, OMPACO board member and child and adolescent psychiatrist, who also was on the 2011 team.

Thirty six teachers from three school districts in Dar es Salaam were present for the sessions at Mbuyuni Autism Unit in the Primary School compound. They had various levels of training in teaching children with special needs including children with ASD. Although there is a Teachers Training College in Arusha Region, there is very little taught on autism spectrum disorders. Ms. Grace Mtunguja, herself a teacher of children with special needs, saw the need for extending knowledge of ASD, both academic and practical to these teachers.

The sessions were generally received with interest but the practical "hands on" demonstrations and participation in role playing were joined in enthusiastically. This has led to some discussion by the Team on a follow-up program with more emphasis on classroom observation, shadow teaching and practical demonstrations.

On the last teaching day at the School, we were honored to have the program closed by.....from the special needs division of the Ministry of Education, accompanied by district education officers. With speeches, songs and gift giving it was a festive end to an intense week of teaching and learning and exchanging experiences and emails.

As well as working in the classroom, the Team attended the meeting of the National Association of People with Autism Tanzania (NAPA-T). This is mostly composed of parents and relatives and friends of children and young adults with ASD. They are earnestly attempting to increase the knowledge of ASD among the population of Tanzania, beginning in Dar es Salaam. They are gathering funds, planning for care of their children and students who age out of the current educational system and running a website to help attain their goals. They are interested in communicating with other organizations and associations, eg Autism Speaks to gain from the experience of others.

While the expert members of the Team carried on in the classroom, Dr. Altekruise, Dr. Canarella Ms. Arin and Dr Collins were invited by Dr. Frank Masao head of the department of psychiatry at the medical school to speak to the members of the department and residents and medical students in the department. Dr .Altekruise gave a lecture on autism spectrum disorders with

emphasis on evaluation, diagnosis and the treatment of ASD. Dr Canarella and Ms Arin added some clarification on their specialties and there was a lively questions and answers session. After the formal “rounds”, a small group of doctors, psychology interns and residents had another discussion regarding their work and how they could further engage in this section of child psychiatry.

A request for a seminar especially for junior doctors, newly qualified psychiatrists interested in child psychiatry and psychiatry interns resulted with Dr Collins and Ms Arin meeting with them one afternoon. Ms. Arin delivered a lecture on observations of a child on autism spectrum, clinical evaluation with a differential diagnosis list and treatment which consists mainly in education with possible medication for specific co-occurring disorders. It was a lively group with much interest in a new subject.

While the classroom teaching was going on at Mbuyuni Autism Unit, Dr Altekruise and Dr Collins with Dr Canarella and Ms Arin met with parents who brought their child for a brief discussion and clinical evaluation of various concerns and worries of their child’s development. Xnumber of children were seen over three days and referrals were made for the children to be seen at various places, eg, speech therapy, hearing testing, occupational therapy, medical evaluation and neurological evaluation.