

The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 12th March 2015



The Don McMath Foundation

Charity number: 1100164

76 Manor Road, Verwood, Dorset, BH31 6EA

Telephone: 01202 823317 Email: info@donmcmath.org Web site www.donmcmath.org

Hi All

Something a bit different for this newsletter, it's easy to forget when you look at the well turned out pupils at the school that they all come from really poor backgrounds, some worse than others. This is an excerpt from an email from Anne at the end of February.

Hi Mick,

It is 5.15 am and I am unable to sleep as I had a very disturbing day yesterday. I am not asking you to do anything, I just need to tell someone of the events to get it out of my system, as that is the way I cope with it.

It was a very hot day yesterday, but I had arranged with Momodou to go out and enrol some more children for Sept. Momodou is the taxi driver I have been using for this job and you know him as he used to work at Sailors as security and he has a child at the school. I enrolled several more children, but because it was so hot, I only went out for a couple of hours. As we are returning home I get a call from Mr Jeng (*the headmaster*) asking if he could see me urgently and I arranged to meet him at the house.

Mr Jeng and Fatou (*a teacher*) both came and I was told M's mother was at the school crying because her daughter was ill. A couple of weeks ago, M had been diagnosed with malaria and DMF had paid for her medicine, but malaria does not last that long so I decided she should go to Afra Med. Fatou said she would go with her and her mother.

On the way back they dropped off the family and then came to me. Momodou who has been enrolling children with me and got used to seeing some of the poorest families, begged me to go to their compound as their living standard was the worst he had ever seen and then waited outside while Fatou told Mr Jeng and me the results of the hospital visit.

They did lots of tests on her and found she had a urinary infection, constipation caused by bad diet, she was also suffering from bad depression. When Fatou had talked to her about this, it transpired that there was very little money and it was a struggle to give her fare for Nusrat (*Senior School*) and she knew that sometimes it meant the rest of the family went without food that day. Also their diet consisted of mainly boiled rice, no sauce, vegetables or fish. Also she was having a period and because they had no money she did not have pads, but a kind doctor at Afri med made her up some pads. I then decided that I would go to their compound and see for myself. Mr Jeng and Fatou came with me. There are 3 girls and the mother living in one room which is only big enough to have a double mattress with about a foot left on one side. All their other belongings which are few are outside.

It is the state of the building that is the shocker, as it is an uncompleted building with no windows door or ROOF. They have put blue plastic sheeting on the roof to keep out the sun, but this will not stand up to the rains. There is no water so they have to go to neighbours and beg for water which they collect in plastic containers, but as you pay for water here the neighbours are not always accommodating. Consequently hygiene standards are low.

The mother tries to earn money, by selling charcoal. She buys a sack for D200 but it takes 2 days to sell it and she makes D50 (*less than £1*) profit. However talking to the mother it was very clear that she is also very depressed and has lost all hope.

While M was attending school at DMF they lived in Bijolo which is the other side of Senne Gambia and M walked to school each day (a long way) but was always on time, clean and a very disciplined child. She worked hard and got a place at Nusrat. They are now living in Bakoteh as they no longer could afford the rent and they are living in this place rent free.

Their immediate need was for food, so I took them some of my own rice and drinking water and gave the mother some money from our unofficial hardship fund (money donated by one of our sponsors) and told her to buy fish, vegetables and oranges with it. I am also in the short term going to give her fare to go to school from her fund. I think once her medical conditions which she has been given medicine for have cleared up she should go to school as I think this will help with her depression.

Their medium term needs are going to be finding more affordable and suitable housing and helping the mother to generate enough income to support the family. However she is in such a depressed state that will take some time.

I have told you about our hardship fund before, but just to remind you, every so often she (sponsor) gives me money to use to help anyone that is in dire need. It is all done through Ous, (*our school administrator*) so they think he is giving charity to them and not DMF. At the moment the fund is paying D10 a day for a child in Nursery who does not get food

each day and the fares (D150 per week) to Nusrat of P who has no family here (his mother died a couple of years ago) and stays with friends. Also I know she has helped other people in the past. She paid for Ous's book keeping course and has bought clothes for the family of the child she sponsors. However I am sure it is not a bottomless pit. Sorry this is so epic, but it has helped me settle my mind. Anne

As a result of this we (the trustees) have decided to create a hardship fund to allow us to help pupils and their families who are in desperate straits. We will keep this fund separate from the school funds. We intend to use the proceeds of this year's garden party (see below) to start the fund off.

A follow up email from Anne:

Have had quite a bit of success with M now. I have found a place that will be available in a couple of weeks. It is 2 rooms with a bathroom. It is a bit more than I was hoping for, as it is D600 (*less than £10*) a month. (Payable 3 months in advance). It is very near the school.

I am now looking for something for her to be able to earn a living, she is keen to continue selling charcoal but I can't see how she will ever make enough money out of that. I am suggesting that we pay 3 months rent and buy her first stock of food to sell, but after that she has to be come self-sufficient. What do you think? – We have agreed to this.



On a brighter, more cheerful note Hamsa (who has been severely disabled from birth) has now had operations on both legs and is progressing well. He is leaving hospital any day now for a period while his legs heal and will return in 6 weeks to have the casts removed He spoke to one of the teachers last week on the phone and complained that the food was tasteless and they put no salt and pepper in it! One of his relatives is going to bring him in some spicy food..

It turns out he has a "sister" now living in Germany and it is through her efforts that he is now in hospital. He is in Hamburg and his brother who flew out with him says he will keep us informed about progress through e-mail.

The school gave him a big send off on Friday (13th February) , which was very emotional, teachers were crying, children were crying, I think the only person who did not cry was

Hamsa. The children lined the main path and sang songs while, at great effort on his part he walked from the nursery to nearly the gate. He said that the next time he comes to the school he will walk the whole path by himself. Anne told him we are keeping him on the register at the moment. She privately gave him some sterling for himself to change to Euros, to use in Germany on himself.

Anne hopes to go to Hamburg in the summer to see him.

An email from Hamsa's brother in Germany.

Good morning Mrs Ann, first of all the entire jallow family is thanking you very much for everything you have done for Hamsa, from the day you have met our late mum till today. Thank you once again...to inform you that 19th Feb, they have operated the right leg and was successful. Today they will also operate the left leg by the grace of THE ALMIGHTY GOD. I will attach some of his pictures. Thanks a lot. GOD bless you all...



Many thanks to Frank Winrow who turned up at the school with hundreds of sample tubes of toothpaste. There were enough to give each child and teacher a tube.

Thanks also to Alan and Cath King for taking a couple of PCs out to the school for us.

The Verwood Garden party will take place on Sunday 24th May, Invitations will be sent out later this month. Once again we are limiting attendance to about 60 people based on the first to respond.

DONATIONS

Thanks to the new sponsors who have signed up over the last few months we always need more! With the new intake in September and with a few sponsors dropping out we now have about **31 children needing sponsors**. Please pass this on to anyone you think might like to sponsor a child, as Anne has mentioned in the past "£5 a month is only the cost of a bottle of wine!"

Please note the website address: www.donmcmath.org and the email address: info@donmcmath.org. You can also reach Anne and Mick via: anne@donmcmath.org and mick@donmcmath.org.

If anyone who currently receives this newsletter through the post is now on email could you please let us know your address so we can email you future newsletters as this will cut down considerably on our costs.

Thank you all for your support.

Anne, Judy and Mick McMath – March 2015