



Changing people's lives

November 2013 Newsletter

Happy Christmas to all our members, supporters and well wishers - your support is invaluable to us. Another busy month not least for our friends in the new Gunjur Community Link Committee who have received three groups of 10 young employees from Lloyds over the space of three weeks, living with families in Gunjur and making a contribution to women's livelihoods by repairing the fence surrounding the 12 acre Fayunku vegetable garden, originally built in 1999 by a group of students from St John's School and Marlborough College – so it has done pretty well! But it was getting a bit thin in places and cattle were beginning to invade and destroy the crops.



Lloyds Group help construct new fence

You may ask “Why do you send young, inexperienced, unskilled, potential bankers to live in a Muslim African village for a week when

you could just as easily send the money to people in Gunjur who have all the skills and more, required to build a fence?” You could ask that same question of Lloyds.



Fetching water for women's vegetable garden

It is clear to us both in Marlborough and Gunjur and also to Lloyds who encourage their employees to volunteer to do this work that by providing that unique experience of living alongside people of a very different culture and faith, in a community of such social wealth and displaying such hospitality and generosity, albeit lacking some of the resources that we would take for granted, we are contributing enormously to their personal development, their ability to work as a team and providing them with an opportunity to reflect, as we all do, in the mirror of that experience, on our own lives and call into question whether “we have

got everything right in our society". So building a fence alongside young Gambians is simply a means to experiencing something much more profound.

In the meantime, as reported in the October newsletter, a new Task Force in Gunjur, led by a superb business entrepreneur, Lamin Janneh is working extremely hard to develop a business strategy for the Gunjur community. We are receiving weekly emails describing the progress that is being made, the appointment of a consultant, regular slots on local radio to publicise the work of the Task Force and at the beginning of December a BANTABA traditionally in The Gambia a meeting that takes place under a designated tree in the centre of a community, where matters of great importance to the community are discussed.



Local woman makes soap to sell

The BANTABA will bring people, men and women, from far and wide in Gunjur to discuss the opportunities for business development that the arrival of water and electricity might provide and how we can uncover and support through training and grants or loans to potential new entrepreneurs.

This is clearly a new and exciting strategic direction for MBG and if anyone reading this feels that they might have something to offer in terms of support and/or advice we will be delighted to hear from them.

Gordon Morris from Sherborne who has been to Gunjur several times and in the UK has been Programme Director for the Countryside Agency, a lecturer in Business and Management and has a PhD in Rural Development, has generously offered his services to the Task Force as a supporter and will be in Gunjur during January and February as a volunteer.

In the meantime, our fundraising activities through classical music have kept us extremely busy with a magnificent piano recital by Anna Zassimova originally from Russia who flew in from Germany to play for MBG and the St Peter's Trust as part of the "Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter's Church".



Anna at St Peter's Church

These recitals are sponsored by Robert Hiscox and Hiscox insurance and after expenses we make on average £350 per recital. And then Simone Dinnerstein the American pianist and Stephan Loges the Bass Baritone from Germany gave a superb concert of music by Bach and Schumann in the Memorial Hall at Marlborough College, thanks to the Master. This was described by reviewer Shirley Burrow in the following terms "The recital lasted only

for an hour, but it was an hour of supreme artistry with a complete understanding between the two musicians. It was a rare treat for an enthusiastic audience. It was one of the finest recitals I have ever been to. I have seldom heard a pianist as good as that.”

Back to The Gambia where several MBG volunteers will be visiting for a week in December, including Neil Griffiths who has been the driving force and superbly generous supporter of the preschool education programme in Gunjur for the past ten years.



Early years programme in Gunjur

The BIG question in Gunjur is how do we make early childhood education sustainable and tackle the issue of dependence on outside support, given that the Gambian Government does not provide any support for under sevens education. As was cogently expressed by a good friend in Gunjur “people must be sensitized to appreciate the value of early years schooling and understand that this is a priority over and above some other things on which money is lavishly spent e.g. fine clothes for the Muslim Festivals. If you think education is expensive, try ignorance!”

WGEC Report – Caroline Harmer

The first term of the academic year has brought lots of interesting developments for

WGEC plus a visit to the Gambia in October half term about which Nick has already written.

In the last MBG newsletter, I wrote of three funding bids that we had in and I am delighted to announce that two of those were successful. The Heritage Lottery will be funding a ‘**A World of Work**’ – a project for primary schools in the Trowbridge area which will make the connections between industry in Trowbridge and the rest of the world by looking at not just the global connections of products in and out of the area but also the movements of people who have been brought to the town for work – Trowbridge is the most ethnically diverse town in the county. We feel that the project can do much to counteract negative views of migration often seen in the media and we hope it will do much to promote community cohesion and greater tolerance.

Global Greenfingers is also being funded by the Lottery through ‘Awards for All’ and will support primary schools in Westbury to develop school gardens with an African theme. We are really pleased to be working on both of these projects which will really get going after Christmas with Jane Talbot from WISE – an old friend and once a trustee of MBG.

It’s been a busy term in other ways. The new **Global Learning Programme** has been launched for schools at Key Stage 2 and 3 and we are working hard to get our courses validated and advertised on the website. So far we have 3 courses up there and 5 more awaiting validation. There have been 6th form conferences and it is always wonderful to interact with young people in workshops and make that direct contact with them, with all their vibrancy and enthusiasm. As a Connecting Classrooms trainer for the British Council, I have been working with schools new

to school linking and we are looking forward to the launch of the new MBG website and are trying to get all our downloadable resources updated so that they are 'fit for purpose'.

It seems like having just come back from the Gambia, I am immediately planning the next teachers' visit. 10 of us, mainly teachers, will be spending 10 days in Gunjur and around and with so many of them old hands, we will be planning a varied programme to keep everyone engaged. Some of them are already speculating how different life will be in the village with electricity – in very hot October, the possibility of a fan in the house felt very significant! We will be involved in supporting Neil Griffiths in his training of the pre-school teachers which we always enjoy and we are hoping that the British Council will sponsor a workshop for Gambian teachers with a link in the UK – we did this very successfully in 2012 and it would be brilliant to be able to extend that to more schools with the help of Ebrima Drammeh from the Gambian One World Linking Association. We are also going to focus on resources that teachers can bring back to use in schools – a great excuse to go shopping.

I attended the CoDEC – Consortium of Development Education Centres – a few weeks ago and it was sobering to see the turnout so low. The sector is certainly struggling at the moment since DfID funding was withdrawn and we are all looking for ways to keep ourselves afloat. In the last month, MUNDI in Nottingham, a seemingly vibrant and strong DEC, has closed down as well as Bridges in Shropshire. So at the moment, we are grateful to be still here as part of MBG, supporting schools in Swindon and Wiltshire in

their global citizenship journey. Long may that continue.

Lloyds Report – Alex Davies

After 14 months of planning, the third Lloyds Bank trip to Gunjur has just been completed. Twenty seven young people travelled out in three groups to spend a week each in Gunjur. Together they completed a three week long project to build a 200m long fence along one side of the TARUD Fayunku Community Vegetable Garden. A new fence was needed to keep cattle, sheep and goats out of the garden which were getting in along the exposed path side. There were four returning Lloyds volunteers from the 2012 trip and MBG Leaders David Johnson, Bakary Touray and Alex Davies.

This was the first experience of rural Africa and overseas volunteering for each group. The MBG project makes up the volunteering section of the Lloyds apprentice programme for individuals participating in the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. Each participant has to fundraise £345 for the trip and project as well funding their travel and any other personal costs.



Digging fence post foundations

For everyone the size of this project came as a shock. 200m is easy to say, but when you add in 35 degree heat, no shade, over 460 wheel barrow loads of hand mixed concrete and 92 iron fence posts it suddenly becomes a mammoth task. Group one cleared the bush that had grown up around the old fence and digging the 92 post holes. Group two made and positioned the iron posts in place and began constructing the concrete pillars. Group three set about making the rest of the pillars and plastering them up to (near) perfection. The fence was topped off with barbed wire and a custom made double gate which can be closed at night to protect the gardens.

It's not all work and the group were able to enjoy the beauty and seclusion of Gunjur beach at the eco-lodges and some of the thrills of the dawn river trip, snake farm, crocodile pool, monkey park and traditional drumming sessions.



Feedback from volunteers

Stacy: It was a once in a lifetime experience and incomparable to anything I have ever done. It was an amazing experience that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Sean: Life changing! It's made me appreciate the things I have and opened my eyes to another world. The timekeeping was amusing however, frustrating at times!

Omar: My advice? Definitely seize this opportunity as this is the best thing I have experienced in life.

The 2014 trip is already underway and as before previous members of Lloyds trips will return to be part of the leadership team.

Dates for your Diary

MBG Christmas Party

Wednesday 18 December, 7pm

42 London Road, Marlborough, SN8 2AA

“Brilliant Young Pianists in St Peter’s Church”



Gunel Mirzayeva

Sunday 26 January 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Gubaidulina, Bach, Schubert and Prokofiev



Charles Owen

Sunday 9 March 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartok and Schubert



Ben Schoeman Sunday 11 May 2014, 7.30pm

Performing works by Bach, Schumann and Schubert