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Dear Supporters

November 2020

Here is the latest news of our school for girls in Malek Alel, South Sudan and how we continue to support them. Despite challenging times, the news is very positive!

Like the rest of the world, South Sudan had to take action to minimise the risks of Covid.

We had been very worried that the people of the community of Malek-Alel might have suffered from the Covid virus. There is no effective public health provision in the village, and people are often living very close to one another. But we understand that although the state capital, Aweil, 20 miles or so away, has had cases, there seem to have been no cases of illness in Malek. So that is a great relief.



We continued to pay the staff while the school was closed of course, to ensure that it was ready for whenever the reopening was possible. We believe that this has been effective in keeping the team together, and the staff have rallied round to clean up the school and its grounds in preparation for the new start. It has been the rainy season during the closure and the vegetation has grown up round the school; so the staff have been clearing this away.

As we told you in our last newsletter, schools were closed by Government order, just as they had been starting the new year in March. Recently they have been allowed to restart, but only for the oldest girls in year 8. Teaching began again on 5th October for those pupils. Their final examinations have been put back from December to next February. To help them catch up on missed time, they will be coming to school for six days a week till then.



The plan is for the younger girls to restart school next Spring.

The top year of the secondary schools is also reopening now, again with the aim of preparing those girls for their final examinations. As you know we pay the school fees of those of our girls who have gone on to secondary school, and so we are interested in their continuing progress. This is a part of our charity's contribution to the world wide priority for giving girls education and thus choices in their lives. We will be continuing to track how our girls are doing and how their education to go on to training for careers develops. It's great that among our teachers now are girls who studied at our school, went off to secondary school and have now returned. This is also a great encouragement for the younger ones to see in a tangible way what difference education makes in one's life.

It is important to provide for periodic training of the teaching staff, as part of their ongoing professional development; and we have paid the costs of courses over the past years. The headmaster is running a course for his teachers now, so we have just sent out money to cover the costs of that course.



Before lockdown the World Food Programme was supplying free food for all the girls to have a cooked lunch every day. We paid the cooks, and for a monthly meal of meat. But we understand that the WFP deliveries have now stopped, and an alternative arrangement has not yet been put in place. So we have started sending money to ensure that the school can buy and cook food for the girls in the middle of their school day.

Our bread oven is still in action, you can spot it on the right under the tree!

Speaking of the rainy season reminds us that this time last year there were severe floods in the area; crops were devastated, and people were washed out of their homes. The school tell us that this has been a problem again this year in a wide area of the country, but fortunately not near the school.

What has really affected local life adversely since the spring is a widespread inflation of prices, resulting from national economic circumstances. This applies to costs of food and the other basics of life. When we heard about this we have responded by providing higher pay to the staff, to offset the price increases.

You may remember that at the turn of the year we introduced new financial controls in our relationship with the school, and the trustees of the charity have changed. One of the changes we made was to set up much better direct communications with the school. So now we exchange letters with the headmaster, Bak, twice or more a month, and his IT teacher Angelo is very good at sending us photos of life at the school. We can get rapid information from them through WhatsApp. We are finding that this enables the trustees to understand and respond quickly to developments at the school, which means we can help them better.

We must also give you an update on the Charity Commission inquiry into the charity. You will remember that there were questions about whether we got the best available exchange rates in sending money to the school. And there was a lack of evidence to prove how the school spent the money we sent them. The exchange rate problem was resolved in summer 2019, and we now get the right rates. And since our visit to the school in December we have received admirably comprehensive evidence of the school's spending. As a result of these developments in 2019, the Charity Commission agreed at the end of June this year to remove the controls that they had placed on our expenditure. The new trustees are therefore able to operate the charity without constraint.

The school grounds and St. Peter's Chapel also open their doors to the wider community. This October they hosted the Youth Conference of the Anglican Church of Aweil South. It has been a hugely encouraging time for all involved, especially after these times of not being able to hold gatherings. This was properly celebrated!



Of course, all that the trustees are able to do for the girls in Malek Alel is made possible by your financial support for the school. The headmaster of the school is constantly expressing his thanks to you, the supporters of the school, for making it possible to keep on teaching the girls, and giving them life opportunities that they would not get otherwise.

We thank you for making all this possible by your donations.

To save costs, as explained in earlier newsletters, we now only send the newsletter by email. If you know of someone who had the paper newsletter, and has now access to email, would you be able to pass on our newsletter? Thank you!

This comes with our warm wishes and huge thanks

The Trustees of
Under Tree Schools

