

BEGA kwa BEGA

Towards the end of January, 2001, 4 volunteers from Wishaw, Scotland, and one from London, spent 16 days in Uganda. "It is an experience that will stay with me forever" writes Elaine Kilmurray. "It is a beautiful country and its hills, greenery and lakes resemble the Highlands of Scotland in lots of ways, though the temperature was a little different! I hope that through development and modernisation the Ugandans never lose their community spirit, compassion and family values. I recognised village life in Scotland 40 years ago. David, Jane, Emmanuel and Edward made my stay as welcoming and comfortable as possible. They could not have done more to make our stay more pleasurable. I found I slotted into their way of life very easily because they treated me as an old friend and not as someone they had just met for the first time. Preparations for the journey began last October when I started fundraising. The first venture was a sponsored climb up Tinto Hill, over 2,300 feet; the next a Christmas Fair for which my mum and I had made a variety of gifts. (One of my friends raised money by losing 1 stone). There followed the Christmas Disco which was a wonderful night. Many gifts were donated which enabled us to hold a terrific raffle. In total I had over £1,600 to take out with me. The majority of this was spent on packages for the schools. Each school was given a set of P1-P7 Maths and English Text Books (14 books in all). These were Oxford Text Books used for the National Curriculum. In addition each school received a football, a board game, felt pens, crayons and some reading books. The schools with nursery classes also got some supplies relevant to their needs. £100 was given to the street children's project in Kampala to enable them to have sugar for, hopefully, a month. Some of the money was given to a midwife to help with her clinic, some to a hospital in Kisubi and a little to a woman who needed medical treatment."

Angelina Campbell began her fundraising last Summer. Table-top sales were held, shawls knitted and sold and houses cleaned. She writes: "it was hard work but in return enjoyable and rewarding. Seven knitting machines were donated from the funds raised by 'the women of Wishaw to be used by women who are the victims of poverty, Aids and war'. In all 47 women were taught the basics of the knitting machines. In only 4 days they learnt how to knit V neck and round neck jumpers and cardigans, slip-overs and hats.



On the Sunday before we left we were given a message that some of the women of Kitale village had been given an order from a local nursery school enabling them to make a living for themselves and their families. A few days after my return I received this letter: *'We, the members of Kuteesa women's group from Kabaale parish who have participated in the just concluded workshop on knitting wish to convey our appreciation to Bega kwa Bega for organising that workshop. The workshop has given us skills which will be very useful in strengthening our economical power. We are also very grateful for having allocated a knitting machine to Kabaale Group. We assure you that through our group Leader Mrs Juliet Mukinda who has given us a tender of making sweaters for her Nursery pupils, it will properly be used for development of our group and families.'* Angelina concludes: "We now plan to return to Uganda with more machines."



While Angelina was busy with her knitting machines, Elaine Kilmurray, Sunny Walker, Cathy Jordan and Martina were more than busy coping with the children's play schemes. Last Summer, after the teachers' training days, Martina had approached some of them and asked if they would like

to help with the play schemes in the long holiday after the New Year. Many of them volunteered. Since then wires must have got crossed because many of the teachers who came expected training for themselves. This took place in a minor way as it had already been planned to spend two days with the teachers preparing for the play groups. The children were divided into three sections: one learning crafts with Sunny, one busy with paints (never seen before), crayons, pencils and scissors, books and board games with Elaine and Cathy and a third out in the field with Martina playing games. The first week was spent in Kitale and the second in Kakiri. Sunny writes: "I didn't feel I really pulled my weight. It was an easy option to sit sewing in peace and quiet with 20 - 25 girls whilst my colleagues and the Ugandan teachers coped with the other 300+. The 'Rigid Heddles' came into use as did the peg loom, very effective using sisal. Fun was had trying out 'Eskimo yo-yos' (spinning balls in opposite directions). One teacher made one with leaves, twigs and bark. A compromise was reached for the children with a cup-and-ball game: juice cartons and balls made from old t-shirt material stuffed with newspaper and attached with plaited wool. The children enjoyed this and showed great dexterity with plaiting and needle threading. An afternoon was devoted to plastic canvas work and dominoes for the teachers who wished to stay on. I felt quite embarrassed by the emphasis put on the help given by we 'teachers'. I was enjoying the experience and felt that the Ugandan teachers could teach me a great deal. I wish some of my ex-colleagues could have seen their circumstances."

Some of Elaine's views on the play schemes: "The teachers who came along to the first village workshops were eager participants in the scheme. It wasn't until this point that I fully realised we could have been given the title of 'The Importance of Play as an Educational Tool' as a remit to work to. Had I had more information or had I been asked to prepare for this I feel I could have put my organisational skills to better use and been more prepared. I was under the impression I was going to help with a scheme which was already organised and I was to 'slot in' where needed. However, when faced with a situation which lacks organisation I get my head down and get on with it. There was a lack of resources for the number of children and teachers who came and we spent much time in Kampala looking for items. On the other hand there is little point in bringing in materials which cannot be replaced in Uganda. The second week at Kakiri was wonderful. We had learned from the first week and Susan Muwanga (who had spent 2 weeks in High Wycombe two Autumns ago) was a superb co-ordinator. We took direction from her. She was so organised and had worked very hard prior to our visit. The teachers who came were placed in working groups. Each had a volunteer as their leader. She gave us a remit and we worked to that and had discussions at the end of the day on what had been learned. On the days the children came the teachers passed on their newly learned skills to them. I have never come across such well behaved, well mannered and talented children. They were so happy and glad to wait their turn for whatever it was that they were learning, and with around 350 children there, There was some waiting." To sum up: there were 60+ teachers and 600+ children gathered in two villages from 40 schools.

The group of volunteers had faced problems right from the start. Sunny was sent home on attempting to book in at Heathrow because of fog in Brussels. (Why could the plane from Glasgow land and not one from Heathrow?) She arrived two days later. The luggage containing the knitting machines was lost and was not located until a phone call from London to Brussels discovered that they were in Nairobi. It was thankfully collected on the 9th visit to Entebbe. Sunny, who had been asked to show the owners of a loom how it worked discovered it to be 'broken'. (It required a new wing-nut) What they actually wanted to know was how to make different designs on a 4 heddle loom. This just demonstrates the importance of communication which is beginning to be made easier with the advent of e-mail.

What of the day-to-day work of Bega kwa Bega? Training takes place regularly: in Agriculture (the Project has paid for ten heifers in calf for five bereaved families in Kitale and five in Kakiri - the first calf must be passed on to another family in the village,) Rural development, Small business

management, Local chicken production and rearing, Animal breeding, Making animal feeds (cows, pigs, goats and rabbits), Silage, Cow mineral salt block making, Disease identification and treatment, Charcoal making, Ideal milk making, Soya milk production, The use of local herbs and their identification, Preserving fruit and vegetables, Juice making, Jam production. Raw materials are all locally accessible and are used in an 'environmentally friendly way'. Training is carried out by Ugandans.

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