





By DESIREE MULDER, Noble Mobility, the Netherlands

s part of a long-term fund-raising commitment to the Orange Babies charity, which was founded in the Netherlands, Noble Mobility staff took part in a cycling adventure in Namibia this autumn.

Desiree Mulder, special ambassador for Orange Babies at Noble Mobility, joined the team who went cycling on a nine-day tour, together with 17 other people.

She visited the charity's specialist homes and orphanages for pregnant women with HIV and their HIV positive children, as well as babies who are HIV negative.

Although she had travelled through Namibia seven years back, she had little idea what her journey touring the charities and orphanages supported by the Orange Babies charity would be like.

She shares her diary of unforgettable experiences...

#### 27 September

I'm arriving in Namibia early in the morning and, after checking in at the hotel, I'm soon on my way to Hope Village for a short visit. There, a Dutch couple has been managing four houses (for girls, boys, babies and our toddlers' home) with 87 children.

The older children were at school while the younger ones and toddlers were at the house. As soon as we stepped out of the car, the children reached out to us. All they wanted was to be held. A few kids joined me and my colleague on the tour through the four houses.

All the houses had their own day and night mother, while there was one father for the boys' home. Many children - including the toddlers - are living with HIV, but they all receive medication. Following a strict routine, the kids had to take their medication at 04.30 hours and 16.30 hours. It was sad to know

that some kids were bullied at schools for being HIV positive.

#### 28 September

I met with my colleagues who had visited some Orange Babies projects. The heat and the unpaved roads - laden with stones and gravel - had made the cycling trip a lot harder and my colleagues had to give it maximum effort.

The camping – which for one colleague was his first ever camping experience - the cycling trip, and the visits to the Orange Babies projects helped everyone bond through this amazing experience.

We all visited the Hope Village together this time. The kids sang and danced for us. They proudly showed us their rooms, which they share.

Continued on page 61 ▶







Clockwise from top: One of the boys from the Hope Village babies' home; At Hope Village, one of the mothers and Baba Sylla, the founder of Orange Babies, cut a cake. The other adults on the picture include Noble Mobility staff and another cyclist; Noble Mobility's Naud Wirtz (left) and Maarten van Zutphen join in a game of rugby

## ► Continued from page 59

It was very special for the five of us from Noble Mobility (Sigurd Jolles, Paul Duijndam, Naud Wirtz, Maarten van Zutphen and myself) to see the toddlers and the house they live in. Although we know that the kids are getting food, medicines and a safe place to stay, we all felt we need to do more...

#### 30 September

Together with Baba Sylla, the founder of Orange Babies, and Elanza, the woman in charge of Orange Babies Namibia, we visited several projects. The first project is Ehalelo Koo Meme, helping HIV infected women and their babies. The women receive medicines so that they can breastfeed safely and the babies stay HIV negative. The babies are weighed and measured, and the women receive counselling.

The women are given a food parcel every two weeks and the babies are regularly tested for HIV. We saw a woman come in with her twomonth-old baby. The baby still weighed still less than three kilos and was so small. The woman was provided with a bag of food and some baby clothes that I had brought from Holland.

We also visited a church involved in charity initiatives, but which wasn't a part of Orange Babies project. At the church, the children were singing and, when they saw my camera, they started to pose for pictures. The church also provides the elders with a meal, twice a week. The oupa and ouma, as they call them in Afrikaans, are taking care of their grandchildren as their own sons or daughters have died of Aids.

I realised that many Namibians were volunteering and trying to break the stigma of HIV. We also visited a clinic where people attend for dental check-ups, counselling, family planning and HIV testing. While in the waiting room - as I'm standing there with my camera around my neck - I realise what I'm witnessing is only familiar to me from TV. An image of the people waiting there hits me.

We then drove to Okahandja to visit the child development programme. Here, at the Five Rand Primary school, 300 of the 500 children get a meal after school five days a week. The 300 children are connected with one of the volunteer community mothers who

# The images from today and the previous day keep going through my mind

know their details. The pictures that I took show all happy faces. I help with the dishes at the school and it just felt unnatural to me to not be able to do more. My time in Namibia and at the Orange Babies project is just too short.

## 1 October

Today, I'm taken along with two Dutch nurses who had been volunteering at the Hope Village to visit the Orange Babies project at Rehoboth. When we arrived, the children and their mothers were sitting under a big tent. The women were provided with certificates

for following a computer course, and courses on positive parenting. The programme also focused on pregnant women and their children, and had been successful in ensuring that all children stayed HIV negative in 2012.

Next, we visited Good Hope Hostel in Witkop, which was a long drive and in an isolated region. It has a big farm, a school, a house and a home for orphans. The home has a dorm room for boys and three dorm rooms for the girls, and has almost 80 children in all. The children ate their meals after school together. These kids were shy and it was not easy to engage with them.

The nurses offered to stay at the hostel for a week to help. This offer was appreciated and arrangements were made for their next visit. We decided that they would buy toys and games for children and bring them on their next visit. On the drive back to Windhoek, I felt tired; the images from today and the previous day keep going through my mind.

#### 2 October

Our last day, and the last visit to Hope Village. The day before I had bought some books, and games, and toys for the youngest baby, who was three months old. At lunch, the children came into the house to have their meal together. They are mostly able to eat themselves, but some need help. Like any other kids around the world, they sometimes don't listen, are naughty and tease each other.

After lunch, the kids from the babies' house are put to bed and it is time for me to leave. I'm thankful for this once-in-a-lifetime experience; these memories will last forever.

61 December 2013/January 2014 59 December 2013/January 2014