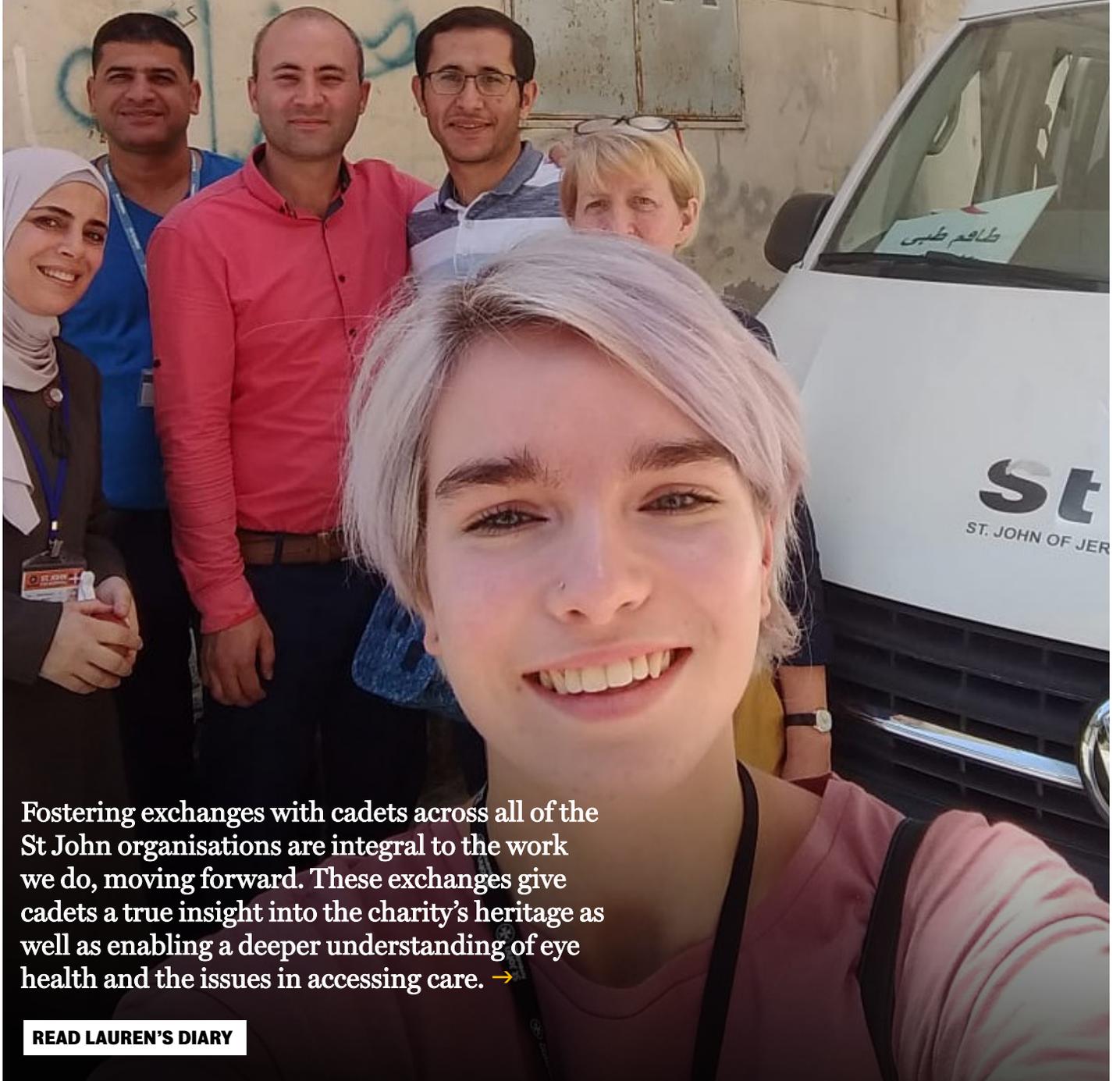


**VOLUNTEERING, DIARY OF A FIELD TRIP TO JERUSALEM
ST JOHN AMBULANCE FIRST AIDER, LAUREN WILKINSON**

PEACE IN SIGHT

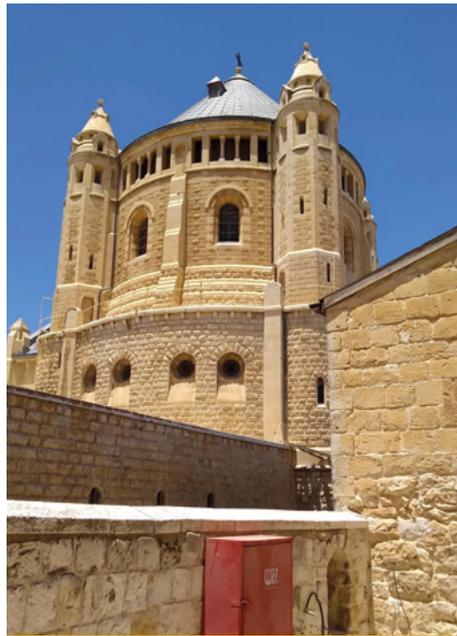


Fostering exchanges with cadets across all of the St John organisations are integral to the work we do, moving forward. These exchanges give cadets a true insight into the charity's heritage as well as enabling a deeper understanding of eye health and the issues in accessing care. →

READ LAUREN'S DIARY

DAY 1

SCRUBBED UP AND READY FOR SURGERY



DAY 2

EXPLORING THE OLD CITY

DAY 3

WITNESSING OUTREACH IN ACTION



In July 2019, with support from the Durham Knights Templar, I was given the opportunity to visit the St John Eye Hospital with my unit manager, Sheila Thorpe. This was an experience I will never forget! I learnt more about the hospital and its important work in the community, as well as gaining a better understanding of practices and traditions different to my own.

QUALITY EYE CARE FOR ALL

The St John Eye Hospital has several departments, including a large outpatients department, specialist eye units, operating theatres and 24 hour eye emergency services. It's the only public hospital in the region specialising in ophthalmology, and people travel from all over the country to access its services. During our visit, we were able to see their vital and life-changing work, first-hand.

Throughout our visit, we were able to learn more about the lives of people across the region. At first glance, Jerusalem seems like a peaceful and idyllic place, with its beautiful architecture and rich historic past. Although these elements attract tourism, we soon learned that locals have a different experience. Through speaking with staff and patients, and visiting the other clinics and outreach centres, we were able to see the struggles patients endure to receive treatment. Due to these challenges conditions go undiagnosed for so long that they manifest into a range of complications. This highlights the important work that the St John Eye Hospital undertakes. Its services focus on making eye health care accessible to all, which creates a meaningful impact on people's lives.

DAY 1

On our first day we visited the nursing school with Nasrallah Khalilieh, who manages the programme. With his support we delivered life support and CPR training sessions to the staff. This was a great way for us to get to know the team. After this we jumped into our scrubs and observed a number of operations.

INSIDE FOCUS

DAY 2

On our second day we took the opportunity to explore the Old City. It was joyful ambling through the city's many colourful streets and markets before visiting the Western Wall and the Cenacle, a holy site which houses The Room of the Last Supper. It was a wonderful but tiring day!

REACHING OUT TO THOSE IN NEED

DAY 3

Our third day started early. We joined the hospital staff on their mobile outreach programme, which visits remote villages to offer screening for eye diseases. Patients are then referred to the main hospital for further treatment in Jerusalem, or the clinics in Hebron or Anabta – or they are given treatment on the spot. We accompanied the team on their visit to Selet al-Harthieh, a small village more than two hours' drive from East Jerusalem. When we arrived there were 50 or more people already waiting to be seen. This was not a surprise as the St John Eye Hospital is the only hospital and charity delivering free eye care to marginalised communities. By close of day the team had seen over 75 patients and had stayed longer than planned to ensure no-one was turned away. Almost

two thirds of those seen were referred on for further treatment. Many of the patients have complications caused by uncontrolled diabetes, as more often than not, due to lack of medical care, the condition isn't recognised until it has progressed (see page 3).

Furthermore, it's important to mention that the majority of patients seen on this visit were women and children. This is apparently typical of these clinics, due to women encountering difficulties travelling to the nearby towns or cities without their husbands. This only further highlights the importance of the mobile outreach treatment offered by the St John Eye Hospital, as it's not just about treatment, but also about educating the communities in eye care, so they can spot symptoms earlier.

It was an honour to observe the fantastic work the hospital does in providing medical treatment to those who need it. The team works tirelessly to visit each village bi-annually, but it's a struggle. Sadly, due to the cut in USAID in 2018 (see page 4), the programme now runs only four days a week instead of seven. It is clear more funding is needed.

DAY 4

We started off day four by delivering another life support training session to the staff. We then spent the morning on the paediatric ward with nurses Munther and Omayma, who explained to us the conditions these children were suffering from, such as congenital cataracts and glaucoma. Some children had travelled great distances for their surgeries, having to gain a travel permit to cross the separation wall to visit the hospital for their appointment. Despite the language barrier, it was lovely to play with the children who were in high spirits, despite the circumstances. It was inspiring to see how hard the clinical staff work to ensure their patients have the best treatment experience possible.



DAY 4

CHILDREN TRAVELING FOR CARE

PATIENT CARE AT THE FOREFRONT

DAY 5

On day five we travelled to the Anabta clinic where manager, Hani Abdul Hajja, allowed us to observe patients being examined, including the use of laser therapy. We saw a range of patients, from babies and children to elderly people, all with a wide range of conditions such as amblyopia, glaucoma and cataracts – as well as many cases of diabetic retinopathy, which is sadly on the rise.

A MESSAGE OF PEACE

DAY 6

Day six began delivering our final session of training of basic life support at the hospital, which was followed by a visit to the Muristan clinic in the Old City, East Jerusalem, run by Marlene Katansho. The clinic is a walk-in centre for emergencies, check-ups and surgery follow-ups. In addition to working at the clinic, Marlene also runs a free school screening programme that helps treat children with eye conditions and which offers advice to parents. This clinic plays a vital role for many local people who find hospital visits a challenge, particularly shop owners and the elderly.

This visit has been invaluable for us. We have learnt so much about how important the St John Eye Hospital's role is in supporting the local communities. In the centre of the Muristan clinic's beautiful garden sits the Tree of Hope, a sculpture by world-renowned British artist, Mark Coreth, which was commissioned by the hospital to inspire the message of peace. This tree represents people of all faiths that have been coming to Jerusalem for thousands of years, and symbolises renewal, rebirth and hope.

DAY 5

EXAMINING IN ANABTA



DAY 6

INSPIRING HOPE IN THE MURISTAN

DAY 8

Our last day at the hospital was spent in the outpatient department where we observed nurse technician, Alice, as she completed pre-screening for patients going to surgery later that day. We then observed Judith Musallam, head of paediatrics, work with a nine-year-old girl with a squint. Judith then talked us through the importance of the work they do with children, some as young as one-month-old.

I'm so grateful for this experience working with the St John Eye Hospital. The work they do is a huge inspiration to me. I intend to harness the team's passion and commitment to clinical excellence in my career moving forward. ◉

PEACE IN SIGHT

DAY 7

On day seven we went to visit the Hebron hospital which since its move in 2015 is now in a more central and more accessible location. The clinic covers a wide range of conditions, including cataracts, glaucoma and squints, and offers a weekly surgery so patients don't have to travel to Jerusalem. Around two thirds of the patients seen here are refugees from one of the four refugee camps near Bethlehem. I spent the morning with Orthoptic nurse, Huda, who showed me how they use different techniques and tools to diagnose eye conditions in children.

I'm so grateful for this experience working with the St John Eye Hospital. The work they do is a huge inspiration to me. I intend to harness the team's passion and commitment to clinical excellence in my career moving forward.

**ST JOHN AMBULANCE FIRST AIDER
LAUREN WILKINSON**