

Dumbarton Gambia Education Fund



DUMBARTON/LONDON CORNER NURSERY SCHOOL PHOTO 2008

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Aunty Caroline Kusack has been in situ as the Headmistress of our nursery since October 2007 and in January we were looking forward to seeing the school to establish whether there were any changes. We were delighted. Not only the buildings but also the environment within the school premises were completely revitalised.

All necessary repairs have been carried out, the lighting and electricity has been extended and all the walls are painted with an oil-based paint which can be wiped down when the little fingers have left their marks behind them.

Aunty ensures there is always clean water for the children to wash their hands after going to the toilet and before and after eating their dinner. The school toilets are now spotless and to a standard not often seen in schools in The

Gambia. The outside walls, including those outside the gate have been decorated with information about the school, instructions and educational facts and figures. You will see what I mean from the pictures below.



Two memorable events from our trip in January were the Presentation of Prizes and the school trip. You can read about the school trip later in this report. The Presentation was made possible for the third year running by the cash prize donated once again by Pat Soufi of The Edrington Group where I work. This year there were the following prizes:

Best Progress Boy:

Best Progress Girl:

Spelling Prize:

Maths prize:

For the first time we also added a progress prize for the Adult Education class as they are very much a part of the school and most are parents of our children. More about them later.



Aunty has taken over total responsibility for meeting out the rice each day according to how many children are in school. This means that wastage (and the amount of food which disappeared into the family compounds) has been drastically reduced. She also defines the quality of rice and food which is bought for the meals. One thing that we refused Aunty was the freezer that she insists would let her buy better quality fish and meat when it was available and buy in bulk. Given the erratic electricity supply to the area, we believe the risk of food defrosting and being refrozen was too high to risk the children getting bad tummies. The library is now up and running and the books which we sent, and which were purchased last year are easy accessible for the teachers and pupils to use and read. We have a school of which we can be proud.



Thanks to a special donation we were able to send out 6 boxes of educational equipment requested by Aunty Car and when we visited, this was in place and being fully utilised. We took Aunty into Banjul to purchase a television and audio centre so that the video player and the DVD player from the boxes could be used along with the many tapes and CDs.

So now we have the school looking as we had always envisioned and the equipment and the staff that we need to ensure the children are getting the best available education. Aunty herself says that her next priority is to look at the school curriculum and teaching methods and bring these up to her exacting standards.



Adult Education: These classes have become a very important part of what we are achieving at London Corner. The classes are made up almost entirely of the parents and families of the pupils, and learning to read and write their own language has had a huge impact on many of their lives. Several of them have now got jobs, and the mothers are better able to carry out day to day tasks, because they can read notices and letters and the names on official documents. As well as this they are learning new skills. I reported before how they were learning to tie dye materials and this term they are learning to make soap. Again, they will be able to sell their produce to fund further ingredients and this part of the adult education becomes self-funding. There is one special benefit from these newly learned skills. Auntie Car was unhappy with the quality and colour variance in the children's uniforms and Mariama, the Adult education teacher, came up with a good idea. The class would be supplied with good quality material, and dyeing ingredients and would produce the materials needed to supply each child with a uniform. The families would pay a manageable amount towards the cost of the uniforms so that it didn't take too much away from school funds. And so Kenny and I spent a very interesting afternoon at Mariama's home, or rather the garden, and watched the process of turning white cotton fabric into bright yellow, ready to be tie dyed with the black and then turned into clothes for the children. While we were there the first part of the process surprised us as the material went completely black, then hung out on

the fence and within 15 minutes of Gambian sun, turned yellow before our eyes.



During the Presentation day a large number of parents and members of the community turned up at the school and many wanted to get their turn at the microphone to sing the praises of the new Headmistress and to ask us to give their thanks to all the sponsors who so generously donate cash to these children and poor families who live so far away. They are truly grateful for your help and it is my pleasure to pass on this appreciation to all of you.

School Outing: Last summer Guy Rose, the son of the Director of Technical Services at Edrington, did a sponsored walk to raise funds for our nursery school. Guy raised £350 and some of this money was earmarked for a school outing for the children. It has been several years since we were able to afford to take the children out for the day and so this was a very special treat. The day started with a busy time loading the two buses, a 'gillie-gillie' (a minibus) and a larger bus which carried the rest of the party. Enough food and drinks were loaded onto the top of the buses to feed the 50 children and teachers and cooks and off we went for what was an adventure for the children and an experience for us. While Kenny drove his own jeep along with the cooks, I travelled in the gillie-gillie with two other Dumbarton ladies who were staying with us for a week. With five adults and 15 children it was a bit of a squash and in Scotland, the health and safety folk would not have been happy.



Eventually it was time to leave and as Kenny, myself and our friends headed off home in our own transport we waved goodbye to 50 very happy if tired children and teachers.

However, in this poor third world country it is acceptable and not unusual.

After a journey with a few stops to retrieve the plates and lids from the food containers on the top of the buses (as they flew off down the road behind us), we arrived at our first destination which was called Sanamentering.

Sanamentering is a holy place of pilgrimage for 90% of Gambians, being the place in The Gambia where Islam first came to the country. Islamic missionaries arrived there, and it is now a place where many Muslims will go on pilgrimage, and is one part of The Gambian coastline that will never be developed, but will remain untouched. There is a little mosque there where people will visit, sometimes for days at a time, praying and asking God to grant them special favours.

Next stop was the crocodile pool at Gunjur which is also a special place of pilgrimage for many Gambians, especially for women who have not been able to have children of their own. There is a belief that by washing in the waters of the pool, a woman can become fertile, and have lots of babies! Crocodiles, though, are rarely seen there in modern days although there are still some around. It is said that a very special white crocodile lives in the pool, but some Gambians think this is a myth.

There was a distinct lack of crocodiles the day we visited, but no one was complaining!

And so we went to the beach at Kartong. There the children were fed and we had lots of fun running around by the sea. There were races and ball games and lots of laughter with the children obviously enjoying the whole experience.



2007: So it has been a year of change and of learning. Largely forgotten among the other events was the new arrangement with a local community care resource, put in place with the help of Faye Suso, our Charity Vice-chairman who is a Gambian currently studying at University in Glasgow. Our children get free medical checks at this centre and we pay for any treatment and medicines which are required. Aunty keeps a cash float for this purpose and it a credit to the good feeding and care that our children now receive, that we have hardly needed to use any of the float as the children are healthy. **Thanks for your support. LINDA**

