



Changing people's lives

January 2014 Newsletter

A Very Happy New Year to all MBG Members and Supporters and thank you for all the wonderful support you have given during the past year. We can guarantee that 2014 will be as exciting as 2013 - that is the nature of our work! Read on.....!

After 30 years of engagement in The Gambia with a strong basis of trust between our partners and ourselves, MBG sees one of its most important roles as introducing to Gunjur and The Gambia, people and organisations with specialist knowledge who can address specific issues facing the community and the country.



Pre-school children singing

The extraordinary work that Neil Griffiths with his international, expert background in early childhood education, has done in Gunjur in the field of pre-school education over 10 years is a case in point. There is no Government funding for early childhood education in The Gambia.

Some 3,000 children have received early childhood education in Gunjur and we are on

the point of getting the pre-school curriculum, which has been developed with teachers in Gunjur, accepted by the Government of The Gambia.



Neil, Anita Bew, our treasurer Theresa Ardley, office volunteer Stephanie Dale and Angela Hutt a long time volunteer with MBG were in Gunjur during December and wrote the following.....

TARUD Pre-School

The pre-school has been refurbished and has new floors, doors, toilets, furniture and blackboards. The kitchen has been fully re-fitted and the hall renovated. All walls internally and externally have been painted. Additional flower beds have been created. Classrooms have all new furniture including shelving, tables and chairs. Every classroom also has a folding bookcase and floor-mats to sit on. The outside playground has been renovated and painted in bright colours. Class sizes have been reduced with approximately 30 children to a class.

The school will be connected and wired for electricity by the end of January.



Refurbished and reprinted pre-school

At a meeting with the Head Teachers of the five pre-schools in Gunjur it was agreed that, following a request from the Early Childhood Development (ECD) inspector for the region, the pre-school curriculum which has been developed over the past three years would be presented to the Ministry of Education in February.



New pre-school toilets

Neil and the group visited all four schools in Gunjur during the week several times. He was overwhelmed by the excellent progress and standards of education in the schools.

He met with Isatou N'Dow, Principal of Gambia (teacher training) College and the progress of the schools was shared. Fifty copies of the curriculum were presented to her, which will be used for Early Childhood Development teacher training. She also agreed to send students to the Gunjur schools to learn from our expertise. Isatou will attend our training days in February and Neil is to offer a half day training session

for all Gambia College Primary Teacher training students in February.

Starfish Malaria Project

To date the project has distributed almost 4,000 nets protecting nearly 9,000 children and adults under safe sleeping conditions.



Local woman making neem cream

In addition neem cream which is made from the leaves of the neem bush by women business entrepreneurs offers additional protection. Malaria cases are dropping dramatically in the village.

Puppet Shows, Home Visits, Health Centre Training, Radio Slots every month, Mass net distribution, dipping events, take place regularly raising awareness of malaria and the steps that need to be taken to protect children and adults from being bitten by mosquitoes.

Meeting with the Gunjur Community Link committee (GCL)

Angela and Anita met with four of the members of the GCL to discuss the recent Lloyds group visits. The GCL expressed concern at the spacing of the visits asking if they could be further apart as they were feeling tired after the three visits of ten people in consecutive weeks because it is all so new to them. They admitted they have a lot to learn but have made an excellent start. We agree!

Disability Africa

Members of MBG will be aware that we have been working with Disability Africa (DA) for the past 3 years. We introduced Ric Law, the Director of DA to Gunjur and The Gambia in

2010 and he and his team of volunteers in Gunjur have been doing remarkable work primarily raising the profile of disability in that community.



Volunteer working with dyp

In common with many other African communities, attitudes to disability mean that children are often ignored and hidden away and the first step has to be to recognise them as children. As one of our Gunjurian volunteers put it movingly, "I hadn't realised that these children are human beings!"

Ric Law writes Disability Africa (UK charity no: 1143704) works with people in African communities to develop awareness of the needs of disabled children and young people (**dyp**) and provide services to meet those needs. We also explore and dismantle barriers that prevent the inclusion of **dyp** at home, in schools and in their communities. With widespread stigma associated with disability and no system of welfare or support, most **dyp** are homebound, often left alone for many hours, with no educational, medical or social prospects. The first priority for disabled children is to end their isolation.



A playscheme in Gunjur run by DA

In Africa, there is widespread evidence of stigma associated with disability; in The Gambia, as elsewhere, anecdotal accounts of disabled young people being hidden away are extremely common, distressingly this includes evidence of infanticide. There is almost no national or local system of welfare or support, leaving most dyp totally reliant on their family and a high proportion of them are homebound and alone all day - isolated by cultural prejudice, poverty and lack of access to normal life opportunities, the first priority for disabled children is to end their isolation. Their parents have been brought up in traditions which expect little or nothing of a disabled child and too often a direct consequence of these low expectations is comprehensive deprivation of meaningful stimulus and interaction with family and community, deprivation of health care, education and even food.

"Hidden Children" is an essential part of our wider Gunjur Inclusion Project. Funds have been raised to build an "Inclusion Centre" in 2014, in the 27,000-strong community in Gunjur, The Gambia. The Centre will provide a permanent base for essential educational, medical and family support services to **dyp** and the community. We have run a successful play scheme in Gunjur, for 2 years but we know from WHO statistics that there are many more disabled children confined in their homes. In 2014-2015, with involvement from the local community, we aim to 'find' approximately 500 'hidden children'.

We have pro-active strategies to achieve these **seven outcomes**:

- Raise community awareness of issues – through schools, local radio, posters, village compound visits
- Work with local schools to provide resources and skills to support them to include dyp
- Provide Disability Awareness programmes for school students and staff & create anti-bullying policies
- Engage school children to carry out 'village disability surveys', identifying disabled neighbours <18 yrs
- Create a 'child-to-child' programme of non-disabled 'buddies' supporting dyp in classroom
- Train volunteer classroom assistants to support teachers to include disabled children
- Facilitate local awareness-raising drama presentations in schools and community spaces

WHO estimates suggest approximately 2,700 people in Gunjur will be disabled, and as many as **1,500 will be children under 18 years**. The condition and welfare of these youngsters can only be guessed at.

Initially we have focused our work in The Gambia, where we have established a strong new programme in Gunjur since 2011, working in close co-operation with a local NGO, the Trust Agency for Rural Development (TARUD) and the Marlborough Brandt Group.

At the start of our project, it became apparent that running a regular play scheme for **dyp** is an inexpensive and easy intervention which can simultaneously:

- end a child's isolation
- provide a context for medical & educational assessment and individual service planning
- provide an appropriately stimulating, fun and educational environment

- create an interactive opportunity for parents and other family members to begin to change their expectations of their children
- change prevailing negative attitudes by providing an opportunity for members of the community, particularly young people, to gain positive experiences of disabled children through volunteering



Engaging with children through music

Fundraising has been successful in establishing the play-scheme over the last 2 years; it's currently held at the TARUD pre-school in Gunjur and has proved to be immensely popular with up to 60 children (age 3 to 15) attending regularly and 15-20 young local volunteers.

We are providing a 'referral and follow-up' service for children with urgent medical needs, supporting families with transport and medication costs. We have established a partnership with a local clinic to provide surgical and other medical support to dyp and to date have delivered a number of urgent procedures. Our project co-ordinator carries out home visits to establish contact with families and promote disability awareness issues.

The Hidden Children project is an essential foundation for our wider Gunjur Inclusion Project. Funds have been raised to build the Gunjur Inclusion Centre in 2014, providing a permanent resource base and a range of support services and outreach to the community. The local Health Centre keeps no

records of disabled children seen and a recent informal survey by a local NGO found fewer than 10 disabled children in local schools.

In 2014-2015, the **Hidden Children** project will be working to 'find' approximately **500 disabled young people** in the local area, using pro-active strategies outlined in the summary. This project will function alongside the play scheme and the other support programmes radiating from the "Inclusion Centre"; as children become known, we will work with their families to identify the needs of their children - educational, social or medical - and involve both children and families in strategy and service development.

Disabled children who have experienced little social contact will undergo a transition programme to prepare them for gradual inclusion into mainstream schooling. Children with profound or complex impairments will have day placements at the Centre which will, in part, be staffed by pupil volunteers from secondary schools.

Partner organisations and project to date

We work in consultation with community stakeholders and local organisations, providing planning, training and support to develop infrastructure and a skills base for longer term implementation of the project. Our partners are:

- The Marlborough Brandt Group (MBG)
- Trust Agency For Rural Development (TARUD) – with whom we have signed an MoU and agreed a Joint Action Plan to deliver the Gunjur Inclusion Project
- Africmed Clinic - a Gambian not-for-profit medical institution with the aim of improving the general healthcare needs of the people living in the community <http://www.africmed-gm.com>
- Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital, in the capital Banjul. The Head of Physiotherapy Dept. will work with hospital trainees to establish a

community physiotherapy practise at the Inclusion Centre

- The Gambian Federation for the Disabled is an umbrella membership organisation for disabled organisations in The Gambia
- The Child Protection Alliance is an NGO awareness & training around vulnerable children

Construction of **The Gunjur Inclusion Centre** starts in January 2014; it is fully funded and land has been donated by the community. We plan to start the **Hidden Children work in March 2014** to find and prepare the ground for dyp to become involved with the support programmes available.



Aims and outcomes of the Hidden Children project

- In the two years 2014-2015, we anticipate the following outcomes:
 - 500 dyp will be 'found' and a Register maintained and shared with statutory services & NGO's
- Up to 500 dyp will begin to experience social interaction outside the home; in schools, at the Inclusion Centre and in the wider community
- Up to 50 dyp will begin to access education in local schools. (This number reflects the time needed to create individual education plans, improve resources and skills in schools & change traditional attitudes)

- 160 dyp per year will receive community-based physiotherapy and/or other medical care- 500 Carers (predominantly women/girls) will receive respite from the burden of care, enabling them to return to work/school, thus improving the economic health for their families and community
- 500 Carers will receive health education and training to support their disabled family member
- Hundreds of non-disabled young people and their teachers will gain awareness of disability issues
- Two local schools will adopt anti-bullying and Inclusion Policies
- The Gunjur Community will become increasingly inclusive and experience a reduction in disability discrimination. The Elders will be encouraged to draft and adopt a "Gunjur Inclusion Charter"
- A seasoned and valuable local NGO (TARUD) will extend its capacity, skill base and infrastructure
- Partnerships already initiated with other Gambian NGO's such as the Gambian
- Federation for the Disabled (GFD) and the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) will be extended to mutual benefit

The Business Development Strategy

Great progress is being made on the development of the business strategy in Gunjur, given a) the problem of unemployment amongst young men and b) the opportunities that the arrival of running water and electricity in Gunjur could provide for business entrepreneurs. The Group that is taking this forward meets weekly; they have given a number of radio broadcasts to raise the issue; they have developed a questionnaire which has been sent out to 300 recipients, not least young unemployed men who have been asked what they see as the problem and what potential solutions they can foresee.

On March 19th there is to be a big Bantaba meeting under a tree in the centre of the

community in which representatives of every section of the community will be invited to participate. We are very fortunate that an old friend of MBG Gordon Morris who has been to Gunjur several times in the past and has been involved in community development in UK for the whole of his life has volunteered his services in Gunjur for two months and will be supporting the process of the development of the strategy which we hope will be complete by the end of February and "then the fun begins!"

We hope to see you at the musical and other occasions that we have arranged for the New Year starting with the next in our series of:-

"Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter's Church"

Sunday 26th January, 7.30 pm in St Peter's Church, Marlborough



Gunel Mirzayeva will be playing Chaconne by Sofia Gubaidulina, Partita No 6 by JS Bach, two Impromptus by Schubert (Op.90 no 1 and no 3) and Schumann's Carnaval Op.9.

Tickets for this recital at £7 (£5for MBG members) are available from the White Horse Bookshop or Sound Knowledge in Marlborough High Street or on the door.

Future 2014 dates for your diaries include:-

Sunday February 23rd at 7.30 pm

"Festival Strings" with Conductor Stefan Hokes, in St Mary's Church, Marlborough. The programme will include ***The Capriol Suite by Peter Warlock*** and the ***Mozart Clarinet Concerto*** with **Nicholas Shipman** as soloist.

Sunday 9th March at 7.30 pm

"Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter's Church"

Charles Owen will be performing ***Mendelssohn - Variations sérieuses Op 54, Brahms - Eight Piano Pieces,***

Op76, Bartok - Sonata 1926, Schubert - Sonata in A, D959

Saturday 29 March at 7.30 pm
Swindon Choral Society with Conductor **Robin Nelson** in **Marlborough College Chapel** (with thanks to the Master) will be performing "**The Dream of Gerontius**" by **Edward Elgar**.

You might also be interested to know that on:-
Wednesday 12th March at 8.00 pm

the annual **Marlborough Brandt Lent Lecture** is this year being given by **David Mepham** the **Director of Human Rights Watch** in the **Theatre on the Hill** at **St John's Academy, Marlborough**



David Mepham

Lord Judd