



Newsletter

Issue no 5 by Annabel Kerr

Welcome to our fifth Newsletter

I start with an apology to you all about the delay in getting updates sent out about Bansang Educational Appeal. My attention has been focused elsewhere but at last I can tell you all the progress that has been going on. We have continued sponsoring children at secondary level education, 75 in 2013-2014 across four schools and 63 in 2014-2015 in three schools. The reduction in numbers will be explained later and is a result of Government changes in support. The church nursery school was officially opened in April 2014. Progress on the Bansang Upper Basic library has been slow but is now in a useable state where books aren't exposed to wind and sand. We hope to get an air conditioning unit fixed to complete the renovation works and make it a welcoming place for teachers and students

In November 2013 we sent a container full of useful equipment to Bansang including school furniture, bicycles, clothes,

computers, stationery and school materials, all donated through various UK charities.

We have expanded our support within the UK in the last two years. A secondary school in Scotland, West Calder High School is sponsoring 8 students this year after hearing about BEA on the internet. A church in Lancashire is sponsoring two students and I recently visited them to talk about BEA and why support is desperately needed. We received support from Beacon Hill Churches Together last year also and I'll be raising awareness of BEA in north west Essex later this year.

Over the last financial year BEA has raised £9300 with the help of churches and schools, locally and nationally, fundraising events and your generous donations. In the current financial year we are well on the way to achieving the same.

Recent Visits

Since our last newsletter I have been to Bansang twice, January and November 2014 for two weeks on each visit, giving me quality time in each school. On both visits I met up with students, chatting to them, collecting reports and paying their school fees. On the January trip BEA gave money to fix windows into the Bansang Upper Basic Library and to complete works on Agape Nursery Building (we jointly sponsored this with Empower The Gambia). The container had arrived around Christmas and items had been distributed when I arrived. Visiting schools I could see materials being made use of already.



Items donated from Tools With A Mission, ready for use in the Woodwork department

Bansang town and practical subjects in the Arts department can reliably make use of instruments they have.

It was a pleasure to visit the recently opened Agape Nursery School and meet Pastor Chinedum who had taken over from Pastor Mendy at the church several months previously. The children all seemed to be learning and enjoying themselves in practical stimulating lessons.



Nursery class singing 'Head shoulders knees and toes'



Sponsored students at Daru receiving donated clothes from the container in January '14

In November I enjoyed the novel and luxurious experience of regular grid electricity at Bansang Senior Secondary School for a few hours in the morning and in the evening. Although the school was wired for this in 2008 when it was built, there had been no supply to it or the village close by until 2014. As well as being able to enjoy air conditioning and cold water the school is benefiting enormously as the IT classroom can be moved back to the school from



The New Agape Nursery School

During my November visit I planned to give all primary and nursery level students a pencil. There were some interesting calculations at the stationery shop near Banjul as I calculated roughly how many would be needed. It seemed strange spending £100 on pencils. I felt very humble distributing them as head teachers passed on thanks from parents that their child had received a pencil.



Staff and children at Sukuta Lower Basic School receiving pencils.

Sololo Basic Cycle school received a number of items including some donated sports shirts I was able to take out along with stationery supplies.



Assembly at Sololo school donating items

At Daru school I was able to donate some money to Jabou the head teacher, who decided to get uniform made for all students who hadn't got any. While I was on my first

visit to the school a member of staff went around each classroom taking names and age of each child without uniform. She quickly bought the material and the tailors in the village were soon at work. A number of uniforms were completed before I left.



Students at Daru Lower Basic School with their new uniform

In the last academic year we sponsored 66 students, 49 at grades 10-12. As Government assistance changed last year so did our sponsorship to concentrate on senior secondary level. Those children being sponsored already at grade 7-9 have continued being supported, but this is being phased out to concentrate on the increased costs of secondary level schooling. In the current academic year things have changed again, but I will be able to tell you more after my next visit. All students at the secondary school can hire a bicycle with our sponsorship if they would like help to get to and from school in the heat.



Sponsored students with bicycles provided by Re-cycle, a Colchester based charity

On my last visit I travelled to a distant village to try to get one of our former students back in school. Bunna was a promising student who was exploited by gifts for sexual favours and ended up getting pregnant 3 years ago. With support from Jabou, the female headteacher at Daru school I was able to persuade the senior school to accept her back into school to finish her education, given her better prospect in the future as a single mother.



Bunna in her village compound, with her daughter

In Mabali Kuta School I found discovered the staff had assigned a bicycle to 2 girls travelling 4 kms to school and back each day, one of them could ride and carry the other one. This is quite a commitment for these girls and being able to get to school more easily is a real bonus.



Making good use of the bicycle at Mabali Kuta school

Other projects ongoing are the library refurbishment at Bansang Upper Basic School and refurbishment of staff accommodation at Sololo school where teachers are living 2 or 3 to a room in dire conditions. We hope this aids teacher retention.



Sololo Staff accommodation block - inside is worse!

PROGRESS SO FAR

I am very pleased with how the charity has ticked over in the last two years and was pleasantly surprised when I realised how much we have still managed to do to help students in Bansang despite my neglect. On my last visit I aimed to distribute pencils to every primary aged child in the schools we support. This caused some amusement in the shop at the coast where I was calculating how many and costs of pencils needed. To me this seemed a minuscule gift but became news in each village school I visited. Even I forget how much we take for granted.

This year is our 2nd year of students completing school who have been sponsored throughout their secondary education. It has been a pleasure seeing them grow up and make the most of their learning through our support. We have some students who hope to go onto university and we will support them where we are able to.

I am very grateful for the support I have from you all; those who give their time and those who give their money to help BEA achieve what it has so far. The reliability and continuity of our support is making BEA a household name in Bansang.

Sponsorship is having to change and adapt each year. Last year the Gambian government took over boys fees at lower and upper basic level, but removed sponsorship for girls at senior level. This year they are covering all fees but there are still costs to be paid at senior level, the largest of which is text books. We have adjusted sponsorship to £4 for children without school lunch and £7 with lunch. Additional funds will be used for our other work in providing resources. We will review the situation yearly as teachers have some concerns that the current system is unsustainable. We look forward to the time when our help is no longer needed. We continue to keep ourselves small so we can be fully accountable and keep money going to where it is needed.

Without help like yours many of the children we support would not be able to complete an education that we take for granted. We are grateful for your support.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Annabel Kerr

Trustee Changes

In April this year we welcomed Sheena Simmonds Ward, Peter's wife, as a new trustee of the charity. Sheena had been so impressed with her first visit to The Gambia last November that she readily agreed to join the team of trustees supporting the charity. During that visit, Sheena and Peter met with myself, and Ismaila the Head teacher of Bansang Secondary school. The accompanying photo shows us all meeting at the Ngala lodge on the coast, prior to enjoying a lovely African meal together, when we were serenaded by local musicians.



George completing one of his half marathons

Quiz Night

In April this year, trustee Peter Ward organised another quiz night, assisted by Sheena, his wife, who became a trustee earlier in the year. This time we were able to use the village hall at Wickham Bishops, which is a much larger venue than hitherto, and the evening was again well supported. As always there was an interesting mixture of straightforward and more challenging questions ranging from general knowledge through to a contemporary round on Scotland, and a novel round about doctors! We provided a scrumptious ploughman's supper, and topped off the evening with a raffle and a draw for wine bottles. We received very complimentary remarks about the professional delivery and electronic scoring system, and were delighted that the evening raised a record £740 for BEA funds.

George's Half Marathon Year

Following on from our Windsor Half Marathon three years ago George decided to undertake a year of monthly half marathons. This has taken him all over the country and he's had to run in some difficult conditions. He has raised over £2500 for BEA during this time, and we thank EDMS, a firm he works for who donated £100 for each run. Thank you to George for his amazing efforts.

Links

Due to Peter and Sheena's links near Dunmow I was invited to speak at the Five Parishes of Great Easton in September this year as BEA had been chosen as their harvest charity. The church primary school was also involved and I enjoyed 24 hours in the area speaking at 2 church services and the school assembly. The response has been amazing, the church and school raising over £950 at harvest with the promise of more to come. Several members of the congregation have taken up sponsorship and the schoolchildren had the marvelous idea of fundraising though having a week of rice school dinners without dessert and the money saved going towards BEA. I also visited Garstang United Reformed church in Lancashire, in June which is sponsoring 2 girls and spoke about the charity so they know where their money is going.

Fortieth Party

I celebrated my 40th birthday in September. I felt like celebrating after the last 18 months working on house extension and renovations. It was a lovely afternoon attended by friends and family from all walks of my life. Donations were made to BEA and thanks to everyone's generosity over £1300 was raised for BEA.

*If you feel you can help in any way please ring (07521 055926) or email me.
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*Alternatively check out our website
www.bansangeducationalappeal.org*