

# Don McMath Foundation

## Newsletter

[www.donmcmath.org](http://www.donmcmath.org)

[info@donmcmath.org](mailto:info@donmcmath.org)

The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 7<sup>TH</sup> March 2008

Hello All

Apologies for the length of this newsletter but there are several important things to report about the school at the moment.

The school has now been running successfully for five years (we opened on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2003), during that time we have grown from one class of 30 children to seven classes with 210 children and the capacity for another 60.

As things stand in 2010 we will have the first children leaving our school ready to go to the next level of education (Upper Basic which is the equivalent of UK GCSE level). There is a concern that the children may then either finish their full time education or end up in schools where they have to take a backward step as they will have been well educated at DMF and could find themselves at schools with classes of 60 children getting a lower level of education.

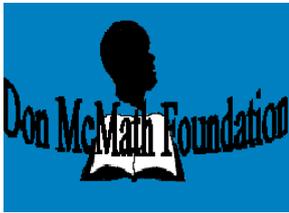
We have an opportunity to build and open an upper basic school to allow our pupils to continue their education for another three years to get them through their School Leaving Certificates. To do this we (the trustees) have decided to move up into a third level of education giving us a Nursery, a Primary and an Upper Basic school.

We have looked into this in detail and decided that it is feasible to build a new classroom block on the existing site for an Upper Basic School. This would consist of a building of 8 classrooms on two stories which would include amongst others, a Science room, English room, Domestic Science room and possibly metal and wood workshop. The school would cover three years with specialist teachers for Maths, English, Science, Social & Environment Studies and other subjects. The cost per child would be considerably higher than the current nursery and primary costs, probably in the region of £80 to £100 per child per year. The building cost would be likely to be between £35,000 and £45,000 out of which we already have reserves in the bank of over £15,000.



This is obviously a major step for us to take, we would be committing ourselves to raising over £20,000 to £30,000 in the next two years for the building and an as yet unknown amount for equipment for the school. We would also have to find a lot of new sponsors.

We believe that with the help of all you sponsors we will be able to achieve this.



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As we mentioned in the last newsletter the Gambian dalasi has increased in value over the pound sterling by nearly 20% this year. Last year (and for several years previous) we were getting 50 dalasies to £1. This year the exchange rate has been between 37 and 43 dalasies to £1. This means that we need to find approximately £8 more per child per year. Because of this we have decided that for all new sponsors we will have to increase the sponsorship per child to £60 per annum. We will leave it up to existing sponsors whether they wish to increase their sponsorship to £60 when it comes up for renewal or not, we will quite understand if sponsors wish to carry on at £50 per year.

The following is from Frank Winrow who visited the school last month.

“Whilst accompanying the Sussex County Cricket Over 60's Team to The Gambia (I was the Barmy Army) over the past two weeks, I visited the school and met Anne as a result of some of the players knowing her and her late husband and their fund raising for the Foundation.

The school is very impressive and the atmosphere there is of loving dedication to the children who are able to attend.

It took no pressure at all to persuade me to sponsor a child (I shall be sending you a Sponsorship Form and Bankers Standing Order) and, having met a young child who thus far had been unable to attend a school (and I could see very little prospect of him attending one) decided that he was the one I wanted to sponsor. Having made an appointment to see Anne I took Musa and his mother to see the school. We also visited other schools. The Don McMath School is not head and shoulders above the other schools it is in a different universe. The fabric of the school, the facilities, the caring dedication of the head teachers and teaching staff, together with the active presence and participation of Anne, is a living and vibrant tribute to the work that the McMath family is engaged upon.

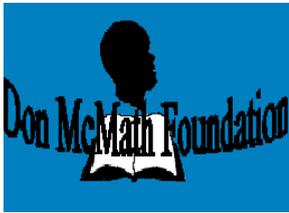
I, Musa's mother and grandmother are overjoyed that Anne has agreed to admit him to the school and provide an opportunity for him to enjoy a good education hopefully he, and others, will be able to use their acquired skills to help their Country and communities develop in the future..

I live 300 miles away from the rest of the touring party and was invited to join them (for a holiday since cricket is not a passion of mine) by my pal Ted Elsey (the party's vice captain and a work colleague of mine before we retired from our jobs as Trade Union Officers). Whilst I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to The Gambia, the culture shock shook me and, at times, upset me. I am pretty confident that Ted will be completing a Sponsorship Form too and we shall both be bringing the Foundation to the attention of our colleagues and friends around Sussex and Lancashire. To this end I shall be very grateful if you are able to email me a copy of the video made by the young daughter of one of Anne's friends (Ted and I watched it at Anne's house) as we think that we may be able to publicise the Foundation by showing it to friends and colleagues.

Very many congratulations on the Foundation's work - there will be many young Gambians with cause for gratitude in the future.”

In February we had a black British teacher originally from Brixton and now living in The Gambia visit the school, he has taught at the American International School & Marina International school. These are the elite private schools in Gambia and very expensive, most European children go there or rich Gambians. He looked at some of the work and said that our standards were high.

We have just found out that the Gambian national exams will be held in April. Mr Colley has been phoning them regularly and last time the guy laughed and said that our school was the only one that kept asking for a date. We will



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probably be told about a day in advance knowing how things work in The Gambia. This will be the first year the Don McMath Foundation has taken these exams so it will be interesting to find out how our results compare to other Gambian schools.

Serehule (one of the Gambian tribes) children very rarely go to school because their parents think that it will make them too western and turn them away from their culture, so we are very pleased that we have 2 Serehule girls in our school. During the Independence Day holidays, the local radio station decided to invite a Serehule child to come and talk about being educated. The child they chose was Fattoumatta Sankano in Grade 4. Fattoumatta is 11 years old & one of our top students, and to say that she was a wonderful ambassador for our school is an understatement. She talked about her education in glowing terms and advised other students to “make their school books their best friend”. When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, she said “the first woman President of The Gambia” She talked with such confidence but there was one funny thing that revealed how young she was and that was when she was asked what did she discuss with her friends in the playground. Quote – “My friend Penda Sowe and I were talking about our teacher Mr Saidy who was sick. We thought the reason he was sick was because he might be pregnant.”

Sue Smith, a friend of ours spent a week with Anne in February, this is her report on her trip:

“I was lucky enough to be able to stay with Anne within the community close to the school. Forget tarmac roads, nice neat houses with gardens, etc but think in terms of rough sandy roads, with chickens roaming free and the odd bit of waste land. (Yes there are free range eggs and chickens so Jamie Oliver is not required out here!)



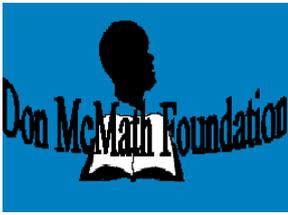
The first few days were spent getting to know the locals and of course lapping up the sunshine and wide expanses of coast line. It is such a beautiful country with wonderful friendly people. I was made very welcome by everyone I met who treated me as if they had known me all their lives.

I went into the school for 3 days and the enthusiasm from the children, and the teachers, to learn was overwhelming. I was thrown in at the deep end on my first day as one of the teachers, Fatu, was taking some visitors around the school and she asked me to take her class. (I have to say at this point that I am a qualified teacher and nurse but that I am used to teaching older students.) The children in her class were very excitable to say the least and I eventually managed some control, if you can call it that, by singing some songs. They enjoy singing ‘old time’ musical songs which seemed unusual for me but went down well.



While I was at the school I was introduced to a bright and cheerful young boy called Hamsa. He is disabled with club feet and deformed arms and hands. When he first came to the school his mother used to carry him everywhere and take him to the toilet. Remarkably he can now walk short distances on the side of his feet and take himself to the toilet. I showed Hamsa and his mother some exercises to strengthen the muscles in his arms and his hands and I gave Hamsa some plasticine rolled up for him to squeeze with his hands. I thought that his mother understood but later found out that his mother thought it was ice cream and wanted some!! My communication skills were obviously not as good as I thought!

On my last day at the school there were some more visitors who had presented the school



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with £2000 raised from a charity bicycle ride. They were all part of a cricket team who used the opportunity to play some games of cricket with local teams and visit the school. One game was played in no less than 47°C!!



All I can say to anyone who reads this newsletter that if you get a chance to go to the Gambia for a holiday then PLEASE look in at the fantastic work that is being done at the Don McMath Foundation School. It was a very humbling experience where you are made to feel welcome with open arms (and sticky fingers!) It just leaves me to say that a huge congratulation must go to all the trustees of the foundation and of course to all the sponsors without which this project would not be possible. I am already looking at going back again this year and am counting the days. Thank you, Gambia.”

So far we have sponsors for 11 out of 30 of the last intake of children in Nursery 1 and are looking for sponsors for the rest, please pass this newsletter on to anyone you think might be interested in supporting us, it's through these contacts that we continue to grow.

We are very keen to encourage our sponsors to organize their own fund raising events for the school, if any of our supporters would like copies of the material that we use ourselves for presentations etc. (Mainly A4 encapsulated photos and information sheets covering the school and it's history) then please let Mick know.

We also have available a short computer based .WMV presentation created by Daisy Mather (one of our youngest supporters) available to anyone who wants a copy, again get in touch with Mick.

One example of fund raising was, as Sue has mentioned above, Nick Marshall organized a sponsored cycle ride from Hastings Old Town to Normans Bay by some of the members of the Sussex Over 50's cricket team and raised a massive £2,000 for the school, they were over in The Gambia in February and, with Anne, managed to spend most of the money on a second hand computer for Ous, new screens and printer, all existing computers upgraded to Windows XP, printers serviced, filing cabinet, TV and DVD for showing educational films, text books, teachers chairs, new desks and benches with the balance going to the building fund.

Important dates for 2008 are:

VERWOOD GARDEN PARTY SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> JULY

BEXHILL GARDEN PARTY IN AUGUST

VERWOOD RUSTIC FAYRE MONDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST

VERWOOD CHARITY CLAY PIGEON SHOOT SUNDAY 31<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST.

If anyone who currently receives this newsletter through the post is now on email could you please email us at the above email address so we can email you future newsletters as this will cut down considerably on our costs.

Anne, Judy and Mick McMath

March 2008