

**CATEGORY | Outstanding Environmental
Health Professional**

WINNER | Sam Lauder, Powys County Council



INTRODUCTION

Sam is currently on deployment with the British Red Cross to the Democratic Republic of Congo in response to an Ebola outbreak. As a Hygiene Promoter within their Emergency Response Unit he is securing significant improvements to health. These occasional yet significant deployments away from his traditional yet demanding role as a Senior Environmental Health Officer with Powys provide Sam with true fulfilment in his working life as the consummate Environmental Health Practitioner. Sam promotes the skill sets, values and worth of the Environmental Health Practitioner not just through his day to day job but also within humanitarian organisations.

After completing his Environmental Health degree in Cardiff, Sam went to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for 12 months to work for a small charity. During this time he worked on a programme designed to help street children into education and apprenticeships, he managed a public health programme in a displaced peoples camp to improve living conditions and sanitary facilities, he also taught English and carried out many other tasks including collecting and delivering supplies from neighbouring Zambia. Because of his interest in environmental health in humanitarian emergencies he studied a diploma in humanitarian assistance at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. He demonstrated at this point his true commitment to this cause by carrying out the studies in his own time and self-financing it too.

Following completion he applied for and was successful in gaining a position with the British Red Cross as a hygiene promoter in their Mass Sanitation Emergency Response Unit (ERU). Sam's specific role is 'Hygiene Promoter'. He is responsible for making sure that there is a link between the affected community and the hardware provided by the team, i.e. the latrines, water systems etc. The Hygiene Promoter is responsible for looking at normal sanitation practices, raising awareness about the spread of diseases and mobilising the affected community to adopt practices that are safe.

The ERU is capable of being deployed at short notice (within 24 hours) to humanitarian emergencies anywhere in the world. In January 2015 he was deployed by the British Red Cross to work as part of an international team in Kenema, Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. He worked as part of the Infection Prevention Control team in a large Ebola Treatment Centre. In this role he oversaw all matters of infection control. All his training as an Environmental Health Practitioner came into play as he was responsible for correct use of PPE, correct cleaning and disinfection, waste management, food and water hygiene, chlorine preparation, pest control and sadly dead body management. He also provided training sessions on the importance of handwashing as a measure to stop the spread of infection.



On the 20th June he has again been deployed by the British Red Cross, this time to Mbandaka in DRC in response to the outbreak of Ebola declared in May 2018. He has been deployed as an Infection Prevention Control delegate providing advice and carrying out physical tasks to ensure the risk of infection in health facilities is minimised.

He is currently working with the local health centres and hospitals (11 in total) to develop and maintain triage and isolation facilities, so that any suspect cases of Ebola can be isolated and transferred to specific treatment centres without them accessing the general health system. This process along with specific training on cleaning and disinfection, chlorine production, the correct use of PPE and handwashing has proven effective in ensuring that the illness cannot spread within the community. He is now involved in considering their exit strategy and looking at resourcing each of the health facilities with training programmes and emergency equipment that they can implement in the future should an outbreak of Ebola or other infectious disease such as Cholera occur.

To be appointed to and to sustain this role, Sam has carried out the studies required in his own time, taking leave and unpaid leave to complete the necessary studies and subsequent deployments. He continues to have French lessons once a week to strengthen his chances of deployment with French being the main language for communication in so many deployment countries. His commitment and drive towards making such a positive public health contribution are highly commendable. He strongly believes that EHP's have a vital role to play in humanitarian emergencies, but unfortunately the skill set we hold are not fully recognised by many humanitarian organisations. He is working hard to change this.

On Sam's return from DR Congo alongside his demanding day to day role supporting his team delivering food hygiene, health and safety and infectious disease work Sam will start work on another one of his many projects worthy of recognition. For a number of years now Sam has been delivering a project to improve the consistency of application of the Food Hygiene Rating scheme. This has involved all 21 Welsh Local Authorities along with bordering Counties from England with FSA England and Wales colleagues. Food Standards Agency Wales have funded this on a full cost recovery basis year on year whereby Sam delivers an All Wales event and then rolls this out on a regional basis across Wales. The event last year gained recognition from further afield with EHOs from Gibraltar attending. Gibraltar colleagues are in the process of reviewing their food hygiene legislative basis and the potential to introduce a food hygiene rating scheme.

Combined with attending the event they also spent some time on inspections with Sam to gain a better insight into the food hygiene rating scheme and how it works in practice. Sam's work on this project regularly gets mention in the FSA's annual report to Welsh Government which reviews the implementation and operation of the Statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme for the positive contribution it has made to ensuring consistency across Wales by providing sessions for all Welsh Local Authorities' looking at how premises are rated and trying to ensure ratings are being issued consistently. Sam researches and develops scenarios for these events which highlight areas open to interpretation and therefore liable to cause inconsistency along with topics of current concern. By working through such difficult scenarios and having healthy cross border discussions year on year the level of consistency across Welsh Local Authorities improves. This has enabled the Local Authorities to really focus on the finer intricacies of consistency and has given rise to a consistency steers document which is produced by the Food Safety Expert Panel in conjunction with Sam which provides answers for officers on common but sometimes complex issues identified through the scenarios.