

# SPRING NEWSLETTER 2023

I'm sitting writing this newsletter with the first sign of Spring knocking on the door. The lighter evenings are coming, snowdrops flowering, and the daffodils are just beginning to bloom. I have to say for me, I really enjoy Spring. Not only because we are saying goodbye to the darker evenings, but it's also the time of year when we head back to Gambia, escaping the colder weather here in the UK. I'm delighted to say that this year is no exception. Pa and I will be retuning in March and by the time we return to the UK, the daffodils will be in full bloom, other spring flowers will have sprung, and the lighter evenings will be here.



Since my last newsletter, life at the nursery school has continued to flourish. We have 67 children registered and attending. We are employing 9 staff who are carrying out a fantastic job supporting and nurturing the children to reach their full academic potential, as well as ensuring their wellbeing and nutritional needs are being met with a healthy lunch.

At the last Trustees meeting, it was agreed by all to continue with the decision to only operate 3 classes at school. As you know, just before Covid forced everyone one to go into lockdown, one of our teachers left to teach at a Lower Basic school. With lockdowns in place and their being extremely limited opportunities to fundraise, we had to make a tough but realistic decision to operate with only 3 classes and not 4 like we been. In September 2021 this decision was reviewed again, however, it was still agreed to continue with the three classes. Of course, it is the Trustees aim that with time, we will be able to reinstate the 4<sup>th</sup> class and have pre-nursery fully operational again. We are keen to do this as currently we have a waiting list of eager children wanting to join.

Many of the fundraising opportunities we had before Covid, are no longer available. Therefore, the way we

Gift donations under £10.00	
Sack of salt for cooking	£3.00
Sack of pepper for cooking	£3.00
Live chicken for eggs and meat	£4.00
Fish for one serving of 120 people	£4.00
Education pack (pencils/rubber/ruler)	£5.00
Hygiene pack (toothpaste/toothbrush/soap)	£5.00
Mosquito net	£6.00
Gift donations under £25.00	
Sack of carrots	£13.00
Sack of potatoes	£14.00
Sack of onions	£15.00
25 bundles of firewood	£17.00
Gallon of palm oil	£19.00
Feed the school with fish for 5 days	£20.00
Sack of rice	£23.00

had previously raised funds to sustain the project has changed. Our key focus now, is to continue to seek and gain sponsorship for the children, staff salaries, feeding programme as well as the general running costs of the school.

To sponsor a child for their education, a nutritional meal and medical treatment for malaria is £10.00 a month. We appreciate that with the high costs of living here in the UK, it's not easy committing to regular payments. Therefore, any amount you, your family, work colleagues or friends can donate to COGS for its continued success is always greatly received. **Here is a list of what your Donation can buy..... as they say every little helps! This is so true for COGS. We maybe biased but it's now 16 years since COGS started and**

**the land was purchased. Sadly, over the years we have seen many other project fail and close. But thanks to all the amazing help and support from YOU our sponsors and supporters I am still here writing regular newsletters giving updates on the project about the work and achievements COGS is doing.**



Just before Christmas, Poppy and Jasper stopped off in Gambia whilst touring Africa. There were able to spend time at the school, interacting with the children and enjoying chatting with the staff team. Simon, Raymond, and the entire staff team made them very welcome during their stay at Jabang. Following their stay at the school they had the opportunity of visiting the community, interacting with families of past and present pupils.

**Poppy said "Simon, Raymond, Linda and Odette were incredibly kind, welcoming and hospitable. The ladies cooked us some magnificent feasts and we had a lovely evening chatting.... Simon is so enthusiastic about the project and his passion, we are both genuinely considering teaching at some point. We learnt about the history of the school from its inception some 15 years ago to where it is now – a**



**remarkable story. It has been the highlight of our trip so far." ..... "It was lovely walking around the village with them all and being introduced to many old students – some adults now!" Poppy went onto say "I also love the way the kids are taught to teach themselves, it's amazing' I had the loveliest time in Gambia.**

Thank you, Poppy, and Jasper for visiting and for your lovely comments. We are delighted you had an amazing time and enjoyed your stay. If anyone reading this newsletter would like to find out more about visiting the project, please do not hesitate to contact us here at COGS HQ. Being able to see first-hand, the amazing work of the team and the progress the children make is so rewarding.

The last target we had on our School Improvement Plan (SIP) from 2019 -2022 was for there to be a computer in Nursery 2 and Nursery 3. As you can see from the photos the computers are now at the school and our Deputy Head Teacher Raymond has the job of installing and maintaining them. As well as being a qualified Early Years teacher, Raymond also has a Diploma in Computer



Software and IT. The children in these two classes will have the opportunity within their timetabled lessons to develop their IT skills which will be very exciting for them. Jabang is a rural community and therefore there are not always the same opportunities that the children who live in the larger towns have. We would like to extend the number of computers per class to 3.

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) will be developed for the next 3 years from 2023 – 2026. It is a requirement from the Ministry of Education that all educational settings have a SIP and COGS is no exception.

The focus will as always be on developing further the educational opportunities for the children as well as sustaining all that is already in place.



A further focus that the Trustees is keen to develop is that of sustainable living with more emphasis on recycling, the environment and clean cooking by using less wood. This



will include developing the garden area further so that more vegetables and fruit are grown for the feeding programme as well.

The staff started by banana tress see in the here and doing very with the available from the community well.



team have planting which can photo they are well. Having our own borehole really helps garden as it means we have water without having to be collect and carry it



To support and develop the literacy skills not only of the children but for the community, another aim is to develop a library of fiction and non-fiction books for all ages. The books will be available for the children and their families to borrow. Of course there would need to be a system in place for this to be managed so the books are returned. When Nina and Pa visit the project in March, they will be talking with Simon and his team about the feasibility of this and how it could be managed. Currently there are very few libraries in The Gambia. We know many people have smart phones and can research using electronic devises but being able to read and learn from a physical book should not become a thing of the past. Children are less likely to have access to smartphones, iPads or computers at home so having a physical book, it is hoped will allow for more talking between the different generations and will spark lots of questions and communication and reflection with family members about the wider world.

When Nina visits COGS in March, she will be carryout a day's training not only to COGS staff but to the staff in the school cluster group for the area and staff from other schools that Nina has connections with. Simon is keen to continue to develop the staff's knowledge on Behaviour Management in the classroom together with the importance of observing the children and assessing the children's skills against their overall areas of development. Nina will include behaviour strategies as well as how it's not always easy see what has happened if you turn away for a nanosecond!!! She will incorporate theories of learner as well as Maslow's Hierarchy of Need.



Here is a picture of our amazing teaching team and our newest member of staff Awa the school nanny who takes on the role of a



Teaching Assistant supporting the children in the classroom, at the toilet as well as at lunchtime. Awa is deaf, and despite this, the children and her communicate using their own developed form of sign language. It is hoped in the future that Makaton will be able to be taught as part of the school curriculum.



Jabang Health Centre has now opened, and COGS were part of this



momentous day with the official opening taking place with the Minister of Health in attendance. The birthing centre has been handed over to the community Australia and



and we would like to thank COGS all the supporters and sponsors anyway to this. Having this facility much. It means that the distances they have been.

from the UK who helped contribute in the community is going to help so community will not have to travel the

**HOW CAN YOU HELP BY SUPPORTING COGS AND FUNDRIASING, WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR HOME?**

Well, the answer is easy..... If you have not registered with Easy Fundraising, now is the time to do so. I would urge you do so this as soon as you have finished reading this newsletter. All you need to do, is to register by visiting



[www.easyfundriasing.org.uk](http://www.easyfundriasing.org.uk) and select **COGS** or **Children of Gambia Services** as your chosen charity. Each time you want to make a purchase from a retailer, and there are over 3,600 to choose from. You visit Easy Fundraising, find the retailer, place your order and they will donate a % of your purchase to **COGS**. There is **NO** additional cost to you for using this facility, but the benefit to **COGS** is significant. Retailers include John Lewis, Boots, Argos, eBay, and Gap to name just a few. Each retailer donates a % of the purchase.

We have recently heard from Amazon Smile, that they will shortly be stopping their charity donation. Of course, this will impact on **COGS** as it was a great way to raise funds. However, by our supporters swapping to Easy Fundraising we are hoping that the reduced donations from Amazon will not impact us too much.

I would like to end this newsletter with a few general pictures from The Gambia and of course to say a big **THANK YOU** to you all for your support, donations, and sponsorship. I will update you with all the news from The Gambia in our Summer Newsletter which will include all updates from our Spring visit. Don't forget you can keep up to date by visiting [www.cogsgambia.org](http://www.cogsgambia.org). Ask your friends, family and work colleagues to like and follow our social media pages. Let's continue to spread the amazing work of **COGS**.

