

Hello. I hope you have had a good year.

I visited South Sudan in August and only a few of you had news whilst I was there. Apologies if some of you have heard some of these details before.

The Kindergarten management have appointed several new teachers and it's exciting to see the progress our children are making. Especially exciting for me is that we now have the first class of our primary section (Key Stage 2 in UK). The new primary teachers have done an amazing job and our children have passed all the national exams this term. The system is that in primary and secondary schools' exams are set by the County at the end of each term. It is more assessment than formal exams but standardised so all schools do the same. In January the Primary 1 children will move to Primary 2 and the top class from the Kindergarten section, who have just had their graduation celebration, as the academic year has now ended, will move into primary 1.

We achieved quite a lot during my time in Yei. Some small items included getting some notice boards made for the new classrooms so that charts and teaching items can be pinned to them so that once the new rooms are painted nothing will be stuck directly on the walls. When we have some spare cash we will get the old block painted and notice boards made to bring them up to a similar standard to the new block. I had taken with me lots of books and resources for the staff training sessions so we are turning the original office, attached to the old building, into a library so we can store the resources and books carefully and staff will have easy access to them. We painted the room and purchased some new cupboards and staff are cataloguing items to ensure everything is kept safe and available for use. One of the governors went to Uganda and with some money I had left with them was able to purchase some textbooks and early reading books. We also bought a motor bike for school use! Every time anything is needed from the market (which is daily and often more than once to buy food for the children) it costs to hire the local motor bike taxis plus staff need to go to meetings and other school related commitments. Because of the small (relative to costs in UK) initial outlay and the length of time a tank of fuel will last this will make a big difference to the school budget. Some school staff are being trained to use it, so long term making considerable savings.

The new bookshop building is now complete and serving customers. It makes a big difference to profits not to have to pay rent and the addition of a room that can be used as a small café is proving to be a huge success and will make a significant contribution to the school budget.

One of our new staff has some expertise and interest in agriculture so is developing the small school garden to support the feeding programme in school. Part of being able to fully implement this plan is to construct a much needed new fence (which is now broken in many places and does not currently fence all the school land) to enclose all the school land giving opportunity to extend the play area which was reduced when the new building was constructed and allow our team to develop our little garden into more of a farm. The long term plan is that this feeds the children but also surplus could be sold and used to support the school budget.

There is also urgent need for some more latrines to be constructed as staff are currently sharing with the children. Our toilets are now old and need renovating and there aren't enough for the numbers of children now attending.

Alongside this I was able to spend time in the classrooms with the children and staff and have enjoyed seeing the progress the children are making as a result of the team's hard work. We are hoping to raise funds to buy desks especially for the primary classes, as currently they are working on their knees. We also need some additional staff desks and a cupboard for each room but this is all in our long term plan!

I visited an outlying area of Yei where a friend of mine (whom I have known since I was first living in Juba) was involved in a Kindergarten until the troubles in 2016. My friend died suddenly in January so I was able to visit her grave and close to the grave is the shell of a kindergarten building. The building was devastated during the troubles in 2016 when the inhabitants fled for their lives, but they are returning now and there are many children who have no access to any form of education. Prior to 2016 our first headteacher used to visit this school to help the staff and share some of our resources. As a result of a gift I have been given we are able to replace the roof and then people will use local resources to rebuild the walls so allowing the children to return to a basic education. Ferida (our headteacher) is keen to support the staff to re start. It would be a positive way of keeping my friend's memory alive as she gave so much to that community.

The other schools I visited last time are making good progress. One already has a basic classroom structure as there are so many children wanting to come they have outgrown the small church building. The senior girls at the school in the Dinka area have sat their senior 4 exams (GCSE level but the format is an overall certificate) and all 21 passed. An amazing achievement. I visited a little tailoring school where a small group of women are learning to use treadle sewing machines in order to be able to make clothes to sell, to enhance their income as well as making reusable sanitary wear. The Mothers' Union Leader in Rokon who is leading the tailoring project is planning to go to Awerail in the new year to start a similar programme there.

I distributed the parcels of underwear and everyone was very excited which you can see from the photos.

Thank you for your ongoing interest and encouragement in so many ways, it makes so much difference to the children in South Sudan. I wish you all a happy Christmas and a peaceful 2024

Love from Carolyn



First class of the Kindergarten section



Our first class in the Primary section



Our Staff during the training session in August holding items that show what they contribute to the daily life of the school.



The first stages of the new library. There are now several more shelves and cupboards.



The new Café.



Before and after showing the progress of the renovation of the school on the outskirts of Yei.



One of the new projects showing the number of children accessing education for the first time. There is need for new buildings to accommodate the needs.