

Dear Friends of St. Anthony's Nursery School, Malawi ☺ Dec 2009

This time last year, after a very successful visit to Malawi, I pondered the idea of having a year off from my annual visits to the school. Sadly, just 6 weeks after I returned my Head Teacher, Mariam, had a stroke. It soon became clear I would need to return in 2009 as her health took a turn for the worse.

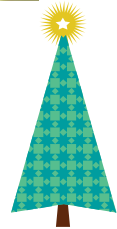
Thankfully I am pleased to say Mariam is back on her feet but sadly has lost the use of her right hand. As a result, 2009 has kept me very busy as I had to step up to pick up the responsibilities Mariam was too unwell to carry out. The good news is that after a busy visit to St. Anthony's Nursery School last month things are back on track and we are all set for 2010.

My visit to the nursery was also extra special this year as I was joined by my lovely boyfriend Mark, who provided a much needed second pair of hands. It was Mark's first visit to Malawi and I think we can safely say he was bitten by the Malawi bug, 80 happy smiling children guaranteed this!



Without a doubt the children of the nursery school are the most fantastic and special part of my visits. They can be a little shy and apprehensive when they see a 'muzungu' (a white person) but by the end of the first morning I have lots of little hands fighting to grab my fingers. I also try not to have favourites but there is always one extra special cheeky character and this year it was gorgeous little Cecelia →

Once the children left the school each day I had a chance to reflect on the operational issues that needed completing. Due to Mariam's health she is no longer able to carry on as Head Teacher so has become the 'Child Care Officer', responsible for ensuring the highest standard of welfare and child care for the children. The Deputy Head, Noel, who is a very bright and capable young man has stepped up to replace Mariam as Head Teacher. During the last year my Night Watchman, Wedson, sadly had to move away from the village due to personal reasons so handed in his resignation after 7 years' service. This gave David, the reserve Night Watchman, a chance to step into the full-time position and I am confident David will do a really good job.



During my time in the village I also formed a relationship with Cornelius Muwa, the Government- appointed Head Teacher of the local boy's primary school. Cornelius has been a Head Teacher for many years and I respect his management experience and knowledge. Cornelius kindly agreed to act as a 'Supervisor' to the school, for a small wage, and will keep a watchful eye on the nursery and step in when needed or called upon by the staff. Cornelius lives opposite the school so is very conveniently placed to assist, he is also setting up a school committee for the nursery which will involve local parents and residents. I feel very strongly that the community should be taking an active hands-on role in looking after the nursery and integrating it into local society. A school committee should ensure this happens.

I partly set up the new relationship with Cornelius because Father Phillip Mumbulu from Zomba Catholic Diocese has moved on from his role as Education Ex-Officio so will no longer be able to provide support to the school. The Diocese has been actively involved in helping my staff over the last year and on a positive note they remain committed to helping with the general day-to-day running of the school. A new Father is now in charge of Education, Father Gwegweya, and although he was unable to meet me whilst I was there, I did briefly see the Bishop of Zomba who re-signed an updated Memorandum of Understanding pledging the church's commitment to help with my nursery school. I am hopeful that with Father Gwegweya and Cornelius' involvement the school will run efficiently and smoothly in 2010.

I have learnt over the last 7 years of managing the school you can never be quite sure what is round the

corner and at times 2009 has been quite a challenging year. However, stepping back into my school again and seeing the children so keen to learn, play and have fun with their friends is the only reminder I need to know the nursery school is achieving its goal of educating children and making a real difference in their lives. Mark and I had a fantastic time with the children and we have hours of video footage that captures their laughter, giggles and excitement. I am very fond of all my pupils and I am proud that the nursery school is giving them the best possible start to their education.

Thank you all so much for making this possible and continuing to support a small but very important little nursery school in the heart of Malawi. Your donations have helped so many children and I would like to say a huge thank you on their behalf.

Wishing you a really special Christmas and a wonderful start to 2010.

Gina x

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

