

Dumbarton Gambia Education Fund



DUMBARTON/LONDON CORNER NURSERY SCHOOL 2009

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2009 had hardly begun when Kenny and I travelled to The Gambia for our annual visit which is primarily to spend time at the school, and also time with Francis Glynn of GETS, the charity out there that work hard to administer the school and keep us in touch during the year. There are always issues which have arisen during the year which can only be resolved by face to face discussions with the parties involved. This visit was no exception and the 'highlights' this year were the lack of electricity at the school, problems with one of the walls of the school, and the matter of how the social security and tax is paid from the staff wages. Due to the restraints of work holidays, I had decided to go for one week this year and Kenny for two weeks whereas we usually spend three weeks to give us time to look after school matters, meet all our friends in the villages and the tourist areas and spend time with our

friends at the church of St. Andrew's in the village of Lamin. We managed to squeeze most things in but ended the time feeling exhausted and wishing for a longer stay.

Tina Kemp and Mhairi Halliday came along for the week as they have the past two years. Tina is a journalist with our local newspaper, the Lennox Herald, and since her return she has written three great articles about the school and the charity. This always helps to raise the profile of the project and to raise funds. Tina works tirelessly raising cash for us through her work with the churches in and around Helensburgh, and is the Vice Chairperson of our charity.



The school was looking glorious and one of the first things we noticed was when we walked through the school gates. In previous years we would be immediately surrounded by the children shouting wildly and grasping our hands. While this is a wonderful experience, it was good to see the result of Headmistress Aunty Carr's stricter regime, and hear the children busy with their classes. After all, it is a nursery school and the children are there to learn. Of course, once the classes finished we got a wonderful welcome with the children singing the school song (Dumbarton Will Shine) and calling us by name. The school has been selected this year to have a VSO volunteer as an extra teacher for a few months which is evidence of how highly thought of the school is among the official inspectors who would have nominated Dumbarton/London Corner nursery for this honour.

The owner of the land and buildings had been unable to pay his electricity bill this year and got disconnected by the power company. This left the school without electricity when he installed Cash Power (pre-paid meter to us) in his house. More about this later!

The highlight of 2008 was the graduation ceremony when Aunty managed to source immaculate gowns for the children who were leaving nursery school to go to the Lower Basic School to continue their education. Without the benefit of nursery education and a basic knowledge of English, the children may not have been able to take this step.

The children did us proud and Aunty had invited quite a few local dignitaries to make speeches. Also, our Secretary Fran Walker was in The Gambia at the time and was able to attend as a special guest. Our good friend Father Jimmy Cole, who visited us in Dumbarton this summer, was also a guest speaker at this most impressive occasion. We have DVDs of the day available, and are hoping to be able to get quite a few copied and distributed. If you are interested in receiving one, please contact me. My email address and the rectory telephone number are on the front page.



Ready to go on the outing

We had thought that we would be unable to fund a school outing this year. Although it may seem an extravagance in these times of financial cut backs, it is an important part of the school life, and not only gives the children an educational experience but also a day that they will remember as they get older. Due to a very

generous donation from a colleague at The Edrington Group where I work, we were able not only to purchase the required Cash Power for the school to have a supply of electricity, but also pay for the outing. Some of these children may not have another opportunity to enjoy such a time again, remember, the families in London Corner live in abject poverty. Many children will leave school before they finish their education due to poverty and the needs of their families if parents die, as is still very likely in The Gambia. So, off we went to Tanji Cultural Museum where the children spent time looking at the history of their country and saw craftsmen weaving and metal working in the old traditions. At the end of the tour we went into an area where a traditional group were playing the drums and Kora. Without any encouragement the children were all up dancing in the African style and having a great time. My friends and I joined in of course, and raised some laughter amongst the children!



Wow! These children can dance!

Aunty Carr is content that her school is doing well and we continue to be proud of the progress being made. Things are difficult for us at the moment with the exchange rate falling from around the 50dalasi to the £ last year to a current rate of 35d to the £. We have to be prepared for even further falls with the President aiming for 27d. So, we had to make a decision to give up the services of Foday the Koranic teacher. We had always maintained these classes since the beginning when we had promised the local Imman that we would be providing this area of education. However, with Koranic classes readily available for all the local children elsewhere at weekends, we decided that this was the best way to cut costs. Foday was given a severance payment of two months salary and I am sure he will be able to find employment in another school very soon.



Linda and children at Tanji Museum

The day ended on the beach where we had races and games and a presentation of prizes for the most successful children of the school year. The successful children were:

- Best Progress Boy: Basila Sanyang
- Best Progress Girl: Isa Faal
- Spelling Prize: Yankuba Barri
- Maths Prize: Fatou Mata Trawalley



Kenny with the children on the beach



Tina greets the children at the school

Other Projects: Although not funded through our charity, you may be interested in knowing the progress of some of the other Gambian children and young folk who are supported by some of our friends. You may remember a young man called Ousman who Tina and Mhairi have been funding to train as an electrician. This year he has qualified and we went along to his training school where he was presented with his certificate. He has now gone off to Senegal for six months where he will gain experience working with a company and then return to The Gambia to find permanent employment.

Fatou Mbye, has been sponsored by the McMartin family since we first went to The Gambia. She is doing well in Lower Basic School and we took out a birthday present for her as usual. **Kaddy and Banding** are being sponsored through Upper Basic school by Tina and her mum Dorothy and are both getting good results each year.

Dumbarton United Football team from Brufut received a full set of Dumbarton away strips (with a home set waiting to be sent out) and are doing well in their league. So well, in fact that they are aiming to go up to the Senior League next season. We have supported these fine lads since they were small boys just kicking a ball around for fun and they are a credit to us, and to Kenny who has encouraged them with words and cash from the beginning. Since returning Tina has raised £210 to buy them all football boots to get them off to a good start. This will be taken out by a friend who is visiting in March

and so they should be playing even better football soon.

Glasgow Artist - Ashley Cooke is currently in The Gambia and while we were there, she was teaching our adult education class some new skills so that they can perhaps make artwork for sale in the markets.

It was interesting to see the local ladies making papier mache butterflies and painting them in bright colours. Soon, they will be getting tuition in how to crochet although this is a skill already used by many resourceful hat makers in the tourist resorts. Our friend Faye is back home in The Gambia at the moment and is helping Ashley by translating some of her instructions into Wolof. Some of the Glasgow words probably don't translate but Faye manages to improvise!



The boys race towards the finish line on the beach during the 2009 school outing.

So I am pleased to be able to share some of our experiences with you as sponsors, and am happy to be able to report that all your donations continue to help these poor children who live in third world conditions in Serrekunda. I know that I keep saying it, but you really do make a huge difference to the children and families.

Thanks again for such wonderful support and generosity, it is much appreciated and every penny is used to help the children.

Linda