



## 'I returned home with great memories'



Dental nurse **Claire Kingsnorth**<sup>1</sup> shares her experience of volunteering with Dentaaid in Morocco.

**D**entaaid is a charity that provides dental care and oral health advice for people in need in the UK. They also help to improve the oral health of people in several countries abroad that often do not have access to a dentist or access to oral hygiene products.

I signed up to volunteer with Dentaaid for their 2020 trip, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic the trip was postponed until 2023. Our trip was to Chefchaouen – the city known as the 'Blue Pearl' – in Morocco in May 2023 and I would highly recommend this experience. The trip was for eight nights and we visited ten schools over five working days to provide safe, free dental treatment to nearly 1,000 schoolchildren who were in pain and

offered them oral health education to try to encourage good habits.

Here is what you can expect if you sign up to a Dentaaid trip.

### Fundraising

It is worth remembering that Dentaaid is a charity and relies on donations and fundraising to fund their work. The overseas trips are no exception and to take part I had to raise funds to help cover the cost of the trip. For my fundraising I received part sponsorship from the British Association of Dental Nurses (BADN) which I am grateful for. I also set up an online fundraising page where I asked friends and family to sponsor me and I paid some of the cost myself.

### Selection and training

After I applied for a place on the trip, Dentaaid selected a team of dental nurses, dentists and a dental therapist to provide the care they required and a few months before we flew out to Morocco, we attended a training day at Dentaaid HQ in Southampton. The aim of the day was to learn about what to expect on the trip and to give us an opportunity to meet

each other. We also collected PPE, such as gloves and masks, that we had to pack into our luggage. When we arrived in Morocco, we had another training day to prepare us for the week ahead. Working in schools in Morocco is completely different to working in a dental surgery at home. We had to learn to adapt; we used classroom chairs instead of dental chairs, bins as spittoons and empty water bottles as sharps bins.

### Packing

We all packed as lightly as we could so that we could fill our suitcases with the dental supplies and PPE we had been given to take. We were encouraged to get hold of as many toothbrushes and toothpaste samples as we could and fill every bit of suitcase space with them! We each had to bring a bright head torch and spare batteries as there is no surgery light and we had to improvise.

### Accommodation

We stayed in twin rooms in a lovely hostel. I got on very well with my dental nurse roommate and we worked together throughout the week. We were provided with

### Author information

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huge buffet breakfasts each morning. The square-shaped Moroccan pancakes (*msemen*) were my favourite! They were so good I have found a recipe for them and will be making them at home.

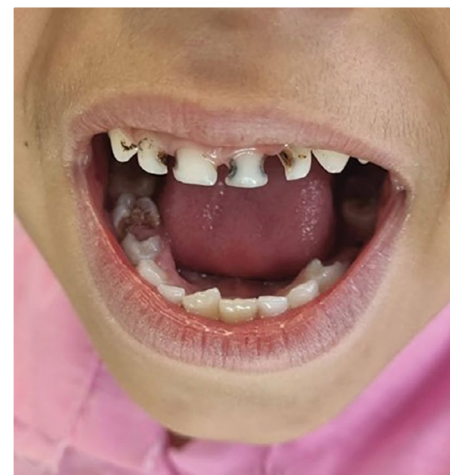
### Typical day

The eight-night trip was broken down into two travel days, one training day, five working days and a rest day. Each working day we set up at a different base school, which was usually a high school. We set up a main treatment room and a decontamination room. The main treatment room comprised of separate dentist stations and a main table for clean instruments and supplies. We ensured all dentist stations were well stocked throughout the day with gauze, PPE, tissues etc.



removed the root and she was so relieved to no longer be in pain.

Most of the children had heavily decayed teeth and many were in a lot of pain. Unfortunately, they have easy access to cheap sugary treats, whereas healthier options such as fruit are expensive in comparison. Access to dental treatment is limited due to the low number of affordable dentists and the cost of travel to get to them. A lot of the children did not even own a toothbrush. Many of the children were easy to treat and very co-operative as they were so eager for the opportunity of having dental treatment.



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After setting up, a group of us would start triaging children one class at a time. Children in pain were invited to come to our treatment room for further examination by a dentist and have extractions if necessary. We also provided all children with fluoride varnish application and oral health education along with free toothbrushes and toothpaste. As well as the set up at the base school, a small team of us would go to a local primary school to triage children and invite those in pain to the base school for treatment to alleviate the dental pain.

### Patients

The aim of the trip was to provide dental treatment to the schoolchildren. A few teachers sat in the chair too and one parent was also treated as her daughter told the dentist about her mother and the years of pain she had suffered. She had visited a dentist many times after an extraction four years previously, complaining she was still getting pain and kept being dismissed and sent away with painkillers. After one of the dentists on our team examined her, it was discovered that the extraction had failed with a root left behind, causing her the pain. Our team

### Decontamination

All dental nurses were responsible for making sure instruments were decontaminated quickly so there was no shortage of instruments. There were limited supplies, so we had to be on the ball! Decontamination was basic, but the best that could be done in the remote environment. Instruments were scrubbed in a washing up bowl with washing up liquid, inspected and sterilised for at least 25 minutes in a pressure cooker as there was no access to an autoclave.

### Support

We all rotated stations and helped any dentist that needed assistance by bringing them instruments, supporting and reassuring children during their extractions and holding

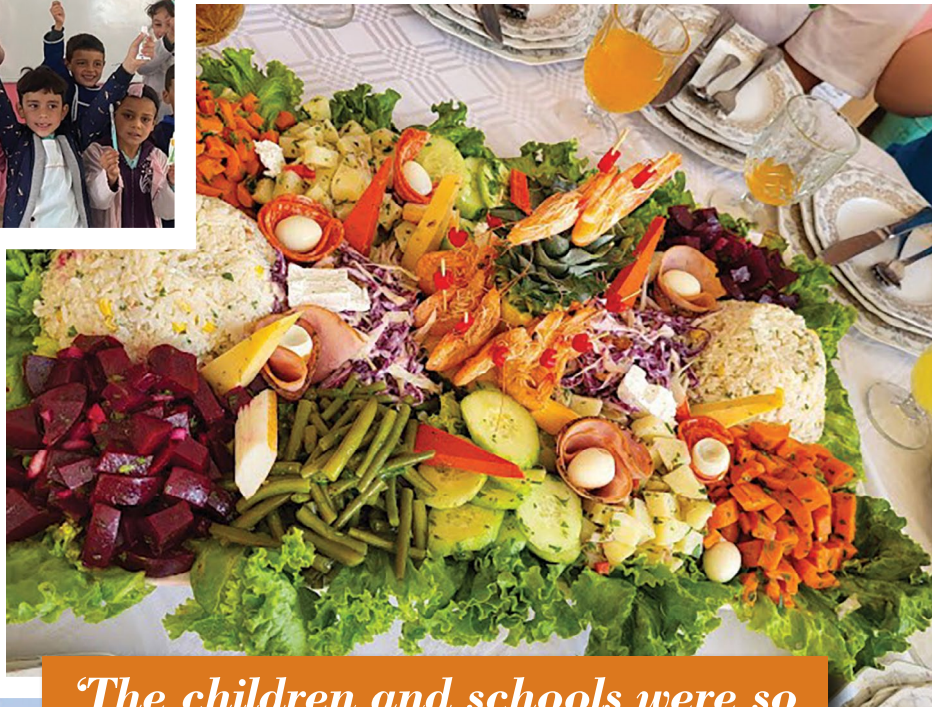




a head torch as a dental light. We learned to speak basic Arabic and universal words eg *aji* (come), *hrak* (pain), *bezak* (spit), *bravo* (well done), *safi* (it's okay/calm down) to communicate with the children. We also gave post-operative aftercare advice to the children with the help of translators. Throughout the day we were encouraged to look after each other, make sure we took regular breaks and drink plenty of water as it was easy to forget during the busy day. At the end of each day we had a debrief to discuss any issues.

and walked to a couple of viewpoints on the Rif mountains. There was also time for souvenir shopping for bargains to bring back home!

and a few of us are even planning to return. There are lots of opportunities to give back to the community, whether that's doing something local to you or volunteering abroad with Dentaaid. To find out more visit [www.dentaaid.org](http://www.dentaaid.org).



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**Overall**  
Our team saw 949 patients in total. One thousand and forty-eight teeth were extracted. Six hundred and eighty children had fluoride varnish application and over 3,000 toothbrushes were handed out along with oral health education. It feels

amazing to have helped with the treatment of children to relieve them of long-lasting pain.

On the working days we were very busy and did our best to provide treatment to those in need. The children and schools were so grateful for the treatment and this really left its mark on me. I was reminded just how lucky we are in the UK to have better oral health education and better access to dental treatment.

I returned home with great memories, we helped a lot of children, I met amazing people and had an experience I'll never forget. The Morocco May 2023 team still keeps in touch



**Food**  
On working days the teachers and local communities were so grateful of our visit and always provided us with a big feast for lunch as a thank you. Many of the schools provided us with Moroccan mint tea and cakes/pastries at the end of each day. This was followed by speeches from the principal and school governors thanking us for our hard work.

**Days off**  
It was not all hard work; we had a rest day and some evening time too. During our free time we explored the medina (old town)

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