

Dear Friends,

As the end of the year and Christmas approaches, I thought I'd send an update to those of you who have so generously supported the Kindergarten and other projects in Yei and South Sudan. This is early because I am about to go to Yei and am not sure how much time I will have when I get back before Christmas to write and send letters!

Amazingly it is ten years in November since the opening of the new school building. The parents and staff have decided that this is cause for a celebration and have invited me (and asked me to invite a friend) to be part of it. Claire, who has been amazing over several years encouraging and supporting the project AND me!!, will be joining me on this trip. It will be really special to share this experience with her. This will coincide with the end of the academic year so on the 21st November there will be a combined tenth anniversary and end of year graduation celebration.

Unusually this will be the second of two visits to Yei in one year. I spent a month in Africa in August, firstly in Kampala where I processed my visa application and then visited Arua for several days to spend time with the teachers who are still refugees in Uganda. We had a good time together experiencing a mixture of emotions: excitement at being together, they don't see each other because they live in different areas in the camps also sadness as they discussed the difficulties of living in a foreign land. All three of them teach in schools in the camps which they find fulfilling but the posts carry little financial reward so life is very difficult as two of them are young widows with large families to support.

I flew from Arua to Juba on a small plane and spent a few days catching up with friends before flying to Yei for two weeks. The first part of my time was spent working with the staff and children. The Kindergarten continues to thrive. Malish and the team work incredibly hard to enable 430 children to have an amazing education. Despite each class having upwards of 120 children they have lots of opportunities to learn in a fun way. The energetic staff bring 'chalk and talk' to life with lots of jumping around, singing and rhymes. The older children also regularly spend time reading and writing. Imagine marking 120 work sheets for each session!! They also have lots of outdoor activities including games and more formal PE lessons. The children have a meal every day currently the ingredients are provided by The World Food Programme and consist of beans and the local staple of maize porridge.

Once term had ended we invited local teachers from other schools in Yei district to join our three days of staff training. I did some practical sessions on using story books to bring various aspects of the curriculum alive. We had lots of fun making caterpillars from socks and butterflies and animal masks, creating story sacks as well as sharing ideas. Many of the teachers have had little or no formal training so opportunities like this are very important. One of our kindergarten governors led some excellent sessions on administration and management and another taught about child development and encouraged the participants to reflect on their practice.

As well as working with the children and contributing to staff training there were lots of meetings with staff, management and parents making for a very full but productive visit.

Through your donations I was able to take some money to buy a new solar panel. Stronger power means the photocopier and laptop are more reliable, this means that creating resources and planning are slightly less stressful.

There are several other ventures that contribute to the Kindergarten :

The hall is used during the day for Day care provision. The children are part of the whole school family so when there is a need for the staff to use the room for other classes the younger children go outside if the weather is good or into the classroom that is being vacated by the class using the hall. This is a self-financing venture with any profits being used to provide extra facilities for the kindergarten. This means that young children are able to access the opportunities the school provides.

The television in the Hall is used regularly to show English Premier league football matches. The customers pay to watch each match (if there is more than one shown they have to pay for each!) This is proving to be an excellent source of income for the Kindergarten.

They have several more ideas to help the school become completely self-sufficient. One is to set up a small stationary shop. With a small cash injection to purchase the initial stock it could become a major income source. It is often difficult and expensive to buy basic stationary in the local market. The headteacher has reliable contacts in Uganda who would be willing to purchase materials and send them to Yei to stock the shop.

Another aim is to have an internet dish so that they can have easy access to a reliable internet connection. This would be of great benefit to the Kindergarten and could be used to set up an internet café. There is a great need for this in Yei and although it would be expensive to set up, it would be well used by the Kindergarten and local community; making it a reliable and regular source of income for the Kindergarten.

As always, your contributions have directly supported the Kindergarten. Through this now thriving community facility you have also (indirectly) facilitated all of the above and much more.

During my visit to South Sudan last year I came to understand the desperate need for ladies' and children's underwear. It's hard to imagine teaching and fearing that the elastic in your undies might give way in class and your children having to go school without underwear. When your salary buys just one meal a month this is a real possibility. I have sent many parcels over the last 18 months and was able to take some children's underwear as well this time. It is so moving to see the excitement when children and ladies receive their gift.

If any of you would like to know more about any of these projects, please contact us. Meanwhile please keep saving stamps and small change and telling your family and friends about us. Some people also give money for a specific purpose: towards travel, postage or to help fund children and young people to access education (there is no free education in South Sudan or the rest of east Africa - it is all fee paying). I have been involved in channelling this targeted support, thank you. The needs are many and it is hard to express how much it means to the school and wider community to have people like you remembering them and supporting them in various ways. Thank you again for your interest and on-going support. This comes with best wishes for a joyful Christmas and peaceful 2020.

Best wishes from Carolyn



Thank you to all those people who help us



Making use of local resources!



Children in Day Care provision enjoying snack time



Children enjoying their beans and maize porridge meal.



Teaching with one of their new story books



Showing off the resources created during the training sessions.



Ladies and children are delighted with their gifts.

