

There will be time for questions at the end, but I prefer a more interactive style of presentation, so feel free to interrupt me with questions as we go along.

So “Attitudes to disability in East Africa”. Perhaps, first we should ask ourselves, What is the prevailing attitude to disability in the UK? or even what is my attitude to disability? So, what do you think? What is your attitude to someone who is disabled?

Perhaps, like me, you don’t think the word disabled is very helpful. I prefer thinking about Ability rather than disability. I am sure that a typical person who is classed as disabled by most people, will be better at some things than I am. I remember being on holiday in Germany with my wife and we were in a small mountain train. One of the other passengers was what I believe is now called educationally disadvantaged. He was in his late teens, but had a mental age of around 7. He was there with a carer and enjoying the trip. Generously he offered me one of his sweets. He was astounded by my reply and found it hard to understand that I couldn’t speak German as well as he could. Similarly, when I was working in Denmark I attended the Chess Club in Esbjerg and played a young guy with “Special Needs”. We communicated in English because his English was much better than my Danish.

Certainly so-called disabled people have hopes and dreams just like everybody else.

I suspect the attitude of most people today to disability is sympathy, tinged with an embarrassment factor, because they don’t really know how to react, and are scared of offending them or others. This would not always have been the case and certainly my memory of the 1960s was that many people were wary of disabled people, almost as though their disability was contagious. I think the UK has come a long way since the 1960s. I don’t think Lost Voice Guy would have won Opportunity Knocks in the 1960s, though he did win Britain’s Got Talent in 2018.

The other prevalent attitude is to mutter about the prevalence of unused disabled parking spaces, when all the standard parking has been used up.

What about East Africa? I will now show a video clip which was made in Uganda, which clarifies the attitude to disabled people in most people’s eyes. It applies specifically to Uganda. But my understanding is that it also applies to Kenya, and Tanzania, and, indeed, most countries in Africa.

1. The Next Chapter <https://vimeo.com/382249427>

I now want to move on from that and talk about a young woman called Emily Henderson, who grew up in Milton, going to Milton primary school and Impington Village College. I had the privilege of having her in the youth group I ran at All Saints Milton, Church at the turn of the Millennium. In 2009 she did a summer job at an Orphanage in Jinja, Uganda, and she was so appalled by the provisions for children with special needs, that when she left University the following year she went back to Uganda and, with a woman called Emily Worrall, she had met the previous summer, who is from

Indiana in the USA, she founded a children's home for children with special needs. It is called Ekisa. Ekisa means "Grace" in the local language, Lugandan. As well as the same conditions we get here, there also a lot of children who have cerebral malaria. The children's home was founded in February 2011, and quickly expanded, adding a community care team and a school. The community care team help parents to look after children with special needs at home and are also instrumental in beginning to change attitudes.

We can now finish the video we started earlier.

I now want to talk about adoption. In the past there have been many children adopted from poor families in Uganda to rich western families. Large sums of money have sometimes changed hands. There has been some concern about this in many circles, including the Ugandan Government. From the very beginning Ekisa policy has been that before anyone can adopt they must foster the child in Uganda for 12 months before they can be removed from the country. Recently this was enshrined in Ugandan Law, and the authorities now refer to Ekisa as an example of good practise

So let's look at the story of one of many children helped by Ekisa. It's time for another video. Let's watch Crispus' Story

<https://vimeo.com/296624579>

I retired in 2016 and my wife and I took the opportunity to travel to Jinga and visit the children's home and school. It was a brilliant. I remember visiting the orphanage where the two Emilys had worked in 2009. We took with us some of the children from Ekisa, including an 8 year old called Jane. Jane helped looking after the children at the orphanage, and it was fairly obvious to me that in the future she would make a brilliant primary school teacher, but I also knew, that without Ekisa, she would have been discarded as a waste of space.