

Dear Friends of St. Anthony's Nursery School, Malawi ☺ Dec 2008



As another year draws to a close I am really happy to say 2008 has been a successful and prosperous year at the nursery school.

Last month I travelled over to Malawi with a long to-do list and a real determination to get key tasks completed. As I mentioned in last year's newsletter, top of my agenda was seeking further support with the day to day running of the school. Jane and Colin Thorneycroft have so kindly kept an eye on the school all year whilst I contacted potential organisations and individuals who may be interested in working with me.

Jane kindly put me in touch with the Catholic Church in Malawi and communication and conversations began via email. Whilst in Malawi I then met with the Bishop of Zomba and Father Phillip Mumbulu, Education Ex-Officio for Zomba Catholic Diocese. After two very successful meetings I am delighted to say I have set up a partnership with Zomba Catholic Diocese to jointly manage the daily running of the nursery school. I strongly believe securing the partnership will see the school further embedded into the Malawian community, with the Catholic Church committed to taking good care of the children, building and staff. They will also act on my behalf in the event of an emergency or serious incident. It was crucial that Mariam, my Head teacher, was very much part of the discussions and in agreement with the changes. As a result I have given Mariam extra responsibilities at the school, with a pay rise to reflect her new role. To summarise the new roles and responsibilities of all involved I drew up a Memorandum of Understanding and this was signed by all parties during my visit. I will continue to fundraise and liaise with my staff from London, monitoring the effectiveness and success of the new relationship. I am really hopeful the partnership marks a successful new chapter for St. Anthony's Nursery School.

Although the above discussions were really important I made sure they didn't take over from my time with the children – it was wonderful to be back surrounded by 80 very enthusiastic students! Whilst I was there we closed the school for 2008 and Class A graduated in a ceremony attended by their friends and family. Watching the children perform a selection of songs, whilst they took it in turns to conduct, was particularly special and I noticed how much they have all come on from their enrolment two years ago. They are so much more confident, switched on and keen to show off their reading, writing and creative skills. It really is a joy to spend time with the children.

All the nursery staff are fit and well and Charles continues to receive vital antiretroviral treatment (for free) at Zomba Hospital. Earlier in the year Norwich City Council sent over a container to Malawi and I packed up twelve boxes of equipment for the shipment, these arrived safely at the school in August – lots of new toys, games and books for the next couple of years. The classrooms definitely needed a fresh coat of paint this year so I asked Ousmane to repaint all the internal walls. We have a lovely new blue gloss sea all round the classroom walls – painted fish are to be added soon!

Whilst we all suffer a tough economic climate here in the UK, times in Malawi are just as difficult and price rises are being experienced by all. Fertiliser has more than tripled in price making it very difficult to afford, which could result in a weaker crop yield next year. Thankfully the government was handing out fertiliser coupons in most of the villages and I made sure all my staff received a loan for a 50kg bag of fertiliser. Due to a very kind donation before I left England I have also arranged for all my staff and children to have Christmas lunch on December 24th. The nursery school staff will prepare the food and re-open the school to ensure all the children have a Christmas feast. It will mean every child has a full tummy at Christmas!

All in all I had a really busy two weeks but a successful and rewarding visit. Travelling over on my own can sometimes be both emotionally and physically challenging, but as soon as you are back in the classrooms watching the lessons you soon realise just why the school is so important. I am extremely passionate about continuing to raise the funds to keep the school running for many more years and it constantly remains

very close to my heart. I will keep a watchful eye on how the staff and church work together and will update you all again next year. I am determined to ensure the children of Chilumpha village receive every chance possible for a better education and a bumper start to their schooling.

Thank you so much for helping me keep the school running year after year. I am so very grateful for the support, kindness and guidance I receive – your donations really do change children’s lives.

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a peaceful 2009.



Gina x

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Please send any donations by cheque payable to ‘The Nursery School’. Thank you ☺



Photos from my visit in November 2008