

Friendly Smiles' Gambia trip October 2022.

With daily temperatures of well over 30 degrees, high humidity and biting mosquitoes, this year's trip was particularly challenging for our team of 10. The long main road from Banjul airport is currently under major restructuring works, which meant travel in the jeeps was very slow, resulting in even earlier starts to beat the heaving traffic.

Our first weekend there was spent working in the village of Lamin Toube and we were thrilled to see the new tiled floors had been completed in the Nursery school, prior to our arrival, thanks to the raised funds this year sent on ahead.

Headmaster Balanding Manka and his team of staff joined us as we repainted the whole school and toilet block both inside and out over the two days, ready for the pupils return on the Monday. Funds also paid for local artist Artical Arts to decorate classroom walls with alphabets, numbers and fun pictures, plus signage and the school emblem, making it a school to be extremely proud of. To say the staff and pupils were happy is an understatement.

We were also happy to donate a large quantity of resources including children's reading books, Atlases, exercise books, stationery, first aid kits, footballs and Paracetamol/Calpol. Our final parting gift was a sum of money, which will fund a school outing to the beach, nature reserve and crocodile park, which is very exciting for everyone.

Our visit to Jabang on Monday 24th meant a chance to see Simon, his staff and pupils at the COGS nursery school and we were happy to donate quantities of toothpaste and brushes towards their school hygiene programme. We also paid a visit to the local Birthing centre about to be opened for the community and donated knitted baby hats, blankets, soap, Paracetamol and a baby bottle sterilising machine.

An afternoon was spent at Jabangjelly health centre, where more donations of medicines, dressings, crutches, blood pressure machines and desperately needed Malaria testing kits were given. Friendly smiles also left payment to part fund the cleaning programme for the coming year, which ensures the hospital is kept in a good state of cleanliness. We also funded some minor plumbing repairs which came to light as we inspected the buildings with head nurse Lamin Jawneh.

Through the week, we also visited the 'Sisters Of Mercy' who run their orphanage and also service a number of surrounding villages offering education and health care. Along with cases of clothes, knitted blankets, bags of soap, toothpaste and medicines we also donated a sack of rice towards their feeding programme.

Sukuta medical centre which continues to expand and serve an ever-growing catchment, were thrilled to receive our vast donations of medicines, dressings and crutches. Plus our visit to their labour ward allowed us to give some newborn babies knitted blankets and baby hats. However, as diabetes in Gambia is rapidly on the increase, the need at this hospital for glucose testing strips is rather desperate and we will be looking to source and send out supplies shortly.

Of course there are always highlights- finding a potential young footballer Eddy, in Deslamin village and being able to give him his first pair of football boots (outgrown by their previous owner in UK) knowing he will now be able to train properly with the village team, was a special moment. Also receiving a large envelope of beautiful carefully written replies to letters previously sent by the children of St.Katharine's primary school, meant a penpal system is now underway.

Headmaster Balanding said ' The children here are SO excited to have a friend in U.K and were thrilled to receive their first letter'. When I saw the words they had written back, in their very best handwriting, it bought a tear to my eye.

As always, thank you everyone for your kindness, generosity and support- without this, our work would not be possible. Finally, a huge thank you to my amazing team who worked so well together to make a difference and always, with a friendly smile.





Sent from my iPad

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