

‘Volunteering is in my nature and this will be the icing on the cake’



Louise Skelt is a dental nurse and oral health educator based in West Sussex who is fundraising to travel to Uganda with Dentaid and volunteer her dental skills.

About Louise

Dental nurse Louise is married to Roy and has three children, three cats, a dog called Tali and three rescue chickens. In her spare time she loves baking and decorating cakes, cycling, walking Tali, and gardening. She is currently walking the South Downs Way in sections and planning two days of wild camping for part of it with her three children this March.

Louise's story

My story begins at 17 when I had just finished college and had no clear direction of what to do with my life. I visited a careers advisor who worked at the college and an option at the time was to put me forward for a Youth Training Scheme (YTS), what is now an apprenticeship. The advisor looked at availability and dental nursing at Cornerways Dental Practice in Angmering, West Sussex came up.

I worked with the owner of Cornerways, David Wright (who now works in Harley

Street), and he gave me a great knowledge of dentistry. I was thrown in at the deep end straight away with suction... and the rest is history. David had a special interest in occlusion so did a lot of Denar work, occlusal equilibration and TMJ treatments. I took my National Certificate and passed and felt that it was time to move on.

To Southwick Green I went and another lovely practice owned by dentist Colin Bunce. We did some great surgical procedures that dental nurses in general practice just wouldn't do now, which is a real shame – such as apicectomies and cantilever bridges – in the days of fee per item.

After a couple of years an opportunity then arose to get more established in leadership roles and I moved to Ball Tree Dental Care in Sompting under the ownership of Christine Hallworth [now run by siblings Sachin and Shalini Anand]. I have been there now for 23 years. This was a foundation dentist training practice until last year and my role was to nurse with the foundation dentist using my knowledge to help support them through

their first year in dentistry. This practice is in a deprived part of West Sussex and education has played a vital part of my role at the practice.

I undertook qualifications in oral health education and later, Duraphat Varnish Application. The practice is part of the Starting Well campaign and we run Duraphat clinics alongside routine appointments which focus on educating parents and carers on the importance of good oral hygiene and diet in maintaining a healthy mouth. As a practice we believe strongly that education is key in prevention. Key to this ethos is a focus on making visits to the dentist fun for our child patients.

Working week

My working week consists of different roles at the practice. I am lead dental nurse and currently guiding three new dental nurses. I am involved with compliance and reception, and I also work with our clinical dental technician (CDT). I have completed an impression taking qualification, so I am very



hands-on in this clinic; it is amazing watching patients with little confidence come out smiling from ear to ear. Our CDT Andy Gibbs is a master of his craft and we are lucky to have him. I have recently completed a course on being an infection control lead (I love a bit of infection control) and am training as an implant dental nurse.

bearable again for these patients.

I also work for the emergency dental service, Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust and have been there for 23 years. The service sees patients out-of-hours 365 days a year with a core group of dedicated dentists, dental nurses and receptionists.

On a recent visit to BDIA Dental Showcase at ExCeL in London, Dentaaid had a stand and I saw overseas volunteering opportunities

is £1,867. I have a further £1,133 to reach my goal. All the money raised goes to Dentaaid to pay for travel, accommodation and food for the volunteer. The volunteer pays for all inoculations and spending money whilst out there.

Once we get to Uganda, I know the hours will be long and working conditions challenging but I will take this in my stride. I can return home to a healthcare system that



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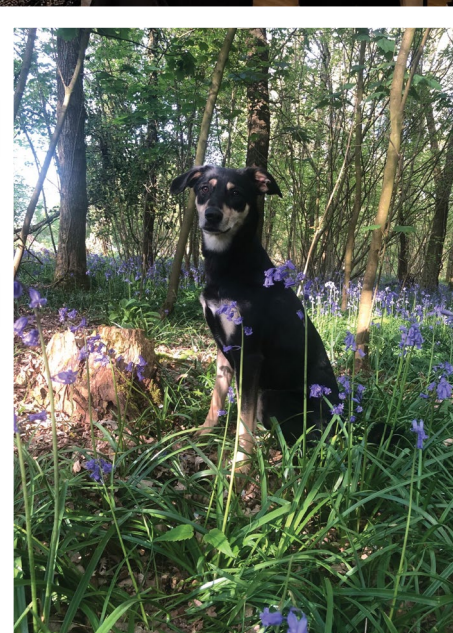
Volunteering

My adventures with Dentaaid started when my youngest child got older and I felt I had a bit more to give. I reached out to Dentaaid and they said ‘come on board’. I have been working at Dentaaid’s Worthing mobile unit for four years and have loved every minute of it. This clinic has the best surgery view in Sussex, straight out to sea and the pier. It runs alongside Turning Tides, a homeless charity, which aims to give some confidence back to this group of people without the pressures of being de-registered if you don’t go. A lot of these patients have a chaotic life and find it hard to preplan events. Being involved with Dentaaid is very rewarding and Andy and I have made some amazing dentures for some of the patients with no dentition back at my practice. I can say without a doubt that this has made living

available. Along with my daughter who is a newly qualified dental hygienist, we said there and then ‘YES, now is the time to do this’. Volunteering is in my nature and this will be the icing on the cake, to visit an amazing country whilst being able to help so many communities with basic oral health needs.

The trip

My trip will take place in February 2025 and last for two weeks. The patients at my practice (now called Dental Essence Sompting) are absolutely amazing. I have known them for years and we are like a family. So, when I decided to hold a raffle, I had no doubt they would get involved. Within two months all the tickets had been sold and we raised a fantastic £900 towards my £3,000 target for the Dentaaid trip. With the help of wonderful dentists and friends of mine my total so far



supports me when needed; the people we will see do not have that luxury.

For Louise’s fundraising page, visit <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/louise-skelt-1>.

As told to Kate Quinlan

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