

My Madagascar experience

Abigail Medway



02/06/2025

The first day at the Sunrise Centre was life changing, seeing all the children smiling, happy and free while at the centre was rewarding. I was astonished on how the children did not let their disabilities effect their happiness and skills. We gave the children all of the toys we brought for them, they screamed with excitement! I observed the children and got to know the staff working at the centre. I worked with a girl called Claveena, where we threaded beads on a string, and I was so proud of her as she struggled at the start but managed to thread all of the beads on the string and she was so proud to show Nathan and her peers. I learnt a lot on the first day, through discovering how capable, confident and skilled these children were. I started to learn Malagasy, telling the children to sit down (mipetraka) as this was a very common phrase at the centre!

03/06/2025

I observed their writing lessons, where they were responding to a letter from another school. I then worked with a group to trace over words and practice the writing skills, while also focusing on fine motor skills. This allowed me to gain communication skills and also discover which support if effective with certain children. Some children cannot write, but positive praise when they tried made them so excited and included within the activity. After lunch it was relax time, and the children were very excited to use our phones and take selfies on them. I also taught Sevoreeno how to say, 'rock on' and pose.

04/06/2025

I worked with a boy called Iman, using word cards and saying them in French, some in English and he was repeating them, he was also teaching me some French words. This developed my communication skills with the children. We then played football with

some of the children and staff. In the afternoon Jeyda and I worked with the staff and taught them some English words and phrases. They also taught us some French and Malagasy words for some phrases too such as; 'inona no vaovao' & 'tsy vaovao' meaning 'what's new?', 'nothing new'. I developed my communication skills, learnt new phrases, and learnt how to be more relaxed and not focus too much on routine and timings, which has been a difficult thing for me during this trip due to having OCD.

05/06/2025

Today was a staff training day, where we discussed which children would benefit coming on certain days, discussing the children's needs and which days are for play and lessons. Then Julia discussed working with certain behaviours, effectively communicating and the benefits of rewards and sanctions. This was useful to be apart of, as we learnt different ways to help the children that misbehave, and I implemented this when working with the children. I have also learnt new strategies to use in my future practice as a teacher. Afterwards over 20 people got in a 14-seater bus to drive home, this was very funny!



07/06/2025



We drove Julia to the airport and went past the mountains and the sea front. The driver stopped and gave us some Ylang-ylang, which is a natural perfume, where they extract the oil from the plant. We spent the rest of the day at Exora which is a 4-star hotel next to ours. In the evening, we drove to the 'strip' and had pizza, there was many children

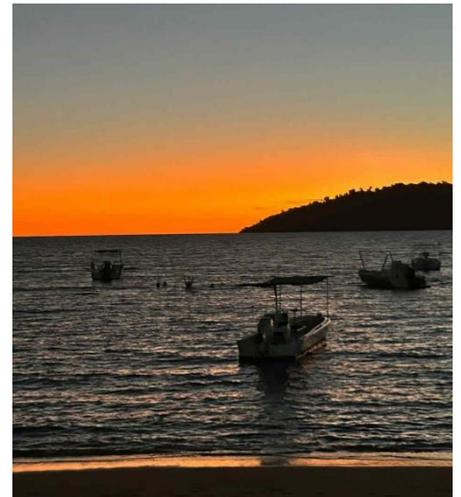
selling magnets, ylang-ylang and vanilla, I bought four magnets. It was a culture shock, when I saw all of the children on the streets working and not being supervised by their parents. Seeing the animals on the streets who were starved was upsetting as well.

The first week in Madagascar has taught me to be more grateful than ever! Being at the centre has taught me to always keep trying, using many strategies to include all children with their work and I have learnt new ways to communicate with the children such as Makaton, pointing and showing and also just showing them, a smile and love will make them feel included and safe.



08/06/2025

Today was a relaxed Sunday at Exora again, in the evening I was swimming in the sea, and I met two men and a girl who lived in Nosy-Be. One of the men was a college professor who taught his students English. This was really interesting to learn and for two hours I was teaching him new English words, and he was teaching me Malagasy such as 'mafana be' (very hot) and mangatsiaka be (very cold). We further discussed the culture and celebrations in Madagascar and England, this taught my new things about the culture, religions, celebrations and life in Madagascar and I used the Malagasy I learnt throughout the rest of my stay in Madagascar. If you look closer us four are waving in the sea.





09/06/2025

We took some of the children to see the waterfall today, we walked past dogs, zebus and children carrying chameleons. It was my first time swimming under a waterfall, and it was incredible! The children were so excited and were splashing constantly. I overcame my fear of swimming around fish it was an incredible time to see the children ecstatic, and the beauty of Madagascar. I learnt that the branches on the trees are manipulated to stay lower to the floor, so they are easy to pick fruit from, and we saw a plant that was similar to a fly catcher. In the evening, we went to the 'slow place' to eat, and I had tomato pasta with carrot toppings! This was a shock to see carrots on my pasta haha.

10/06/2025

Today at the centre I helped the children write the word Madagascar and observed a boy with no hands write on a whiteboard and I was astonished on how skilled and confident he was. These children have taught me that anyone can do anything, their strength and perseverance has been life changing to watch and support.



After lunch I introduced the children to SpongeBob SquarePants (my favourite childhood programme) and they loved it!

11/06/2025

There was more handwriting practice, and I was in the classroom with a girl called Celina. She has very low muscle tone and cannot walk on her own and struggles with her fine motor skills. Within the classroom I slightly lifted her hand up and she moved to write. This was incredible to witness, and Nathan took a picture as a demonstration on how people can support Celina. I gave her the strength to lift her arm up while she moved and wrote beautifully! Compared to my experience in UK SEND schools, I was able to provide more individualised support for the children, and all children have the opportunities to learn, their needs do not prevent them, and this is what makes The Sunrise Centre so special!

12/06/2025

In the morning, I was looking after a baby girl, completing puzzles and helping develop her fine motor skills. Nathan poured all of the Lego on the floor and the children's screaming in excitement is a memory I will never forget. In the afternoon I worked with a boy called Danio who is non-verbal and ADHD. He sat on my lap for almost an hour cuddling and then playing with his two Lego cars, I was making him belly laugh and it was so heartwarming to see him so happy. Everyone was shocked at how long he sat still for playing with me as usually he only stays sat for five minutes at a time. Afterwards, we were pushing his Lego cars around the floor, and he saw a peer with a bigger Lego car, Danio tried to grab it and got shouted at by a couple of the children. However, this was his way of communicating that he wanted a bigger car as well, when I took him to the rest of the Lego and built him a bigger car the smile on his face was everything. Because I had understood what he wanted but couldn't verbally communicate it, this was a proud moment of mine, as I was able to understand him and make him have the biggest smile on his face.

14/06/2025

Today we went to Leamer land, and it was incredible to see all of the different animals. I held a baby crocodile, and I never thought I would do this, as I was extremely scared and overcame another fear! In the evening, we went to one of the bars and there was a dance off where people were doing amazing flips! I also was able to get a picture behind the DJ stand and wear their headphones.



15/06/2025

Today I swam with turtles! And tried fish, Zebu steak, shrimp and octopus for the first time!



16/06/2025

Today we practiced more handwriting, and I worked with the low attainer group that require one-to-one support. To make the lesson more fun we used chalk that I bought from the UK to make writing easier. For Danio, who wasn't cooperating, we helped him draw a car track for him to practice movement with the cars and stay in the line while he is driving. A boy called Landrai was going over to another area to chalk and annoy his peers, so I handled his behaviour by taking the chalk off him and giving it him back when he was in the chalk area, after a couple of times eventually he stayed and drew patterns on the floor. This lesson taught me to be patient and to be able to adapt on the spot for the children that are struggling or misbehave to engage all of them. After school Mariya, Jeyda and I went into town, so Mariya could get a haircut. I bought Vango Vango jewellery and a post card for the children I used to teach for their collection.

17/06/2025



Today we focused on counting to ten in French and I worked with Danio. As mentioned previously Danio struggles to concentrate and stay still, instead of using numbers, I took him into the toy area and let him choose what he wanted to use so he was engaged, he picked a wooden counting bead block. I then took him to a quiet area away from others and counted with him. This was child-led, as he moved the beads or shook the frame I counted for him. He then ran around but would come back where I would count to ten and he would run around more. In the end he was humming the tune of the counting as I moved the beads, so I knew he understood, and he was trying to count with me. I then let him have a brain break, where all the time he will pretend, he is a driver and run around the school. This has taught me to concentrate on the child's behaviour and sounds more when they are non-verbal to see if the child is picking up the work. It also taught me to be relaxed and to let the lesson be child-led and at the child's pace. Which is different to mainstream schools which I have taught in, where the children need to do a certain amount of work by the end of the lesson. Afterwards we drew the Madagascar flag on the children's foreheads and got Grandma to make us pizza Madagascar style.

18/06/2025

We practiced more counting to ten, and I worked with Celina using a grid and animals to place on the rows and count, Celina was able to move the animals and count in sequence, and when I showed her a certain number of animals, she was able to say the



number I had in my hand. Afterwards we had a story about Independence Day and did a lesson on colours. After lunch we used the Lego to make the Madagascar flag. All of this was in preparation for the parade and Independence Day celebrations. In the evening, I realised I had reset the padlock on my suitcase and could not get in, so we had to break the lock with this random kitchen gadget.

19/06/2025

We did another lesson on colours, where I worked with a group of three children using different coloured Lego bricks to identify different colours in French. I then got the children to walk around the centre and find the colour I had asked them, this made learning fun. Through doing lessons like this I have learnt to adapt lessons to be fun, inclusive and target the childrens' mobility skills while learning. Later, all the children got to do story time, Landrai who is non-verbal had the opportunity to be part of story time, he managed to point and make sounds, which was his way of communicating, which made me so proud of him for trying to communicate and include himself in the activity. We then had a story about the French Revolution from Levanche (teacher) and had lunch. In the afternoon we sang the national anthem ready for the parade. I then went back to the hotel and practiced the national anthem.

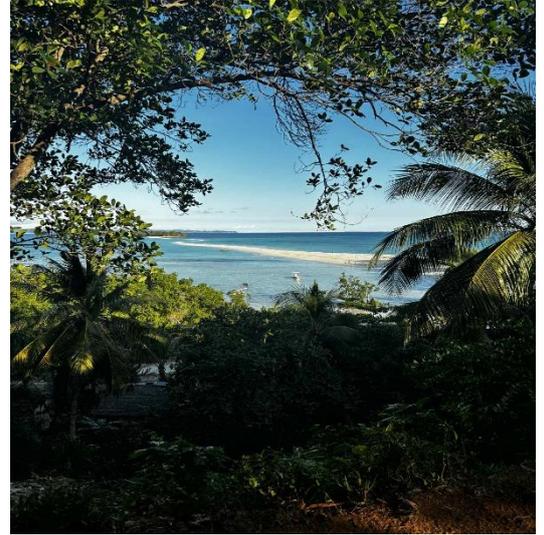
20/06/2025

It was playing day in the centre where the children are able to play all day with any toy they want. For a couple of days there has been a new girl who came from a small island, I had noticed she stayed in one corner of the room. I decided to go over and talk to the teachers who was with her, and because she has not been used to crowded spaces, she is too scared to move closer to the children, I brought all the toys to her and played with her the whole day, she was so happy and making her laugh was the best. I focused on puzzles at the start to support her fine motor skills, and then we played with animals, where she categorised them into sea and land animals. We also had our meeting with Nathan with our improvements and our targets. He said that I am a natural teacher, I have a good balance between setting boundaries and being kind, I am confident in being silly and dancing in front of the children and, he is happy how I came into the centre and worked straight away helping all children to have effective education and support. For my target he said that he could not think of one, he had spoken to Sophie and Julia and said that he does not have a target for me, that I have been great and to never lose my ambitions. This was a proud moment of mine, to be told that I came and

have been great, has given me a confidence boost to apply for future jobs, and I have also been looking into working in SEND schools and future travelling to help more children in need.

21/06/2025-22/06/2025

We went to Nosy Iranja for the weekend, and I have never seen such beauty in my life! The sea was breathtaking! We went on a hike to the mountains that overlooked the island, and I tried lobster for the first time. In the evening, we sat around a fire on the beach with a local band playing Malagasy songs with their guitars and drums. This is a memory I will never forget!



23/06/2025

We had a lesson on numbers and colours and then the children were able to do story time again and listen to two stories from the teachers. The rest of the day was relaxation time, where the children had a rest after lunch and then we all went into the garden to watch football tournaments with the children and teachers. In the afternoon, I also got to say hello to a baby, who was a sibling to one of the students.

24/06/2025

Today was our last day at the Sunrise Centre, it was a playing day today where we had the Lego out all day, played football, basketball and the parachute out. The children loved the parachute; they were so excited to be under it and chuck to balls out of it. In the afternoon, I laid with Celina and was playing with a poppet and a silly hat, where she was laughing so much! Making these children laugh was the best thing, seeing how happy they are was a great reward. At the end we said out goodbyes, lots of tears and hugs with all of the children. Our final wave bye.

25/06/2025

Today was a rest day at the four-star hotel Exora, one of the teaching assistants from the centre came and braided our hair ready for Independence Day parade.



26/06/2025

Today was an early start as we drove to Hellville at 7:30am, ready for the parade that the Sunrise Centre was apart of. When we arrived, the children were getting dressed into white shirts and were extremely excited to see us! When we were ready, we walked up and there were so many schools and clubs being apart of this parade, I went and saw the drums playing and there were boys who were doing karate and flips while waiting for the parade. Unfortunately, one of the minibuses with the children went to the wrong place so we were missing some of the children. We proceeded to march through the main town in front of thousands of people. This was heartwarming, a memory that I will

never forget, to be apart of something so special and so important was a highlight for this educational trip! Afterwards we went to Grandmas house and celebrated, the children did some great dance moves, there was lot of laughter smiles, good food and amazing memories. In the end Nathan gave us all a certificate and the children and staff nominated me 'most well-rounded volunteer of the trip', which was a great reward as Nathan said I achieved this for always trying, through learning Malagasy and learning new ways to communicate, and how I always tried my hardest to help the children and to settle into the centre.

27/06/2025



We rested at Exora for the day then in the evening our TukTuk divers offered to drive us to Mont Passot to see the sunset. It was beautiful!

28/06/2025

Home time 😞 We played games at the airport. I got the window seat on the plane!



My top favourite memories at the centre:

1. Learning new ways to communicate with the children and understanding the childrens' wants when they cannot verbally express them and seeing their smiles when you help.
2. Being part of the parade.
3. Making Celina belly laugh.
4. Danio running straight to me every morning.
5. Seeing how happy and strong the children are!

My top 3 favourite memories outside of the centre:

1. Nosy Iranja.
2. Swimming with turtles.
3. Driving the TukTuk.

What I have done to improve myself:

1. Being more relaxed and not trying to organise everything.
2. Adapting activities to different abilities and thinking on the spot to make the lesson more engaging when the children are losing focus.
3. Treating each child individually and giving them the love and support they need.
4. Meeting new people and doing everything I can to communicate.
5. Learning Makaton with a deaf member of staff and Malagasy with the teachers and public, helped me to communicate with all children including the deaf ones.
6. Conducting writing lessons with chalk.
7. Always being open to trying new things; new activities, new foods and a new mindset.

My proudest moments:

1. Trying new foods, especially seafood!
2. Holding a baby crocodile.
3. Getting the best student award.
4. Travelling to a country for a month on my own and being the best version of myself.

New things that I have learnt and will use in future practices:

1. I have developed my skills in effectively working with disabled, non-verbal children and how to effectively support their needs, learning and knowledge. I

have also learnt how to calm the children down and support them when they are upset. I have though a lot during this trip as my future plans were to work in a mainstream school. However, with this experience, and the love I had for working at the Sunrise Centre, I am considering working in a SEND school, and to carry on travelling over the years to different schools for me to support them further. I dream to give these children everything I can to help fund their education, support their needs and give them the best life possible.

2. I have learnt to 'mora mora' to relax and not to worry about everything but to see the positives in everything. Before Madagascar I always worried, but over the month in Madagascar I have learnt to live in the moment, to focus on the positive, be the best, positive self I can be. I have improved my wellbeing, my attitude and my overall personality while being away and I will maintain this new positive self, so my future class and job will receive the up most love and support to help everyone thrive.
3. I have developed how to effectively communicate with staff and parents; even though I struggled to communicate with the staff, I tried my best and did everything I can, through using sign language, and google translate, so I am able to engage with the staff and communicate with them about their own life, goals and future plans as well as learning more about the childrens' needs.
4. I have learnt to always push the children further to develop their skills, that no matter what their disability is all children are capable of learning and gaining new skills. Due to only being in SEND schools on a two-week placement for my course, I never witness the childrens' capabilities, and it has been rewarding and life changing to witness how incredible to children at the Sunrise Centre are.
5. I have learnt a new culture, which has been incredible to be apart off. I got braids, was a part of the Independence Day parade, spoke to many people about their life in Madagascar, celebrated with Malagasy music, did Madagascar dances and learnt new greetings, handshakes and Malagasy to communicate with everyone. Visited the rock mines, which was a life changing event, seeing the children and parents living in very bad conditions, the children with no shoes and lack of clothes were an upsetting moment. At the end I provided Nathan with some clothes to give to the children, and in the future, I will do a lot more to help these children.

This experience has taught me so many things, which has improved my knowledge, attitude and future goals. With this experience it allows me to find future employment in mainstream and SEND schools and has given me the knowledge on how to travel again in the future to support more children, families and schools.

By, Abigail Lucy Medway