

November /December 2022 Visit to South Sudan

I arrived in Juba Wednesday morning 16th November and on Thursday I went to Rokon (about 50 miles outside Juba) returning Friday. The purpose was to look at a small kindergarten they are trying to start to see if I can help to give it a boost. I am keen that we don't just 'do things for people'. so we have agreed on ways of me helping with things such as a chalk board and some food for the children for the first couple of terms and they work with the community to make it sustainable long term. I had taken some stationary items balls and a few other resources which were all excitedly received. I also visited the orphanage and met an amazing lady - Kiden- who is looking after 27 children ranging from 5-16 mostly orphans as a result of various conflicts. Their challenges are many as she looks after the children on an almost non-existent budget.

Then I went on Saturday with Bishop David Akau to Awerial for the weekend. This is a Dinka area (one of the cattle tribes who historically don't treat women well) He is an incredibly forward thinking Dinka man who is passionate about girls education- explaining to me that when you educate a woman you educate a village. They have over 400 girls over two sites but one building is near the river and floods and the other is falling down. The community are keen to build to enable their girls to have an education to benefit themselves and the community and avoid childhood marriages. The girls are amazing young people who are very articulate and trying to make the most of the opportunities they have. The teachers are young and committed but not getting salaries so how long that is sustainable for is hard to know. We are looking for funding to start some small local businesses to support the staff salaries. In the long term they want to build a new school that won't flood. We have agreed to try and re-start the Kindergarten using the church building and as with Rokon I had taken a few resources and have purchased chalk boards etc and I will support the school with food for breakfasts for the first term whilst they get going.

It's been a very exciting few days and despite many challenges ahead it feels like both areas will meet them head on and do their best for the young people of their areas. They just need a little help to get going and will then build on that.

Alongside the education in both areas the women are working hard to support the church and community. A project I am especially interested in for both the areas is to enable women to make reusable sanitary pads for the girls (so they don't miss school for a week every month) and the ladies also. Again, all they need is an initial boost to buy the first sewing machines and fabric and then they will sell at affordable prices and use the profits to buy more fabric.

My three weeks in Yeï was very busy as we prepared for the graduation of 86 children from Kindergarten to Primary. It's a special time for the children and families as they celebrate 3 years of education and prepare for their primary years. This time was extra special as half of these children will be able to move to Primary 1 in our new building which we opened on the same day. In previous years only a few of our children could be accommodated in the local school and others have had to go much further afield because of lack of space. Over the next years we will slowly develop the primary section. In January we will start Primary 1 (year 3 in UK) then next year those children will move to Primary 2 and some of our top class Kindergarten will become Primary 1 and each following year we will add a new class. The challenge will be once the current block is full but I have challenged the parents to start fundraising now to build extra classrooms!!

The new governors and the school leadership are doing an amazing job in meeting the many challenges the death of the previous headteacher brought for the school. Ferida our headteacher had a baby boy in November and is already back at work bringing the baby with her. I enjoyed being a babysitter whilst Ferida attended to other things!!

Apart from the long term need for additional classrooms there is need for new latrines and the fence needs renovating and extending to include all the school land so the additional children will have room to play.

A generous donor has supported the development of the bookshop which is a major income generator for the school. We have been renting a small building but the plan is to build our own reducing overheads and including a small cafe area for people to drink tea and take cold juices.

Thank you for your continued interest and support. It makes so much difference to the children and families in South Sudan. Best wishes Carolyn Murray

