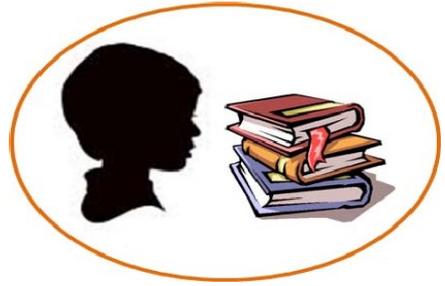


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April 2019 report

Dear all,

I went to The Gambia for 5 weeks in March-April. And I did not stop for one minute!

Here are just a few of the things I did....

For the first week I observed Secondary School teachers teaching their lessons. As I'm not a teacher, I just wrote a report on what I saw and felt but did not give any points to follow up. The teachers were all so inspiring, dedicated and hard-working – it was a privilege to be in their lessons.

I got involved in the Mansa Colley Bojang School's Press & Literacy Club and went to a neighbouring school with students and teachers to help set up a partnership for students to swap ideas and clubs and societies. The students came up with so many ideas and had discussions so eloquently. I was very proud of them!

I had several meetings with the school secretary at MCBS and we talked about our responsibilities and ideas. She wants to organise the medical and first aid aspect in the school, so I will send her some paperwork from my experiences as a first aider at my previous school.

I taught six first aid lessons to students and teachers. One of them was on a Friday afternoon after a week of exams, so it was pretty hard to keep them interested! Each person received a certificate – good for their CV!

I attended a PTA meeting where I explained to parents and families the expenditure of their child's schooling for the next academic year. Luckily the Headteacher was there to elaborate and to answer the many questions!

A few months ago, several students were selected to take part in a World School exchange trip with Dutch students. Some of our sponsored students were amongst them, so I attended a follow up meeting they were having with Mucki and their trip leader. They had the most fantastic experience – it was so interesting to hear about it and how their new knowledge will benefit them and other students in the future.

I spent a lot of time with almost all of the sponsored students helping or overseeing them write letters. If you didn't receive one, it's because we couldn't see the child for a variety of reasons. But we did try! I visited most of the children in their compounds too and met their families, Always a favourite time of mine when there!

Before I went to The Gambia, I'd made an appeal for donations for mosquito nets and I received the money for 137. So Mucki and I spent several hours driving to villages to distribute them. We took the student ambassadors from MCBS school with us to give them an experience of helping others. They then had to write a report about it for their weekly school newsletter. This is again, one of the best things I do... immediate prevention from malaria.

I attended a Soroptimist Meeting. The Soroptimist organisation is a world-wide organisation dedicated to help the welfare of women and girls. Several people were there, including a group from Newcastle! It was interesting to hear what is being done all over the world.

Some Christian friends asked me if I'd like to go to church with them, so I did! The incense made my tickly cough worse for a while, but it was interesting, and the choir sang beautifully.

One day my First Aid lesson was cancelled so I went on a school trip with Grade 8 students. We all piled in the school minibus and set off to the Horse & Donkey Trust – what an inspiring place. Funded by the same named British charity, so much good work goes on in rescuing and healing animals and volunteers from all over the world train local people to care for animals. We then went on to visit Gambia Radio Station and The Standard Newspaper. On the way home we popped into The Law School of The Gambia University to hear about the judiciary system and then ate Chicken Yassa in a restaurant. The children had a whale of a time and they were so well behaved! I thoroughly enjoyed it too. It's so nice to be with children outside of school – I felt I got to know them better.

Mucki and I attended several Rotary Club meetings. Mansa Colley Bojang School is being extended to become a secondary school with help from The Rotary Clubs of The Gambia, Holland and the UK. This has involved a huge amount of work for the past three years and finally the funds are being released and building has started. Next time I go, it will be finished.

Now, I'm not a Maths teacher by any means, but I just happened to walk into a Grade 6 maths class with no teacher, so I wrote some sums on the board! The children responded well, and I hope it was helpful as they had exams coming up!

A friend of mine arrived 10 days before the end of my stay – so I moved from Mucki's compound into Nematoulie Lodge. The next day, 15 women arrived from Hampshire! They were a mixture of nurses, teachers and Days for Girls members. Over breakfast we discussed a rough plan for the next week. The Days for Girls women had previously shipped to The Gambia, 1000 sanitary kits for distribution to girls.

I've never met a more dedicated and committed group of people and within a few hours, it was as if we'd know each other for ever! During the week we visited schools, hospitals, clinics, we completely decorated and transformed the craft classroom in a school and spent a day on the beach with some children whom some of them had decided to sponsor. We are already planning our next trip!

I think this report is quite long enough! It just gives you a flavour of my time there. There's so much more I could write – like just sitting and talking to people about their and my lives, listening to the sounds of life, watching people work, play, rest, smelling the touri – a mixture of plant leaves and seeds which when burned, is a scent to ward off mosquitos, soaking up the atmosphere, becoming involved with things which randomly happen – like wedding ceremonies and naming ceremonies, playing with the children, eating with families, delicious food from one big bowl, doing chores, listening to the beautiful sound of the many birds, shopping in the busy, loud and colourful markets, looking at the wonderful colour and design of the women's

dresses, experiencing the crazy taxi drivers, waking up to the sound of the call to prayer, hearing the goats bleat in the background, staring up at the stars in the non-light polluted sky, learning the local language, each time I go I learn a few more words!, etc etc.

But sometimes it's hard being there. I'm a person who likes to be organised and always doing something and there's quite a lot of rest time and Gambia Maybe Time atmosphere, so quite frustrating at times, but I've fallen in love with the people and their way of life (well almost all of it) and I love being there, doing, in my small way, what I can to help. With the help from you of course!

As ever, please contact me if you'd like to.

Best wishes,

Carol X