

Sponsor A Gambian Child



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We're ten years old!!

Thought I'd just look back over the ten years and highlight some of the incredible things the charity has achieved.....

Firstly – why Mucki and I set it up in the first place.... I met Mucki 13 years ago when I was on a school study trip. We became firm friends right then! A couple of years later I decided to support the child of a mutual friend to go to school. We soon came up with the idea that if I could do it, other people could and so Sponsor A Gambian Child was born! After much thinking, talking and researching, we launched it, and the first ten children were found sponsors to support their education. And it grew and grew. The total number of students who have been educated through the charity is 428. The total number of schools is 23, most of which are in Brikama. 141 children have now left school – most because they have completed their education after Grade 12, and some because their families have decided to send them to Islamic schools which are free. Three children have achieved results in the top five in the country. Children who have been sponsored have achieved jobs as market traders, a policeman, tailors, a school administrative assistant and teaching assistants. Eighteen students have secured a place at college or university – subjects studied are medicine, teacher training, carpentry, accountancy and construction. One child has died. One child was excluded from school. Three girls have gone back to school after having a baby. Thirty of the children were sponsored by Dutch people but have now been taken transferred to a Dutch couple who are organising their sponsorship.

I have had the privilege of meeting (I think) all of them, their families and visiting their schools. When I first meet the children, they are unable to go to school as their families do not have the resources to send them. Their future is pretty negative really. Education should be a right for everyone but in The Gambia, unfortunately, it is not and many children do not go to school because their families cannot pay all the expenses. In subsequent years, when I've met the children again, the difference is incredible. They are happy, healthy, sociable, articulate and looking forward to the future. This is not only the children themselves, but their families. Older members of the family feel that their children have a bright future and will be able to help support their family now and their own families in the future. It's all very positive!

It's a huge amount of work for myself and Mucki. We're a good team! We both say it's the best thing we've ever done and we gain a huge amount of satisfaction from making a difference to many families. But none of this would happen if it wasn't for the generosity of people who find the money to support the children. I say thank you a lot but I really mean it!

I've jotted down a few things which have happened over the past ten years, both closely connected with the charity but also other work I have been doing when I've gone there. Hope you enjoy reading it.

The charity is a registered charity so it is able to claim gift aid from people's contributions. Gift Aid money has been used to sponsor 35 orphan primary school children's education for three years, IT courses for grade 9 – 11 students, bicycles for children who live far away from school, emergency medication, university fees for eight children for three years each, emergency payments for four students whose sponsors have withdrawn.

We hold an Annual General Meeting every year and annual accounts are produced and sent to the Charities Commission.

The charity has a website: www.sponsoragambianchild.org and leaflets.

I have done several presentations over the years – to school assemblies, companies and guide groups and am always talking about the charity to everyone I know! Mucki also has told visitors he has guided whilst they've been on holiday and when he comes to the UK to visit friends, schools and colleges, he tells them. We've had an article in *Hello* magazine and also in the Gambia Experience (the tour operator)'s 25 year anniversary magazine.

A friend has set up Sponsor A Gambian Teacher – funds provide students to train to become teachers.

A local organisation – Thame 10K, gives me a donation every year from a fundraising event. This has been spent on individual children for one year and buying mosquito nets.

We have held two 'Meet Mucki' afternoons whilst he's been in the UK. Several sponsors met him and were inspired by his enthusiasm and commitment. He always does his very best for each child.

The charity is highly respected and trusted in The Gambia. Mucki has built up excellent relations with the teachers and head teachers at the schools our children go to. He has organised an agent in most schools to co-ordinate the children's reports and letter writing. He has other people who help him organise the school uniform and buying of school resources. When he is overseeing volunteers who are working in schools, he asks them to help children write letters to their sponsors. Writing letters is something which Gambian children find hard to see the point of. Sometimes they can't comprehend that someone they do not know is helping them so much.

Several sponsors have visited their children. They have spent time with them in their homes and at school. This is fantastic for them and the children as you can imagine.

Several sponsors have kindly done extra for their children or their schools/homes. Examples are buying extra school resources, bicycles, sending money in response of a flood appeal and a house fire, buying computers, building a wall around the school the child was going to, installing pylons so that electricity could be connected, building a new house for a family, setting a family up in a small business, paying for the furnishings of a house for volunteers, offering a holiday house in Spain for a donation, a group of women knitting jumpers, a family dedicated a classroom in memory of a family member, organised a school Library. One sponsor has a piece of land which is up for sale and the proceeds will go to the charity – however, this is proving very difficult to sell...

Most of the sponsors live in the UK, but we also have sponsors in Australia, Spain, Italy, New Zealand and the USA.

From time to time I appeal for items which are useful in The Gambia. The item for which there is the greatest need is mosquito nets. Every time I go, I send out an appeal and so far 462 nets have been distributed to families. Also (lost count!) mobile phones medication, 75 bras, bags and bags of wool and sewing materials, eight sewing machines, six computers, four bikes, text books for schools and five wheelchairs.

Twice a year I organise a parcel consignment so that sponsors can send a gift to their child. So far 810 parcels have been sent. Children love hearing from their sponsors and Mucki tries hard to send a photo back.

Here are other things I've been involved in – with the help of Mucki and others. Most of these do not involve the charities income or resources.

A dear friend of mine, who has now sadly died, gave me lots of money to spend in The Gambia. Some of the things I did with it are: provided kitchen equipment for a Women's Kafo (women's community group) to give to newly married couples, finance medical materials and improvements to a medical clinic, buy mosquito nets, pay for children for their whole schooling, set up small market business for families, and finance a medical student through his studies.

There are several women's co-operatives in the Brikama area who are knitting and sewing items for sale. Wool, cottons, fabric and needles etc re regularly sent through me and are given to schools for teachers to teach children basic sewing skills.

In The Gambia I regularly teach first aid to students, teachers and anyone else who is interested! Each person receives a certificate and so far the number is 764. I leave posters of the information I have taught for their reference. I have spent some time in a local health centre and hospital and spent a day with a nurse visiting his patients in their homes. I am impressed by the wonderful work being done with so little resources.

A local charity called the TWA funds school furniture. They have also supplied me with sewing machines, wheelchairs and all kinds of sewing materials.

A friend who is a Rotary Club member has visited the Gambia and her Rotary Club has funded classrooms in a nursery/primary school, a well and a hugely successful poultry project which not only raises money for the school but provides food for the children and their families. We are now planning raising funds to build more classrooms at the school.

My latest project is to provide sanitary kits for girls. Many girls are missing school when they have their period. I've got a team of people making kits which will be shipped out soon. Donations and a local company have provided funds so sewing machines can be bought in The Gambia. I'm hoping to set some women up in business so they are self-sufficient.

I thought I'd finish with my usual thanks to everyone! None of this could happen without people financing the children and donating materials or money for projects. And thanks of course to Mucki for working so hard and enabling everything to happen and for enabling me to be continue with working with you and making a difference. I've received quite a few nice comments from people which I'd like to share:

Thank you for enabling me to help a child go to school.

I met my child whilst on holiday and spent some time with her in her school and with her family. I shall never forget it and will continue to help all I can.

I have the resources to help. Of course I will!

I feel good helping a child whom needs it.

Education is for all. So glad I can help in a small way.

I don't need to hear from my child – just knowing that he's going to school is enough for me.

My children are interested in our sponsored child and have learned a lot.

And so we go from strength to strength....

Please feel free to contact me with any comments, queries, suggestions or ideas and of course if you'd like to become more involved...

Best wishes,

Carol