We have finished fundraising for Agape Nursery School!

Thanks to all our supporters and fundraising we have been able to raise £8400 in less than 12 months to build Agape Nursery School. The first donation of £200 came from Anna-bel who heads up Friends of Bansang Schools. Pastor Paul Mendy and his wife Angelic who run the school, assisted by 3 teachers, agreed with Empower to start the work—even though fundraising was still in the planning stages. Thank goodness we did as the day the teachers laid the first bricks was also the day the educational inspectors came to Bansang to close any schools that did not have suitable accommodation. Because the building work had just started we were given a reprieve of 18 months to build the replacement 3 classroom block while still keeping the existing hut and church hall open for the children. Fundraising included Fashion Nights, bag packs, Ride Around The Gambia event at Kiss Gym and further donations by FBS and Swindon Community Church.

The only work left to complete now is painting the interior and exterior and connecting the electricity which has been covered by the last instalment. The Grand Opening is on 10th April when the Empower team will be in attendance along with local dignitaries, parents and children.

Can you help Empower?

- We are always happy to have volunteers help out at our fund raising events—looks great on your CV as well!
- Could your company or community group host a bra bin?
- Could you collect resources i.e. spectacles, educational materials, sports equipment, sewing items and medicines?
- Could you host a Fashion Event—a great way of getting to know your colleagues and have a fun night!
- Do you have links with funding organisations or able to raise some money for one of our projects?
- Could you design a website or contact potential suppliers for Empower?

Inside this issue:

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Empower—Fundraising Updates

Empower Charity Fashion Nights

Do you love fashion at low prices? If so you should be coming to our monthly Charity Fashion Nights at Bar 71, Swindon Town Football Club on the first Monday of the month. It all starts at 7.30pm until 9pm and you can bring along fashion items to donate. £2 on the door, raffle and bar.

We have been supported by some great trade stands and made some lovely friendships. We have raised over £2000 in the last 12 months which has helped pay for the building of 3 classrooms at Agape Nursery school and contributed towards the monthly tithe to the school.

So tell your friends and come along for a great night out! More details on www.facebook.com/EmpowertheGambia

Ride Around The Gambia—on an exercise bike!

Thank you to Kiss Gym for entertaining our mad cap idea of cycling around the Gambia on their exercise bikes to raise money for Agape Nursery school building project.

210 people took part and we cycled not once but 6 times around The Gambia = 4083km in 4 days or 48 hours to be exact! We met some great people and lots of friends and supporters joined us—some came along every day to cycle from 1km to 110km (thank you Simon Purnell). We also had donations of bananas, Mars bars and bottles of water to keep us going as well as people cheering us on via text, Facebook or in person which was great fun.

We raised a staggering £909.02 which meant that we only had £900 left to raise and the end was in sight.

We are now planning to do a Row Up the River Gambia—on rowing machines. Only 1130km so get in training!!!!

28 Days of Gifts and Promises Auction—must end 28/2/14

We have been pledged a fantastic array of gifts and promises for you to bid—and in turn raise money for the projects we are completing in April.

Place your bid by 10pm on the 28 February and pay on our Just Giving/Empower site once your bid has been confirmed.

Prizes include:

- Gold membership for De Vere health club
- Babysitting session
- Beauty make over
- Photo session
- DJ set for your party
- Pentel pen goodie bag
- Garden make over
- Restaurant voucher
Empower runs two sponsorship programmes which target children who are orphans or from single parent families.

We have 20 children aged 3-7 years at Agape Nursery school where the sponsors pay £30 a year to pay for the children’s school fees. Some of the children are in their second year of sponsorship and this has given them a head start before starting their free education at the age of 7 at the Basic School.

Our latest project is for 20 children at Sinchu Njabo Basic School at Sara Kunda aged between 7-16 years. Our sponsors paid £5 each which gave the children a new uniform sewn by the local tailor and a years supply of exercise books and pencils (which every child has to purchase in order to go to school).

In April all 40 children are going to be given goodie bags made by Patches Sewing Group, Swindon Community Sewing Group and Linda Barnes. Many thanks for your hard work!

During our visit in April, we recognised that there was a need for a community library to provide reference and reading books as well as games and activities for the local community and 12 satellite villages around Sara Kunda.

When we returned we were contacted by Carole Green at St Catherine’s school, Swindon who had a library of books to donate. After that the books just kept coming until we had a large number to ship out in December, along with shelving, resources and a manual ‘How to set up an African library’. The elders of the village chose a librarian and we were able to secure a sponsorship for their wages. The library is due to open in the next few weeks and we will be visiting in April to check on progress and take more books. Thank you!

Sponsors are writing letters and adding gifts along with the items we have collected so watch out for the photos on Facebook.

If you would like to sponsor a child we are planning to run a scheme at Daru Lower Basic School and will have more details after our trip. Let us know!

Barry is our link at Sara Kunda but also manages the Medical Centre. Empower has been sending out shipments of medical books, bandages, equipment and training materials for the amazing work the team does. We are also providing solar desk lamps and mobile phones to the Traditional Birthing Assistants who work in the 12 satellite villages helping the mothers give birth at home. We have also sent out cots and mattresses and will be decorating the maternity unit when we visit in April.
The vision of Empower is to link individuals, organisations and charities together to benefit the communities of this remote region of the Gambia through education, training and empowerment.

Empower is securing charity status both in the UK and the Gambia based on the five years experience of working in the Central River Region. Pastor Paul Mendy of Agape Nursery School, Bansang is already our Gambian link, and we have Barry at Sara Kunda. We are run by a Board of Trustees—thank you Liz, Tina, Eve and Ben! Whatever time or skills you can give would be appreciated by the people of rural Gambia—and perhaps you will see first hand what we do by joining us for our next trip.

Forthcoming Events ..... Volunteer? ..... Tell your friends!

- Empower Charity Fashion Nights at Bar 71, Swindon Town Football Club—first Monday of the month from 7.30-9pm. Bring along fashionable and clean items to donate and pick up new and nearly new from £0.50—£10. Trade stands, bar and raffle. £2 entry.
- Supermarket bag pack at Tesco, Swindon 14/2 and 7/3—volunteers needed to pack bags from 5.30-8.30pm. Bucket and Empower t-shirt provided. Will be fundraising for shipment being sent in March
- 28 Days of Promises and Gifts Auction—place your bids by 10pm 28/2 with lots of pledges still to be added
- Supermarket bag pack at Co-op with Old Town Brownies—8/7/13
- Old Town Festival 28/6 and Pride Festival 9/8—help us run a stall
- Empower gig night—do you know a band that could play?

2014 Projects …… How can you can help?

Jo is taking another team from the 7-18/4 to continue the work of Empower in Pakalinding, Agape, Daru, Samba Tako and Sara Kunda by running teacher training sessions, taking out resources to the schools and helping the community paint the maternity ward at Sara Kunda Medical Centre. We will be running first aid refresher courses and topping up the medical boxes left by First Aid 4 Gambia. Agape Nursery School is also going to be opened while we are there so it will be a very exciting trip. If you would like to join the team—be quick as only 2 places left. We also need help with the following items:

- First aid materials—plasters, bandages, thermometers, safety pins, paracetamol, calpol, sanitizer, antiseptic cream……
- Training materials on poultry keeping and animal husbandry
- Educational materials—books, pencils, posters, exercise books, solar calculators, games, staplers, clocks, rulers, rubbers……
- Sports equipment—skipping ropes, balls, whistles, bats
- Sewing equipment—needles, cotton, zips, pins, scissors
- Clothes—for Fashion Nights and recycling if not suitable for resale. Uniforms will be taken out to our projects
- Fundraising ideas—could you run a car boot stall, take part in a sponsored event or just make a donation—large or small—every penny will be used for the projects in the Gambia