

Joe Lawson, Regional Project Coordinator for READ International writes,

My GAP year in 2005/2006 was an independent year abroad organised largely off my own back. Through a family friend, I was able to intern at a national newspaper in Uganda, *The Daily Monitor*. I followed this by finding opportunities in an AIDS Initiative in Kampala, a nursery in Kabale (southern Uganda) and Ziwa rhino sanctuary in central Uganda.

APP is the African Prisons Project (www.africanprisons.org/) which aims to restore the dignity of prisoners by providing humane conditions and improving welfare, access to medical facilities and the opportunity to learn.

READ International is a student-led organisation which seeks to improve access to education in East Africa. Student volunteers from over 40 universities collect good-quality, relevant but disused textbooks from secondary schools across the UK, sort them and send the thousands of textbooks relevant to the Tanzanian and Ugandan syllabuses (which are based on that of the UK). To date we have shipped over 800,000 textbooks. The student-volunteers collect all the textbooks themselves and raise the funds to ship them to East Africa. For more information, go to www.readinternational.org.uk.

I volunteered for the charity for two years at Warwick University, becoming a project intern in my final year, coordinating the collection of 17,000 textbooks and raising over £7,500 to send the books. In my two years, I volunteered in Tanzania in Summer 2008, project-managing the trial of library-renovation project, which has now seen us renovate eight secondary school libraries, with at least ten more planned for this summer. In 2009, I returned to Tanzania on behalf of READ to set in place the expansion of READ International into Uganda, where READ volunteers from the University of Edinburgh will be visiting for the first time July 2010. On my return in September 2010, I then took up a position in READ as 'Regional Project Coordinator', managing project interns and volunteers at universities around the UK, supporting them in collecting textbooks and raising money.

On May 20 2010 I took up my new position as Head of Development (East Africa), managing the office in Dar es Salaam. As well as promoting the work of READ International across East Africa, this office provides a vital role in the evaluation and feedback of our textbook donations in East African schools, improving the work that READ International does.