

## **VOLUNTEERING AT MDZANANDA ANIMAL CLINIC CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

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In January/February 2009 I spent two months working at the Mdzananda animal clinic which is in a township outside Cape Town. This is an area of extreme poverty where most of the million plus residents live in shacks cobbled together with corrugated iron and wood. However, for every shack there is invariably a dog - medium sized, brown and very wary of strangers. These animals serve a purpose as guard dogs but are also usually members of the family which are cared for with the best ability their owners can. Private vet fees are impossible for these owners to afford and the clinic offers a vital service in offering treatment for their animals.

There was no messing about on the first morning as after a brief tour of the clinic (it runs from about 4 converted shipping containers) I was shown into a shed with about 20 people waiting outside and asked to start consulting as the SA vet wasn't there yet! As I motioned in the first patient I came up against my first big problem - language. The local people speak Xhosa which involves making clicking noises with the tongue on the roof of the mouth- for someone who hadn't mastered French after being taught it for ten years at school this was a little beyond me! However, after one of the technicians came over to help translate, we managed to get going and start treating animals.



*Treating dogs at the clinic*

A lot of cases needed treatment for mange and ticks or infected wounds though I saw a range of diseases while I was out there. Babesia is very common (you soon become an expert at doing quick stains and looking under the microscope) with ehrlichiosis and distemper prevalent. The facilities were obviously basic when

compared to the UK, though there were a range of drugs available and inpatient facilities to keep animals on drips if needed- we even did two blood transfusions for very anaemic dogs while I was there. They rely heavily on donations for equipment but make the best of what they have.

Surgery was carried out over 3-4 hours in the middle of the day and with 10-15 cases to get through it could be pretty busy. The majority were neutering but with referral an impossibility anything that presented we needed to have a go. The two main technicians, Ayander and Lazola, are very efficient though with music constantly on in the background they would often pause to break into a dance routine which could be a little distracting! For proof of this, type 'township jive mdzananda' into YouTube and have a tour of the surgical 'suite' while Ayander does his motorbike dance.

Overall I had an incredible time in Cape Town. As well as improving medical and surgical skills you feel as though you are really helping the clinic as they are always struggling with the case load and getting SA vet support. The local people and staff are amazingly generous and kind. I often ate at people's houses (though with delicacies such as boiled sheep's head and curried chickens feet this could be interesting) and they are always willing to help. I would thoroughly recommend any qualified vet that could spare some time to go to the clinic and help out- it will be an experience you won't forget in a hurry.