

BANSANG HOSPITAL APPEAL

NEWSLETTER

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Charity No. 1064469

THE FINEST CHILDREN'S UNIT IN DEVELOPING AFRICA IS NOW OPEN

After 14 years of dreaming, and 14 months of hard work by the builders and the initial and ongoing support of the Evening Telegraph my dream has come true. Don't let anyone say that dreams can't come true, because with the dedication and generosity of so many individuals, charity groups, hospitals, and businesses we have done it; my dream became your dream and we have succeeded. From the very bottom of my heart I thank you.

At the end of June I returned to Bansang to prepare for the opening of the Children's Unit. Accompanied by Joni Ager from the Kettering Evening Telegraph whose flight was sponsored by the travel agency 'Gambian Experience'. We spent two weeks working flat out to put in the finishing touches – such as furniture! Julie's Playroom was filled with toys and hung with the mobiles made by the residents of Sunley Court sheltered accommodation; a room of colour shape and movement to stimulate sick children. Word had spread in Bansang that we were nearly ready and people came from everywhere to help, including the police, the fire service and customs & excise personnel. They cleaned floors, windows, put 80 beds together and assembled the same number of bedside lockers. The atmosphere was fantastic; we had classical music playing, and laughter, lots of it. People were turning up for a 'look' and breaking into dance and clapping with the sheer joy of this wonderful unit. The very final touches were the large rainbow mobiles and wind chimes running the length of the ward which spin and tinkle in the breeze. We invited children in from the outlying villages, as it was pouring with rain they were brought in by taxis accompanied by two Voluntary Service Overseas girls. The playroom was beyond anything they had experienced before; remember these are children who in many cases have never even owned a pencil. They were overawed, but like children the world over, with a little encouragement they soon got the hang of how to play! These children will return to their villages and spread the word that there is nothing to be feared by going to Bansang Hospital for treatment. Julie's Playroom was funded by Meg and John Townsend in memory of Julie, their only child who died 31 years ago at the age of 8 months. Since then they have quietly built a fund in her memory, and I feel honoured that all these

years later they decided to donate the proceeds to Bansang Hospital Appeal.

Included in the costs of the Children's Unit was an Escort Lodge, which provides a mosquito free, sleeping area, showers and toilets for the families of anyone brought to Bansang Hospital. Until now, regardless of the weather, the families would have been sheltering anywhere they could find on the hospital site. The lodge has been named in memory of the late Bernard Sentinella Lodge who even while suffering with cancer concerned himself with the welfare of others and in particular the people of Africa.

The **Neo-natal Care Unit** will be receiving 8 low-tech incubators and 2 phototherapy units designed by Dr Peter McCormick our Medical Advisor and built and donated by Memoli Electrics in Wellingborough. These are easily sustainable in the harsh conditions and will help to save countless babies. A further 2 incubators have been donated to a very needy Government clinic.

Rotary Club of Kettering

Without The Rotarians a project of this size could never have reached its full potential, including all new furniture and equipment. It has been an International project in partnership with the Fajara Rotary Club of Banjul. Their first grant to us was for £23,000 and enabled us to purchase 80 new beds, mattresses, lockers and medicine trolleys. The second half has been applied for and if we are successful it will be used in the Children's Unit for examination trolleys and lights, patient trolleys, screens, resuscitation kits, oxygen concentrators, buckets for the cleaners, and the list goes on. This will make the unit self sufficient from the rest of the hospital.

Libby Purves Show and the BBC Inside Out

The ongoing response from the public to these programmes has been staggering. We now have sponsors for 15 State Enrolled Nurses who will remain with the hospital after their two years training. We also have sponsors for 14 other members of staff ranging from gardeners, cleaners, and a specialist injection and dressings nurse who had previously worked for 7 years without pay. We have found many Gambians working around the hospital for no pay, some with disabilities; they work for their own self-esteem and pride. In excess of £50,000 was donated as a result of these 2 programmes and this is being used to upgrade and build new staff accommodation. The existing buildings were not fit for animals let alone our trained medical staff.

Block one was upgraded and accommodation for 3 families was created, each consisting of a sitting room, bedroom, and bathroom. Also provided is outside cooking facilities and a fenced back yard in which the families can grow vegetables. Each unit is provided with a bed, wardrobe, chest of drawers, settee, armchair and coffee table. Blocks 2, 3, and 4, will each contain 6 units. This work will be undertaken by a new contractor, Mr Jim Wadda, a Rotarian from Fajara Rotary Club, his nick name is Jim'll Fix It, and he does. The Rotarian motto is Service Above Self and this man epitomises that to the full; he always goes that extra mile.

This new accommodation is the key to retaining staff in Africa instead of losing them to Europe. Although we do not yet have the full funding to finish this project, for the first time in the hospitals history we have staff asking to be transferred to Bansang.

MITIE

The MITIE house has not yet been started. The sheer size of the project and the logistics of getting materials onto site have slowed things down. This house is to be totally self-sufficient and will provide accommodation for 12 single staff plus a community room and library.

Meanwhile MITIE are going to install solar power in the Children's Unit. When this is running we will have 24-hour power. Again this is not a simple, straightforward project; it involves the enormous task of moving the panels, and the 1½ tons of batteries from source to site. Parts will be coming from Canada, Australia, and Germany. Specially built battery houses will be required – you can't just put a panel up and plug it into the electrical circuit. Mark Lowrey and Adam Nott will be travelling to Bansang in late October to begin the installation as long as 'Jim'll Fix It' has sailed the parts up the river Gambia to the hospital in time.

Bob Parfitt

Bob looks after the non-medical side of the hospital, lower basic school, and nurseries with a roll call of around 2000 children. Since April we have sent a further 40ft container. I do thank Bob for his dedication to Bansang. Every day sees him and teams of volunteers working to improve the lives of these people. Collecting and sorting the many donations of furniture, office equipment, school equipment and toiletries, you name it he sources it – usually free. His next visit to Bansang will be in January.

Mariama and Alhagie – latest news of our two amputees

Mariama has fulfilled her dying Grandmothers wish of visiting her. She and her uncle travelled to Guinea Bissau, a long and dangerous journey. Grandma had not seen her since she was 2 when her leg was amputated. Mariama is now back at school with a further two years to go before starting her SEN training. Meg and John, Julies' parents, sponsor her and watch over her like a daughter. Alhagie's wife will give birth to their first child in October. Apparently I am going to be one of the Grandmothers!!

Other News

Good news, the perimeter wall, locally known as the Perry Meter wall has been completed thanks to the generosity of the UK GSER's. This will keep the site and wards safe from wandering animals such as feral dogs cats, goats etc. The full funding for the wall has not yet been reached so if anyone would like to purchase their book 'Scooters in the Sahara' - an account of their trip from Blighty to Bansang - it is £25 from Dennis Robinson phone 01267-222877 or on-line <http://www.scootersinthesahara.co.uk>

SAGA Magazine. I have become a cover girl! For the first time in their history a non-celeb hit the August front cover. Definitely my biggest claim to fame. With Alhagie making me a Grandmother and SAGA I am getting a tad concerned!!

Youth Works

Cycles donated by the public have been renovated by a group of teenagers in Kettering. Their group leader John Garner said they were keen to work for such a worthwhile cause and had learned new skills in the process. This is an ongoing project. Bicycles and wheelchairs are also being repaired and passed on to us from HM Prisons Cardiff and Swansea. Keep up the good work guys; you really make a difference to people's mobility.

Things to come

RAF Cosford Air Ambulance Team are planning to 'Spread Their Wings to Bansang', as part of the Plymouth to Banjul rally. The team will consist of one pilot and two aircrew medics and the hope is to provide the hospital with an ambulance when they complete the rally.

The BBC Inside Out team won the One World Media Award for a Documentary, based on our trip to Bansang last November. They are returning this November with Richard Harvey, our accountant for the appeal, and me.

The 10-minute slot will be shown on 12th Jan on BBC1 Inside Out.

Barclaycard will be going out in February to upgrade the present computer system.

Thank you

What an incredible year. So much has been achieved. Sometimes in the face of terrible adversity, the weather, no transportation, and at one very low point no food, fuel, or certain drugs for the patients, yet still the wonderful staff battle on. So we thank the building labourers, cleaners, nurses, administration staff and Doctors and our own Dr Annabel Kerr for everything they are doing, because without them there would be no hospital.

As I shall be in Bansang twice before Christmas I shall be unable to update you again until the New Year, so Happy Christmas everyone!

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