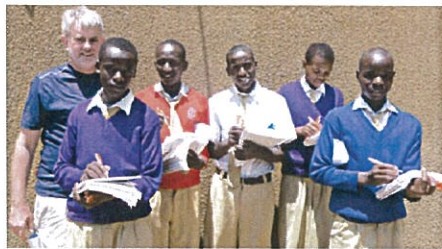


Project builds futures (and shelves!) in Africa



As we reported they would be a few issues ago, Graeme and Bev Fallowfield travelled to Kenya and Tanzania in August to take part in The Meserani Project, which was set up by the pupils, staff, parents and friends of Acklam Grange School Middlesbrough to bring together young people from Africa and Teesside, and had an eye-opening taste of education in the developing world.



As of March 2014 the project had helped to build ten classrooms and furnished and equipped three primary schools in Meserani, Tanzania. 116 pupils from these schools are currently being sponsored to attend secondary school, and 24 pupils are also being sponsored through their further education. Regular trips allow sponsors to meet the children they help, see the results of their assistance and participate directly in the work that goes on.

Joinery Lecturer Graeme and Administrator Bev, who was born in Zimbabwe and lived for many years in South Africa, joined an eclectic group of volunteers for the two-week trip, which also included Graeme's brother (and College Governor) Stuart and his wife Debra.

The first school Bev and the rest of the Team visited was the Meserani Juu Primary School. As there are no roads leading directly to the school the Team had to walk along a dusty foot track, which took over an hour. They were greeted in the school yard with screams of excitement. The children soon went back to their classrooms waiting in anticipation for their pens or pencils, which were duly handed out by the Team - while everyday items here, these are very special things to the pupils there.

Whilst the Team visited Meserani Juu Primary School, Graeme travelled by truck to buy timber for the shelving to be constructed in the staffroom at Lesiraa Primary School, which they were going to be visiting in the afternoon. The timber bought was three 12 foot lengths of Eucalyptus wood, as it was cheaper to purchase than pine. However, due to a lack of roads the closest the truck could get was three miles, and so the wood had to be carried in incredibly hot and dusty conditions.

Arrival was again greeted enthusiastically by the pupils, who sang the school song and the Tanzanian national anthem. As the shelves went up pupils were fascinated by the cordless drill, unable to comprehend until it was explained how it worked with no wires attached. A gift of football shirts to thank them for their help and welcome rounded off the day.

The following day the Meserani Chini School was visited, where villagers not only performed a tribal dance but honoured Diane and Peter, the Team Leaders, with Maasai blankets, a sheep and a goat (which went back on the minibus!) It was especially moving when the Team discovered that most of the children probably went to school without food and were not likely to eat anything until they arrived home again.

The next visit was to Arusha Vocational Training Centre, a special visit arranged for Bev and Graeme as it was a further education college. HCFE pens and polo shirts were presented to Principal Mr Bangantabona Mrefu and his staff, and football strips donated by Ian Roberts, President of Spen Valley Schools Football Association, were given to the pupils. Simon White had also donated two football tops which we presented to the two top students. We were taken on a tour of the College and introduced to Tutors of the various divisions, including Electrical, Carpentry, Welding, Horticulture, Brickwork and Sewing. The thing that struck the visitors most was the vast spaces and large classes; however they hardly had any equipment and it was obvious that Health and Safety was not as strict. When Graeme revealed that in the UK electricians were nicknamed "Sparky" the students took turns to point at each and call out "Sparky" while falling about in fits of laughter!

The last of the schools visited was the Moita Boys Boarding School and the Kipok Girls Boarding School, where it was revealed that pupils actually have to share a bed and in some cases were sleeping on the floor.

Prior to their trip to Kenya, Bev and Graeme had raised £160.00 and, along with Sarah, a member of their Team who had participated in the Boxing Day Dip to raise a further £68.00, were able to purchase 49 text books for Kipok Girls Boarding School.

The visit also included safari drives and walks in close proximity to elephants, zebras, wildebeest and giraffes along with various antelopes. They also had opportunity to visit the Meserani Snake Park and Meserani Clinic, which is the only clinic in the area to offer patients treatment for snake bites. They also visited AFEW Giraffe Sanctuary and the Kazuri Jewellery Factory, which makes products for Harrods in London.

Bev and Graeme describe the experience as "life changing", and anyone interested can find more details on their trip and the project as a whole at <http://meseraniproject.co.uk/>



Graeme and Bev provided us with many more images for this story, complete with annotations. If you would like to see them (we highly recommend it), or get a PDF copy of the project newsletter, please drop them an email.

