

Don McMath Foundation

Newsletter

www.donmcmath.org

info@donmcmath.org

The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 1st March 2005

Hello All

A slightly longer newsletter than usual this month as so much has been happening since the last one in December.

The first new school building is nearly there!



The new school - waiting for the roof

We actually got all the paperwork to start the building in December. On the 20th December the school was marked out and we started digging the foundations. When Anne came home for two weeks at the end of January, the building was at floor level. The day she returned, the men hassled her to the field to show what they had done in her absence, she was amazed to find the entire outer wall was up to ceiling height and one of the cesspits was dug. The cesspits are massive, about 10 feet deep by 20 foot by 8 foot and all dug by hand. The men said they had really worked hard as they wanted to

surprise her.



Putting on the roof beams



At the time of writing, the iron structure for the roof is in place. Wood is being attached to this, and the corrugated roof is put on to this. (All roofs are corrugated in the Gambia) The carpenter says the roof will be completed in 3 days, which is of great interest to the workman as Anne organised a small

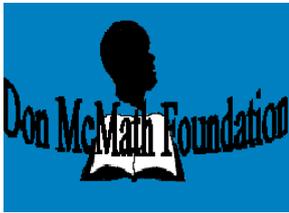
competition in December for them. Each workman put down the date when they thought the roof would be completely finished and the date nearest the completion wins a prize.

One of the cesspits has now been lined with blocks and plastered and is just awaiting its lid. The other one is now being lined. The first fixings of plumbing & electrics have been done and the door and windows are in. They have started plastering the classrooms.



Talking to the foreman

Once that is done we just have to fix the ceilings, finish the plumbing & electrics, tile the floors, glaze the windows & paint. Anne estimates there are about 3 more weeks work on the building and a few days to clear the playground. However, we do have a problem about getting water connected, as there is an embargo on new supplies. Anne knows someone who works for the President and he is going to ask the President to intervene & authorise a connection, as we can't open the school without water. Hopefully, this will happen and we will open the new school on the 4th April 2005.



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Eventually we did get our crates from the docks and we would like to thank everyone who gave us items for the school. Anne started the process on the 30th November and actually collected the goods on New Years Eve after paying various “local taxes”. In retrospect we think that it is not worth the time & money to send out goods by ship, so in future things brought out will be what various trustees and sponsors can carry with them.

Everything is going smoothly at the school. We terminated the employment of one of our teachers in January, as she did not keep to the standards we have for the school. Her replacement starts on the 1st March, thanks to the help of our new chairman, Therese Cardos, who interviewed many candidates for the post.



Over Christmas, one of the trustees Paul McMath who was here on holiday was approached about a little disabled boy. His name is Hamsa, he is in a wheelchair as his feet are crooked and he cannot use his arms. However he uses his feet for everything. Anne asked the teachers how they felt about taking him and straight away they said they would. We also talked to the children about not pushing him or hitting him as obviously he can't defend himself. Anyway he has settled into the school very well and is a happy little child.

The Woods family, who have sponsored a classroom, have just been here for two weeks holiday, which they seemed to really enjoy. They took lots of photos of the building some of which you will see in this newsletter. Also Hannah Woods taught the mother of our disabled child exercises to keep his feet supple.

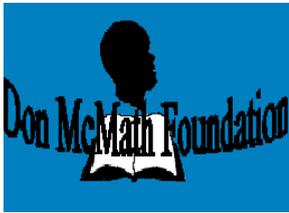
The following is from Peter and Hannah Woods:



“As sponsors of children at the school we decided this year to have a family holiday in the Gambia and to see it for ourselves. What the guide books say is true – the sunshine, the beaches, the welcoming friendliness of the people in this lovely peaceful country make it the ideal place to escape from an English winter – but our contact with the school gave us an extra dimension to the holiday. We are grateful to Anne for helping us to find our feet in the country and for enabling us through her many friends and neighbours to appreciate the lives of the Gambians: their energy and ingenuity in making ends meet in a country that lacks the material wealth we are used to, their support for one another, their optimism and their determination to succeed – all this is quite humbling to us Europeans.



The Don McMath School really is an inspiration. The children sang and recited for us and their shining faces and enthusiasm were unforgettable. Just imagine: they had to be shooed home after school was over! Meanwhile, on the new school site, the roof was going up and the windows installed during our visit (late February) and by the time you read this it was hoped that the building would be finished. For two months the builders had worked without a day off, so determined they were to make progress, and



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we realized what an achievement it will be for the whole community to have built the new school. They can truly take pride in its high standard, both in the building and in the teaching.

As the building nears completion funds could do with an extra boost. Having been there, I can testify how a relatively small amount of money in UK terms can stretch a long way in the Gambia. In enabling a child to go to school you also help their family and the whole community. If, like us, you get the chance to go and see for yourself, you will not fail to be inspired by the value of this project – as well as having a great holiday.”

If any of our supporters feel able to run any new fund raising events for the school or have any ideas for fund raising then we would love to hear from them. We are still about £5,000 short of what we need to complete the first building.

Thanks to everyone who contributed pencil cases or donations for them, we now have enough pencil cases for every child to have one.

During the summer we will be holding garden parties in Bexhill and in Verwood, the tentative dates at the moment are Sunday 10th July in Verwood and the end of July in Bexhill, we will give you all more information and send out invitations nearer to the time. We will also be running a stall at the Verwood Rustic Fair in August and a stall at the Hastings Festival in August.

We will be having the official opening ceremony for the new school on Monday 28th November, all the Trustees and so far at least two of our sponsors will be attending. We would love to hear from any other sponsors who might be interested in attending, as you can see from the Woods comments it's a fantastic place to have a holiday! Please get in touch with Mick if you are interested and he will be able to help with information on accommodation and flights etc.

Three of the classrooms in the new school have been financed by individual sponsors. They will be called the Biddy Woods classroom after Peter Woods' sister, the Sue Cook classroom after Graham Cook's late wife and the Mushtaq Ahmed classroom after Samina Ahmed's father. If any of our other sponsors can raise or donate £3,000 they can also have a class named after themselves or their loved ones.

We expect to increase the number of children in the new school over the next six months and so will be looking for more sponsors. If you know of anyone who may be interested then please get in touch with us and we will send them information on the school.

We would like to once again thank you all for your support, without your help the school would not exist today.

Anne and Mick McMath

1st March 2005