

Alice

Head of Training and Services



Name: Alice

Job Title: Head of Training and Services

Organisation: MapAction

What is your job role and what do you actually do?

I am Head of Training Services at MapAction and I am responsible for overseeing MapAction's internal training programme, for our team of 80 specialist volunteers, and also for strengthening the capacity of our external partners (UN agencies, government agencies and NGOs) with the ultimate goal of improving humanitarian response through the effective use of geospatial data for decision making. This involves the design and delivery of training programmes, strategic planning and evaluation of our training offer, partnership development and community engagement, and the day to day operational management of our training delivery.

What does a typical day look like?

Working for a small charity means that no day looks the same. I work from home most of the time, so I spend a lot of time on calls with our partner organisations, my

colleagues and our amazing team of specialist volunteers to plan, develop and project manage training initiatives both in the UK and all over the world. I also feed into fundraising proposals, and support MapAction operations more generally.

How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?

Geography is foundational to MapAction's work. It is the lens through which MapAction views crises. We use geography to help decision-makers navigate chaos and make informed, life-saving choices. For example:

- MapAction provides maps and geospatial data to help responders understand what's happening on the ground following a disaster (where disasters have happened, where affected populations are located, where resources are needed, where are roads, rivers, access routes etc)
- We do lots of geographic data collection and analysis to identify vulnerable populations, at risk, analyse flood zones, landslide risks, earthquake impact zones. Visualise logistics pathways, damaged infrastructure or evacuation zones.
- Geography helps coordinate the efforts of different agencies in the field – e.g. mapping who is doing what and where
- We use remote sensing and satellite imagery to anticipate emergencies e.g. detecting changes in land use of water levels



- In non-crisis times we help countries and agencies improve their geographic readiness by training local responders in GIS and mapping tools and building disaster response mapping capacity

**What do you enjoy most about your job?
What have been your favourite projects?**

My role specifically focuses on helping local responders use GIS and mapping tools to build their own long-term resilience to disasters, rather than relying on international support. No-one understands the needs, culture, risks and resources of a community better than the people who live there, and I'm really passionate about putting power back in the hands of affected people.

I don't get as much opportunity to travel internationally now that I have a young family, however I was lucky enough to visit Kyaka II refugee camp in Uganda earlier this year to deliver some data collection and mapping training to a refugee-led organisation network. I love seeing the 'lightbulb' moments when we've helped people identify some really practical solutions to their challenges.

**How did you get to where you are now?
(education pathway, qualifications,
internships and volunteering)**

I studied Geography (BSc) at Southampton University and then did a Master's in Water Management at Cranfield University. Whilst at university I volunteered as Vice President for Amnesty International. I was also Co-founder of Oxfam Student Hub. Since university I have volunteered at various organisations including as a Homeless Outreach Volunteer, and supported a Sunday social centre for migrants at Akwaaba London. I couldn't afford to do an unpaid internship straight out of university, so instead I took an entry

level job in a small welfare rights charity. I found the position through a dedicated charity sector recruitment company, and used this as an opportunity to learn more about the charity sector. I was given my first opportunity in the international development sector through a contact I'd met through my volunteering work (this is one of the reasons why volunteering is so important). This was a project management position working on economic development programmes in Nigeria for 1 year. It was a tough posting, and not exactly in the area of work I wanted, however I was able to demonstrate my ability to work in challenging contexts and with different cultures. This experience led to my dream job, working as a WASH (water supply and sanitation) advisor for refugees affected by the Syria Crisis, for an organisation called ACTED. I was based in Lebanon, but regularly moved around the region. This later opened up lots of doors for me in my career, including working for Save the Children and eventually for MapAction.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go into this career?

Volunteer! Volunteering gives you real-world experience with the kind of work that charities do. It demonstrates your genuine interest and commitment to the mission; it develops key skills and it builds your network, which could lead to job offers or mentorships. This is a free and very rewarding way of gaining invaluable experience.

A word of caution- if you want to volunteer overseas, be really careful about the opportunity that you select. Research potential organisations thoroughly and ask yourself 'what skills do I have that could be useful?' Selecting the wrong placement can be harmful to communities and also to your career search. Luckily there are a lot of resources online to support you with this.