

Here we go again! We just don't know how we're going to cram everything into this newsletter - it's going to be fuller than ever. There are so many good things to report on - the visit of our Ugandan partners in November, the magnificent sum raised through the Christmas Catalogue, other generous fund-raising, the school exchange visit to Uganda in February, good news on the Goat Improvement Project - and praise from the Welsh Assembly! When this newsletter goes out Lorna Brown and Val Talbot will be in Uganda, together with member Carole Ashurst who is there to set up an exciting health and environmental project in the villages and to establish links with Kumi Hospital. This would be a good time to confirm that everyone who visits Uganda pays all their own expenses and **not one penny** comes out of Dolen Ffermio's funds.

NOVEMBER VISIT A GREAT SUCCESS

The visit of five Ugandan colleagues was a huge success and certainly helped to lift the gloom and doom of both the weather and the recession. The reactions we've had from those of you who met them were: "inspiring", "heartening", "humbling", "our children's lives have been enriched". Equally, we shall always remember them for their warmth, enthusiasm and infectious sense of humour. We have the UK government to thank for the school exchange visit, the Welsh Assembly for funding Emmanuel Maraka's flight for a photo diary project with Cordelia Weedon (with Arts Connection providing the resources in our primary schools). Most of you will have read extensive reports on the visit in the press, sent to you personally or on our website so let our visitors speak for themselves - and far more eloquently.

Patrick Wakabi, the Headteacher of Kamuli Boys Primary School, linked with Llanfechain Primary School said: "I have found Jane Bentley and her staff supportive, co-operative and they work hard to fulfil the objectives of the school. The parents are also very supportive and take an interest in all school activities."



Patrick with Llanfechain School pupils

Patrick couldn't get over the small class sizes. "In my school we have 60 or more pupils to each class, which makes it very hard to teach them all and there are primary school classes in Uganda which have 150 children. This is because primary school education is now free in Uganda so a lot more children attend but the government can't afford to train any more teachers so the classes have just grown and grown."

Andrew Ibembe, Headteacher of the Reverend Nayenga Primary School, linked with Llansanffraid Primary School: Andrew praised "the unity between teachers, parents, pupils and the whole community. I felt part of the school, not just a visitor and I shall be very sad to leave. The children took a great interest in Uganda and enjoyed learning Ugandan songs and dances." He was most impressed with the facilities and resources.

In Andrew's school there was just one light bulb powered by a car battery. Not any more though! "I am very excited that Gareth Hughes and his staff organised an event after school one day and the whole community came to it and raised over £1,000. So when I go back home, I can put electricity into my school and there will be enough left over to buy some school furniture. I would like to give my very sincere thanks to everyone for doing this for my school."



Andrew at Llansanffraid School

Moses Kitimbo, senior teacher at Busoga High School, linked with Llanfyllin High School: "I have been very happy at the school and all the teachers have been very welcoming and easy to get on with. I have had very good discussions with Mr Mincher, the headteacher, about issues of teaching. The pupils were eager to learn and they asked a lot of questions. I think some of them would like to come to Uganda and get involved." Moses is also very keen to set up links between churches. One of the last things he said before they all left was: "The light that has shone for us in Wales we will take back to shine in Uganda."

Emmanuel and Miriam Maraka, founders of the Kumi Orphan Project: "We have been overwhelmed by how everybody has received us and looked after us. We are very appreciative and we will not let you down. Visiting Wales has built up trust because people know more about what we are trying to achieve with poor and vulnerable orphans. Dolen Ffermio leaders and supporters are committed to help these children in need and we thank them all sincerely." There is more from Emmanuel in his letter on page 2.



Patrick, Cllr Eldrydd Jones, Miriam in front; Moses, Emmanuel, Cllr Barry Thomas, Cllr Tegwyn Jones and Andrew behind

INCREDIBLE AMOUNT RAISED FOR KUMI ORPHANS

Yet again, you have astounded us with your overwhelming generosity. Despite the recession and fears for the future, you pulled out all the stops to raise well over £10,000 from the Dolen Ffermio Christmas catalogue. As Lorna says, "it is heartening that people still care about the desperate plight of these orphans." Emmanuel wrote in January to thank us both for the visit and the catalogue funds. We join with him to thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Up to now Miriam and Emmanuel have been working in 6 communities where 420 children have received gifts and 300 youth workers and 54 committee members have been trained. These numbers will be greatly increased throughout the coming year to benefit even larger numbers of orphans though, sadly, not all they would like to. For the first phase of 2009, Miriam is now busy preparing two new communities in Ngero and Ongino where committees will be formed and trained to oversee the project, followed by the training of the volunteer youth workers. Billy goats have been ordered, chickens are being prepared for vaccination and local female goats and orange tree seedlings will be purchased shortly, along with the other gifts. All chickens in an area are vaccinated, not just the gifts, so the whole community benefits. Miriam has also been spending a lot of time monitoring the existing communities. She has established quarterly meetings to bring together everyone involved to hear their views as well as to make sure the best use is being made of the gifts.

Dear Friends,

Eight weeks have passed since you very warmly welcomed Miriam and myself to your beautiful country. You protected us against not so friendly weather, providing warm clothing and housing. You fed us with a variety of delicious foods, nourishing our bodies. You facilitated us to learn about your way of life especially in regard to farming, education, and praise and prayers in your churches. You arranged various community meetings and gave us audience to share with you experiences of life in Uganda and the humble work Miriam and myself do, which centres around giving social and economic support to young people who have lost one or both parents. It is implemented by CREATE and is called Kumi Orphans Project. Some of the groups we visited included farmers of cattle, sheep and goats, churches, primary schools, Llanfyllin and Newtown High Schools, church ministers, Oswestry Borderland Rotary Club, political leaders and people of other professions and walks of life.

The visit to your country was made possible and memorable by you the people. The purpose of this letter is for Miriam and myself to say in a very special way: "Thank you to all of you!" We most especially appreciate and acknowledge with deep gratitude the gifts you have bought for the children of Kumi through the Christmas Catalogue. We have been informed that you have once again demonstrated the true spirit of love and friendship that goes beyond the borders of Wales and United Kingdom. To raise over £10,000 at a time of financial recession is a true act of love! These funds will go towards the purchase of various items for the orphans in Kumi. The items you specifically bought include: 139 packs of paper and pens, 96 x 3 tree seedlings, 144 lots x 5 laying hens, 104 female goats, 22 male goats, 24 school desks, 29 push bikes and training for 21 volunteers and the remainder will be used to facilitate project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Dear Friends, as I said while with you, you are very welcome to visit Uganda. This is an open invitation because we feel Uganda is the country of your second home. Political leaders have a special role in building and strengthening partnerships across state borders. Let me therefore extend a special invitation to Mr Lembit Opik, Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire.

Happy and Blessed 2009!

Miriam and Emmanuel Maraka

On top of the amount raised through the catalogue we have been overwhelmed by the generous support given to us by so many groups through Christmas collections, as a result of the visit and since then. Well over £2,500 has been raised for the general work of Dolen Ffermio and we are enormously grateful to:

All Saints, Buttington; Beulah CM Chapel; Bontdolgadfan Presbyterian Church; Capeli Bro Llansilin a'r Cylch; Craigfryn Methodist Chapel; Dolanog Community Centre; Gweinidogaeth Bro Caerinion; Merched y Wawr, Llanfair Caerinion; Llanfair Caerinion Agricultural and Horticultural Show; Llanfyllin Community Chapel; Oswestry Methodist Church; Penybontfawr Choir Concert; Rhiwlas Community Centre; Rhydycroesau Ladies' Guild; St John's Church, Dolanog; United Welsh Chapels in Llanfyllin; Brawdoliaeth Gweinidogion, Welshpool; Ysgol Sul Undebol, Llanfair Caerinion; Ysgol Pennant, CYTUN, Macynlleth

The good people of Dolanog made a very big contribution to this sum when they raised the sum of £1,000 (including a donation from the Wynnstay Group) from their Christmas Fair and Carol Service. In addition to this, we have had extremely generous donations from Prefectform Equipment, Lloyds Animal Feeds Ltd and Innovis Ltd.



The two Dolanog cheques presented to Lorna by Ruth Jones, Angela Hawkins, Rob Jones and Pam James

RETURN VISIT TO UGANDA

After the visiting Ugandan teachers had gone home, Jane Bentley (headteacher of Llanfechain Primary School, Gareth Hughes (headteacher of Llansanffraid Primary School and Barbara Maycock (head of sixth form at Llanfyllin High School) couldn't wait to pay their return visit. They didn't have long to wait as off they went in February, again funded by the UK's Global Schools Partnership Scheme. They had a fantastic time over there, as can see from their personal accounts.

Barbara: What a greeting in Entebbe airport! Moses, Peter (our host in Kamuli), Apollo and Esther (two of Miriam and Emanuel's children) plus a few others. It was great to be back on my second visit to Uganda. We were whisked off to a nearby hotel and spent time catching up and getting a really good night's sleep after the long flight. Next morning off to the British Council for a useful meeting with Emmanuel and the Ugandan organiser of the programme. She was pleased to have Welsh schools involved with the scheme.

We then set off to Jinja to meet Andrew and Patrick who had driven to meet us with some of their school staff. We visited the Bujagali Falls and source of the Nile before leaving



Busoga High School: Art teachers (with Moses 2nd on left) front row and pupils holding materials sent by Llanfyllin HS

for Kamuli. Moses, Patrick and Andrew had organised a packed programme for us, visiting a wide variety of people and places – too many to mention here. My most valuable time was spent at Busoga High school, sitting in on different subject lessons and doing some team teaching in geography. I also gathered information about the computer resources to take back to Llanfyllin. Our hope is to get an internet connection into the school eventually and assist with ICT hardware and software. Communication between the schools could be much more effective and real if we had regular email contact.

We were able to meet with local politicians and education administrators of Kamuli district. These should prove to be useful contacts for us in the future and also raise the profile of our 3 partner schools. It was a fruitful visit and we now hope to develop and strengthen the partnerships between the 6 schools over the next year and then apply for further funding to write common curriculum topics. We could be teaching about Uganda and Wales both here and in Africa which can only serve to enhance the knowledge of all students and increase their understanding of global citizenship.



Gareth: My visit to Uganda was a very special experience. The staff and pupils at the Reverend Nayenga Primary School were all very welcoming. As soon as I entered a classroom there was always a musical greeting of some sort. It became very clear, very quickly, that the children in Reverend Nayenga have very little in the way of resources, compared to our school. However, despite this, the staff and children are amongst the happiest and most enthusiastic people that I have ever had the opportunity to meet.

It was wonderful to see that the money raised in our community had been so well utilised. Electricity now lights up the school and they have also refurbished a building which can be used as an additional classroom. Many thanks were sent from Uganda to the community of Llansanffraid.



Andrew shows off the new electricity supply at his school

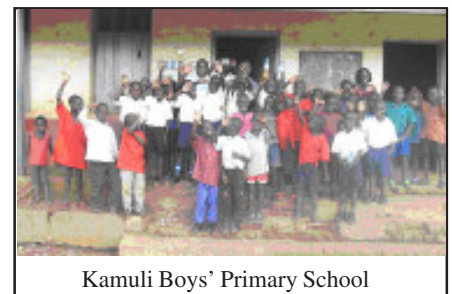
During my visit we were able to establish the fact that our partnership is not simply about the sharing of gifts, but it's about developing the learning experiences that we give to our children. We want to learn more about them, and they want to learn more about us. This return visit really has cemented the foundations of what I know will be a good school partnership for many years to come.



Jane: Amazing, amazing, amazing! Our welcome, wherever we went was so warm and at each and every visit, following the custom, we were fed - so beware and watch your waistline if you ever get to go out there yourself.

Kamuli Boys Primary School is a great place and similar in many ways to our school. The way in which the youngest children are taught is almost identical with the emphasis being on practical work and taking inspiration from the outdoors. Things are a little different in the Junior classes where a lack of resources means there is more 'chalk and talk' but just as here the teachers engage the children with practical demonstrations where possible and their work in almost all subjects seems to be linked with football teams! My very first question (which I fluffed) was about Ryan Giggs!

I now have a much better idea of how our two schools can work on together and involve the children more. The staff in Kamuli and I have come up with a list of topics we can do

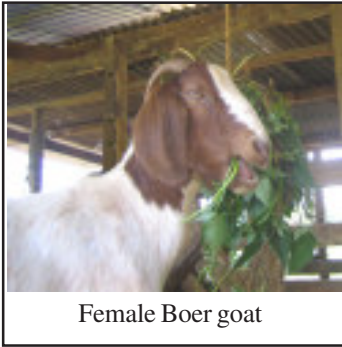


Kamuli Boys' Primary School

together so we can exchange work and learn more about each other's lives. It was a great way to cement our partnership and lifelong friendships have been made. Everyone involved, especially both sets of children, will feel the benefit with a greater understanding of life around the world and a tolerance and respect for difference as well as a recognition that wherever you go children are children.

GOOD NEWS ON THE GOAT PROJECT

Steady progress in building goat houses and fencing paddocks has been made at both Kamuli and Kumi goat units, and the first batch of cross-bred goats is ready to be transferred, once Moses has completed the last fence wiring. The village goat improvement schemes in Kumi district can then get underway.



The next phase of development at Gideon's Kamuli Unit will require considerable funding: a well is urgently needed to improve water availability for the goats, and the major expense of importing pedigree Boer and Toggenburg breeding stock from South Africa. Arrangements for this vital shipment are now well under way. Establishing 2 nucleus herds is essential if we are to have a reliable source of cross-bred animals for the village goat improvement schemes and the orphan project

PRAISE FROM THE WELSH ASSEMBLY

Lorna Brown, Emyr Owen and Val and Dave Talbot went to the Welsh Assembly debate recently on the future of the Wales for Africa programme (which funds the Gold Star Communities Award scheme). Described by First Minister Rhodri Morgan, AM as "the best value programme in this Assembly's 10 year history", it drew unstinting cross-party support with 11 Assembly Members contributing to the debate over a wide range of issues but with a common thread of pursuing high quality, mutually beneficial approaches to sustainable development internationally.

The speakers took the opportunity to highlight the many different projects carried out by voluntary groups in their constituencies all over Africa. Mick Bates, AM for Montgomeryshire, was very positive about Dolen Ffermio and spoke in great detail about the Goat Improvement Project. He even mentioned Lorna Brown by name (much to her embarrassment and our delight).

In his summing up, Rhodri Morgan singled out Mick's contribution and thanked the "doers - who have really got involved," ending with the unforgettable biblical paraphrase "Blessed be the goat breeders, blessed be the artificial inseminators," etc. We had a good chat with Mick Bates afterwards who has promised his help so it was a very worthwhile (and enjoyable) day.

As an aside to the debate the Welsh Assembly Government has also pledged ongoing core funding for the Gold Star Community Award scheme for the next 3 years.

FUNDRAISING

Congratulations to Cordelia Weedon and Emmanuel Maraka for being awarded £2,400 as a second grant from the Wales-Africa Gold Star Communities Award scheme to extend the photo-diary project with young people in Montgomeryshire and Kumi District

As we have said in the report on the Goat Project, this is at a critical stage in its development and needs more funding urgently. Some fundraising events are listed below and, if anyone has any other ideas or suggestions or especially if you fancy doing something yourself, we'd be very grateful. Obviously, we'd be happy to contribute and help out.

LORNA'S SPRING PLANT SALE

behind Bronafon, Bridge Street, Llanfyllin

Saturday, 9 May, 2009 10 am to 1 pm

Plants, cakes, bric-a-brac, household goods, books, etc

Contributions (in particular, plants and cakes) please

CROSS-WALES WALK

Organised by Newtown & Llanidloes Rotary Club

Saturday, 20 June

Different lengths or sponsor a Dolen Ffermio supporter

CYCLE FROM CARDIFF TO HOLYHEAD

From 12 June for 5/6 days

Join Lorna and others - or sponsor one of them

Details for all the above events (and how to sponsor) on the attached flier, the website www.dolen-ffermio.org.uk or from Lorna (648709), Val (791310) or Chas (791626)

UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP

We are delighted to report that we now have 66 members and a very special associate member – the whole of Llanfyllin High School! In addition to members, this newsletter will be winging its way, by post or through cyberspace, to over 300 individuals or groups. We've come a long way in a short space of time and please do join us - £5 annual fee and free for students. You can download a membership form from the website or contact Chas Nicholson, Nant Gwy, Llansilin SY10 7QQ, 01691 791626 or chasnicholson@btinternet.com

WEBSITE REVAMPED

Derek Ward, with help from Chas Nicholson, has been hard at work revamping the website. One of our aims is awareness raising and the website is a vital way to keep everyone informed of what Dolen Ffermio is all about and what we are trying to achieve. There is a new UK News page and on the Uganda News page is a very short video clip of Emmanuel, taken while they were here in November. Our very grateful thanks to Derek for all the time and effort he puts into the website. We plan to have a Welsh version of the website and we would welcome help with translating – cysylltwch ag Emyr (01938 811299)

For comments or more information, please contact Val Talbot on 01691 791310 or email val@daval.demon.co.uk. If you have an email address that we don't know of, please email it. If you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please let Val know.