

Making a Difference

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During a busy and tiring shift have you ever wondered if you are really making a difference for your babies and their families? I'm lucky enough to know someone who has made a difference in the lives of babies and mothers on the other side of the world. Deborah Lester RN, shows that our actions *do* make a difference - even if we can't always see it.

In 2000 Debbie first travelled to eastern Africa through the ISIS Foundation, a not-for-profit organization based in Bermuda. Her destination was a remote part of Uganda. Kiwoko Hospital is the region's only functioning hospital. Debbie travelled there to teach the staff the basics of neonatal care and improve the high infant and maternal mortality rates. The staff yearned to care for babies, but they needed someone with sustainable resources to show them the way.

Debbie was astounded by the lack of basic equipment and supplies. What began as her solo search for neonatal supplies is now the effort of many volunteers. Five Seattle-area NICUs collect precious supplies and equipment, and the ISIS Foundation sends them to Kiwoko once a year in a 20ft. container. The ISIS Foundation also has completed a special care nursery at Kiwoko. Every time a container arrives the delighted staff immediately puts their "new" isolettes into use. A generator keeps the electricity (and oxygen) flowing at night, solving a problem that once was life threatening.

Debbie has made many trips to advance education and support to the nursery. She also prepares medical volunteers to travel to Uganda. She has had to overcome many challenges, but they are minimal in comparison with the extraordinary care the staff at Kiwoko now delivers to their tiny patients.

I know Debbie as a genuinely kind and respectful person, selfless in all her endeavours, with the rare ability to see the big picture. Balance is the key to her successful personal and professional life. She has a wonderful husband and two young sons, continues to work in the Infant ICU at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center in Seattle, and does neonatal transport. She is also the Uganda Special Projects Manager for the ISI Foundation. Recently she was honoured as the March of Dimes Western Washington Neonatal Nurse of the Year - a well-deserved recognition.

Teresa Myers works in Seattle in the Infant ICU at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center and the University of Washington Medical Centre NICU.