



GIVE REPORTS 2014

FOLLOWING OUR TRIP TO THE GAMBIA

November 2013 to April 2014



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Nursery Report 2014

Workshops in Early Childhood Education have been part of the GIVE programme of work in The Gambia for the last three years. Each year we have taken on board our experience of the previous year and recommendations from the Coordinator of Nursery Education at the Catholic Education Secretariat (CES). This has decided the content and direction of each new programme. The programme is designed for teachers working in Early Childhood Education, which in The Gambia takes place in Nursery Schools. Some children start nursery school as young as three; however most are aged between four and six. Many of the teachers are untrained or not fully trained. The CES is the largest provider of Nursery Education in The Gambia. It has developed a curriculum in Early Childhood Education which is followed by all nursery schools under its auspices.

The GIVE programme is divided into two parts. Firstly there are the workshops which take place over a four week period. The next group of volunteers then follow up by visiting the teachers in their schools to further help and support them. Continuity between the workshops and follow up work is crucial to the success of the programme. Consequently, a day-long preparatory session took place last November. All those due to work in the nursery sector in The Gambia from January to early April took part.

This was an informative day. Handouts, which each participating teacher receives at workshops, were examined and suggestions made for improvements. The handouts serve as a useful guideline to the content of each session for the participating teachers, and as a useful tool to memory once they return to the classroom. These handouts cannot reflect the full extent or depth of the workshops, nor can they give any sense of the lively involvement and practical nature of participation. Delivery of the workshops and content of the handouts were discussed and agreed with Mr Gibba, the Coordinator of Nursery Education at the CES, prior to commencement. Handouts for eighty participants in seven subject areas were printed before departure for The Gambia. Two teachers transported these as far as Gatwick. Fortunately, Joe Griffin had secured additional baggage allowance to transport them on to The Gambia.

On the preparatory day in November, **it was emphasised that follow up work in Nursery Schools is the second phase of support and training for teachers attending the workshops**, it is in no sense an assessment of the participating teachers. Many of these teachers have little training. A five day workshop does not train a teacher, it is the start of a reflective process which hopefully influences attitudes to teaching, and provides basic knowledge and skills in teaching methodologies.

In discussion with Mr Gibba, we were asked to pay special attention to enabling the teachers to deliver the Jolly Phonics programme. This was explained to the volunteers who attended the preparatory day in November. Those without knowledge of this particular phonics programme made a point of up skilling themselves so that they could support their Gambian colleagues as requested. Jolly Phonics was only one part of a rounded workshop on Early Childhood Education.

It was explained that volunteers working in other GIVE programmes currently work a four day week. The workshops run for five days and those involved in workshops were welcome to work the fifth day if they so wished. Two volunteers took up this option.



On arrival in The Gambia, a meeting took place with Mr. Gibba and preparations were made for the setting up of the workshops. The first began on Monday January 13th at the CES rooms in Kanifing. The second was held the following week in Soma which is approximately 220km inland. The third was held back in Kanifing and the last, which started on February 3rd 2014, took place in Bwiam approximately 115km inland. Eighty teachers in all attended.

Four volunteers were involved in the delivery of the workshops. They stayed with the main party at the Bungalow Beach Hotel apart from time spent upcountry. In Soma they were accommodated in rooms attached to the hall where the workshop took place. This was managed by Sr Davida from the local convent. In Bwiam they were offered hospitality in the priests' house. The arrangements were basic, comfortable and convenient.

Mr Edward Gibba, the coordinator of Nursery Education at the CES took part throughout. He attended all workshops offering support and guidance. His input was most valuable. It was possible to refer to him in order that the content did not become distanced from the reality of the classroom for the participating teachers. Mr Henry Sanyang, a local inspector of standards in CES nursery schools, was present in Bwiam, his support was also most welcome. **Their involvement helps maintain the sustainability of this work.**

Workshop sessions were given in the following areas

- Oral Language
- Literacy, with an emphasis on the delivery of the Jolly Phonics programme. This was particularly requested by the teachers and the CES also
- Reading in the Nursery Class – how to inculcate the skills required to help young children become 'Reading Ready'
- Numeracy
- Physical Education with an emphasis on integration with language acquisition
- The Value of Rhyme and Song in the Nursery Classroom
- Classroom Management

Hand-outs were provided at all sessions

Opportunities for integration across the curriculum were looked at, particularly with a view to the acquisition of language. Some of the participating teachers' had a poor standard of English. This is a real cause for concern, it was stressed that the acquisition of language is the foundation of all learning. Oral Language featured strongly in the programme each day.

The emphasis was on practical teaching techniques with time spent daily on practical teaching exercises. Mr Gibba had indicated to us that this was most important. Hours were spent giving the teachers time to act out classroom teaching situations. Teacher involvement was first rate with some teachers demonstrating fine skills. The workshops are a very useful platform for teachers to encourage each other and learn from each other. They give the teachers opportunities for discussion and sharing of ideas which hopefully lead to positive change in the classroom.



The use of concrete materials in Maths was highlighted and how to source and use basic materials. Each day ended with the teachers writing their comments and suggestions on notelets to be addressed the following day. The teachers then spent some time making resources to bring back to their classrooms.

The importance of treating the children with respect, of nurturing confidence and good self-esteem through praise and recognition of their efforts was a feature of all workshops.

One volunteer arrived in The Gambia (Charlotte Maye) before the end of the workshop phase. She attended a few sessions in Bwiam before taking part in the classroom phase when the second group of volunteers arrived on 20th February 2014. This helped establish continuity from one phase to the next.

On departure, the first group left twenty three Oxford Mini Dictionaries and twenty three copies of The New First Aid in English to be distributed amongst the teachers who were due to be supported in the follow up programme. These resources were intended for the teachers' own personal use with the objective of raising their standard of English.

Given that eighty teachers attended workshops, it was understood that it would not be possible to follow up with all teachers in the following six week period. It was decided to target teachers who might best be able to continue the process of training in the form of step down workshops and also to visit schools in the out-lying areas. Mr Gibba was involved in the selection of teachers and schools to be supported.

Our volunteers succeeded in visiting approximately twenty five teachers. This included a visit to Barra on the North Bank where the volunteers spent a number of nights in accommodation provided by the nuns at St Mathew's. They were treated with kindness and hospitality.

Involvement in the classroom included **teacher support and guidance as well as modelling and sharing lessons.**

Feedback from these volunteers reflects the difficulties encountered by teachers where class numbers are high, resources limited and, in some cases, inadequate teacher training. It was noted that teachers were doing their best to implement what they had learned in workshops but, it was suggested that at least one additional week would be required before teachers could engage in step down training.

The integrated approach to Physical Education encouraged in the workshops was useful to teachers. Rhyme and song was being used by some teachers as an effective teaching tool and also as a helpful strategy for classroom management. This is an area that could be built on in the future.

Challenges were noted around some teachers' standard of English and language teaching skills; it would be worth considering how GIVE might be able to help address these areas.



The role of **head teachers** in this sector is crucial to its development. Any future involvement of GIVE volunteers might consider how the role of head teacher can be supported in order to benefit class teaching.

If it is planned to continue this programme, the following is a list of points that might be considered with our colleagues at the CES in The Gambia:

- Possibly reducing the content of the workshops to emphasise one or two areas of the curriculum in greater depth.
- Continue to make the workshops as practical as possible
- Consider how GIVE can help to improve the standard of English amongst teachers
- Discussion on how head teachers can be engaged to enhance the work of the programme
- Change the model to involve the same volunteers in both delivery of workshops and classroom support
- Look at the possibility of selecting a small number of the most able of the teachers e.g. ten. Provide workshops for them over a two week period followed by immediate follow up in their classrooms. This might be a better basis for enabling teachers to take on the role of trainers in a step down training model.
- Discussion on how the curriculum and timetable can/may be reviewed to give the teachers opportunities to implement what they have learned in workshops.

The teachers both in the workshops and in their schools were a pleasure to work with and made our volunteers most welcome. The volunteers enjoyed a fulfilling and rewarding experience. We are most grateful to Mr Kujabi for all his support and for the cooperation of his staff at the CES.

The following GIVE Volunteers were involved in Nursery Education in The Gambia:

- Charlotte Maye
- Joan McCann
- Margaret Boucher
- Margaret Cunningham
- Marie Daily
- Mary Douglas
- Mary Weekes
- Tom Allen



Lower Basic Report 2014

Give volunteers have been supporting teaching in Lower Basic schools for the past four years. For three of these work has been concentrated on supporting trainee teachers (TT). In November 2013, Joe Griffin along with two other GIVE volunteers Margaret Boucher and Esther Walsh went to The Gambia to prepare for the forthcoming projects to be supported in 2014. They visited many schools including the Lower Basic schools that were being considered for support. This was a very useful exercise as it meant that volunteers would be expected and prepared for when they went into these schools in January. It was arranged that, on the arrival of the volunteers at the schools, a meeting would be set up with the head or deputy head teacher and the trainee teachers' mentors. This led to a smooth entry into schools in January 2014. It also meant that there was a clear understanding of the role of the volunteer.

Four GIVE volunteers worked with trainee teachers in two schools, St Teresa's and St Charles Lwanga's. Both these schools are very big primary schools with huge numbers of children taught on a double school day shift system. St Teresa's has 3640 pupils. St Charles Lwanga's has an enrolment of approximately 2000 pupils. There are very large staff numbers and many trainee teachers. In recent years there has been a move to ensure that all teachers are trained which has meant that numbers in the training college have reached record levels. The system allows for one year full time in college, thereafter the trainee teachers work in schools during school term where they are mentored within the school and supervised from the college. They return to the college for further education during holiday periods. With the increase in numbers there is a lot of pressure on the system. The help our volunteers give is useful and appreciated. St Teresa's has thirty trainee teachers, St Charles Lwanga's has twenty. In all GIVE volunteers worked with nineteen of these trainee teachers in January and February 2014.

They found an improvement in conditions in the schools, particularly in St Teresa's which has a new school building. There are more wall charts, textbooks, copies and pencils. Unfortunately, there are still not enough text books for all the children and this creates challenges for both the children and the teachers. Class size is very big which is a major challenge for all. The trainee teachers cope well with the resources they have. Positive class management strategies are crucial to good teaching particularly where numbers are high. GIVE volunteers are keen to promote a fair and balanced approach to discipline using techniques that encourage good behaviour in line with CES and Ministry of Education policy which does not allow corporal punishment in schools.

The trainee teachers were welcoming and keen to improve their teaching skills. The volunteers tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. They allowed class lessons to progress intervening discretely where they felt content could be expanded on or alternative teaching



strategies tried. They emphasised basic good practice such as ensuring that the teacher had all the children's attention before teaching a lesson, ensuring they understood the importance of children answering audibly and individually, not allowing distractions to the lesson such as handing out copies before or during a lesson.

The volunteers noticed that some trainee teachers were keen to use rhyme and song during the school day. They were happy to source material for them. Gambian children love to sing, they do so without inhibition and it is heart-warming to hear them. Using this natural interest to support teaching and class management is beneficial educationally and creates a happy classroom.

The volunteers also provided educational aids for the classes they worked in, including number lines, 100 squares, multiplication squares, flash cards, wall charts and work cards. The proper use of these was demonstrated and trainees directed in how to engage the more able pupils in constructive, independent activities when finished work early by using work cards.

PE forms an important part of the curriculum. One of our volunteers introduced hurling skills to three classes. The children were intrigued and engaged and good inter cultural fun was had.

Having worked with trainee teachers for the past three years, it is time now to review this programme in light of experience and ask if we should be working with employed class teachers rather than trainee teachers? The main argument in favour of this shift of emphasis is the tendency on the part of many trainees to change career direction once they have achieved a third level qualification. We need to consider along with the Catholic Education Secretariat if our work would have more impact if it was directed towards employed teachers?

GIVE volunteers who were involved in work in Lower Basic Schools in 2014:

Ena Sheridan
Ken Ryan
Niamh O'Shea
Sheila Henry



Secondary Schools Report 2014

Gambia Ireland Volunteers in Education (GIVE) broke new ground this year at St Joseph's Senior Secondary School for girls in Banjul. This was the first time that GIVE volunteers worked to support teaching in this school. The school has a fine record of producing leading women in Gambian society.

Two former teachers who were Senior Science Teachers in their respective schools took on the task of assessing what could be done to help support the teaching of Science in the school.

They found a young staff eager to listen and open to advice. They advised on teaching methodologies in Science that would be more effective for learning than relying on 'Chalk and Talk' alone. The teachers responded positively. With ongoing support definite benefits would derive. The volunteers hope to continue contact with the school by email offering distance support. Having given guidelines and suggestions in ways of implementing a practical programme of learning for the pupils, the volunteers are keen that this should be supported to help ensure continued implementation.

There are sizeable challenges, not least of which is a proper awareness of safety issues in the use of scientific equipment. There is a basic need to train Science teachers effectively. Our volunteers suggest that the training of teachers in the use of educational scientific equipment and materials should be prioritised particularly in the area of chemistry. It was noted that there was a shortage of science teachers.

Mr Joe Griffin and Ms Esther Walsh visited Ms Hannah Coker the Principal, St. Joseph's in November 2013 to prepare for the involvement of GIVE volunteers in 2014. It is important that this communication with the Principal should continue into the future for the development of the project.

The work done by our GIVE volunteers will hopefully pave the way for future involvement in the science department at St Josephs, where continued support of science teaching would make a positive difference.

A volunteer was involved in supporting Maths teaching at St Teresa's Upper Basic School. The groundwork for this project was done the previous November when she visited the school to discuss the best way to support the teaching of Maths. Very valuable work was done in an area of support identified by GIVE as a priority. Support of maths teaching in Upper Basic Schools could help the effort to stem the failure rate in Maths before pupils graduate to Senior Secondary School. GIVE's continued involvement at Upper Basic level



should ideally include Maths and Science. Hopefully we will be able to recruit suitable personnel. This volunteer extended her stay and continued to support Maths in this school.

GIVE Volunteers who were involved in Upper Basic and Senior Secondary Education in The Gambia in 2014:

Cynthia Ceillier
Esther Walsh
Lucia Shelly

St Peter's Technical Senior Secondary School, Report 2014

Project Description: to help staff, both teaching and administrative, use the new Management Information System (MIS) designed for secondary schools in the Gambia by the Gambian software company - inSIST Global (www.insistglobal.com) - and funded through the World Bank.

St Peters is one of the few, if not the only school currently using the software - although it is available to other secondary schools in the Banjul area. In effect, the school is beta testing the product - particularly in the area of student records, assessments, examinations and curriculum. inSIST Global have bolted-on pre-existing software solutions in HR, Payroll, Financial Accounts etc. to the school specific database requirements, thus minimising costs. The Elements of the system currently include modules on Recruitment, Employees, Departments/Branches, Payroll, Employee Absences, Performance, A Self-Service module, Activities and Planning, Students, Classes, Enrolments/Discipline, Charges, Questions and Syllabus, Financial accounts, Tasks, Contacts, Calendar, E-Mail, D.R.M. (database management, permissions, specifications) and Administration.

GIVE role: Dermot Douglas was requested to help staff use the specific areas of the system for which they had access - e.g. student and classes for teaching staff and the administrative and financial sections for administrative staff. In the main, work concentrated on the teaching staff as the administrative staff already had good knowledge of their sections of the system. In order to facilitate this work, access was given to the entire programme.

Many of the academic staff met over the course of the project claimed to be totally computer illiterate. This meant that individual training programmes had to be developed.



As an encouragement for staff to participate, they were promised that they would be assisted in establishing email accounts, Facebook pages and Skype accounts. A progressive approach was adopted requiring teachers to be able to demonstrate competence with setting up and keeping class registers and inputting assessment and examination results before this was done.

Staff in the school were enthusiastic to learn and the timetable over the five week period of the project was extremely full. As well as running individualised programmes, group sessions were also conducted and troubleshooting and help-desk services for staff who were competent on the system. Staff members adept at using the school programmes also helped instruct those who were unfamiliar.

In effect, the whole effort was a confidence building exercise for those who lacked confidence in their ability to use technology for which they had little or no prior training. When it was explained that they didn't have to understand the science and engineering behind the technology but simply how to follow their way through a system aimed at making their life easier they were reassured and took to the system eagerly.

At the end of the five weeks the Principal and staff were fulsome in their appreciation. In discussions with the Principal and the Senior Administrator, early on in the project, it was agreed that improvements that could be made to the Programme would then be communicated to the designers at inSIST Global. Several changes were noted that would make the system more user friendly and a couple of major changes to allow for the frequent failures of the network, the internet and the power supply were suggested. These are currently being discussed with the designers. Dermot Douglas also undertook to discuss the structure of the programme with colleagues back in Ireland and email any further suggestions for improvement.

To improve communications within the school (currently a single printed message that is toured around classes and shown to the teachers, thus missing absent teachers and teachers who are not scheduled in class at that time), a simple group SMS protocol was proposed, based around the school iPhone that could be used to communicate notification of meetings etc. to the entire staff at the same time. This allows a single message to be sent to multiple receivers (this is possible using the current contacts structure on the iPhone as the sending phone, but doesn't require the receiver to have a smart phone; the initial setup is somewhat unwieldy but the pay-off is significant in terms of time saved and recipient coverage).

To improve external communications and to provide an interactive forum a school Facebook page was setup.



Over 700 photographs of the school, the staff, the students and the school farm were made available to the school authorities. A Facebook page was compiled which included some 200 of these photographs in four separate albums (the additional photographs can be used by the school to keep the albums fresh). The page can be accessed at www.facebook.com/StPetersLamin. Despite the fact that the page still has to be formally launched by the school, it has attracted considerable attention in its first week after commissioning.

The GIVE volunteer involved in this project was:

Dr Dermot J Douglas



Skills Centres Report 2014

The Skills Centres were set up to provide second chance education for young women who had left the education system early and to prepare them for the world of work. The centres are usually located in the grounds of existing Lower Basic Schools. The age range of the students is about 16 to 21 years. The curriculum provides basic literacy and maths classes, plus two main skills strands. One of the strands has a practical focus e.g. tailoring and the other is focused on the acquisition of secretarial skills. The courses run for two or three years. However, over recent years many of these centres have closed due to lack of finance.

GIVE has been involved with a number of these centres since 2011. In 2013 GIVE sent two groups of volunteers to the following three schools in Banjul:

- St Peter's Skills Centre, Lamin (60 students)
- St Martha's Skills Centre, Fajikunda (42 students)
- Presentation Skills Centre, Banjul (300 students)

In these schools, the volunteers supported the teaching of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, Home Economics, Needlework and the Preparation for Work Programmes. Through other modules, they contributed to the personal and social development of their students. GIVE supplied 10 laptops to St Peters in 2013, which were preloaded with Microsoft Office, Typing, English and maths programmes. In some schools, GIVE also provided other equipment such as sewing machines. Volunteers also made donations to buy resources and even fit out a new kitchen.

In early 2014 GIVE again sent two groups of volunteer teachers to these same schools, with the aim of continuing and building on the work of previous years. Their work included the following:

- As with the 2013 group they assisted in the teaching of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and the two strands as outlined above.
- In St Peter's the programme was extended to include CV preparation, mock interviews and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE).
- In the Presentation Skills Centre (Banjul) the main focus was on the teaching of English. Good progress was made despite some minor challenges.
- In the St Martha's Centre students benefitted from the donation of 10 laptops by GIVE. The laptops were preloaded with educational programmes as per St Peter's the previous year. These were installed by the volunteers who initiated their use with the students. Volunteers also supported the teaching of English, Maths, Needlework and Crafts.



- In agreement with Marist Sisters in St Martha's, GIVE recruited and are paying the salary of a local woman, Mariam Sallah with IT skills to take over the teaching of the computer based programmes. The volunteers acted as her mentor and also prepared a manual to assist her in managing the learning process through the rest of the year. Mariam Sallah will benefit from further training during the holiday period financed by GIVE.
- In all these schools the volunteers donated teaching materials such as DVDs and manuals and procured items such as clocks and blackboards.
- Many volunteers have maintained contact with the schools and teachers to support the continued delivery of the modules they initiated.

Observations / Findings

- The principals, teachers and students appreciated the work of the volunteers.
- All centres are in need of basic teaching resources.
- A lot of support is required to raise the standard of English and Maths. Computer skills are being taught from scratch.
- The Home Economics and Craft subjects develop many valuable skills and interests and motivate students to continue to further their education leading to employment.
- The introduction of 10 new laptops in St Martha's was a huge boost to the teaching of IT skills, Maths and English, as well as proving a great motivator for the students. The employment of a local teacher at St Martha's ensures that this will continue and is a positive step forward. The students found initial difficulties with computing and ongoing difficulties with the English language and foreign content of the English module.
- The introduction of the SPHE module in St Peter's was well received and will be continued by a local teacher using the resources left by the volunteer.

Conclusions / Recommendations

- GIVE Volunteers are proving effective supporting the delivery of second chance education to the young women in the Skill Centres and in preparing them for work.
- Their efforts are greatly appreciated by principals and teachers.
- Students are motivated and appreciate that their life chances will improve by becoming better educated and by the acquisition of worthwhile skills.
- All volunteers found their work challenging, fulfilling and enjoyable. Good work was completed despite some minor challenges.
- The subjects that GIVE Volunteers support: English, Maths, Home Economics Craft, and IT are of considerable value to the students.



- English emerged as the main limiting factor in the progress of the students and is an area that GIVE should target for more support in the future.
- Discussion is required between returned volunteers and authorities in the Centres to consider a plan for future trips. It is essential to consider the best use of Volunteers' skills and resources in order to raise the standard of English amongst the students.
- Student friendly positive class management strategies need to be developed.
- It would be beneficial if GIVE made a record of all resources donated and to ensure that they are retained and used effectively.

GIVE volunteers involved in supporting work in Skills Centres in 2014 were

Arenda Lyttle
Barbara O'Connor
Carmel Harrison
Catherine O'Sullivan
Catherine Woods
Irene Hickey Gormley
Jim Henry
Joe Mulligan
Lorna Keane
Mary Casey
Mary Helen Davis
Phil Dineen
Ray Murphy