



KERRI ELLIOTT, For The Pantagraph

Shown above is an example of a teaching aid for students with learning disabilities in Tanzania.

TANZANIA

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and individual education plans, which enabled her to break things down for those unfamiliar with the process.

Elliott took a sabbatical from her high school position in 2011 to help get ACT off the ground.

Last June, she moved to Tanzania to become program director.

"I love different cultures," said Elliott, who also has been a special education teacher in London. She said it's important to understand the culture of those in other countries and not automatically assume your own culture has all the answers.

"I try to put myself in the shoes of other people," Elliott said.

In ACT's first year, it organized four workshops aimed at parents, teachers and professionals, such as doctors and occupational

therapists.

Grace Lyimo, the mother who first approached Elliott and who already had been working on behalf of her son and others, is ACT's country director.

"Grace is really the face of it," Elliott said of the organization. "You need a Tanzanian voice."

Tanzanians lead the workshops, providing information and training, she said.

"I think that's why it's grown so fast. It wasn't coming from foreigners," Elliott said.

In the short time the organization has been in existence, "We've noticed changes," she said.

The school where the first educational workshop took place had trouble attracting students at first, in part because of the stigma and misunderstanding that still is faced by some in Tanzania who have children with disabilities, but also because of a lack of awareness.

Now, Elliott said, "it has 67 students and a long waiting list."

What has been most rewarding for her is seeing parents with "tears of joy" when they realize their child's disability is not their fault and that there is help for them.

She hopes other ISU students and graduates will come to Tanzania as volunteers and have that same experience.

Bock said, "We hope her story is going to inspire someone who is listening out in the crowd to follow that same path" — whether in the United States or abroad — "and see how their education can change the lives of others."

As for her own future, Elliott expects to stay in Tanzania for at least two more years, then, she said, "I'll just go where the road takes me."

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