

GIVE REPORT

FOLLOWING VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES IN THE GAMBIA 2016

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GIVE Volunteers in Early Childhood Education 2016

In February 2015, after three years running workshops on 'Early Childhood Education' for teachers of children aged 3 to 6 years (the equivalent of Junior and Senior infants in Irish national schools), GIVE volunteers embarked on working with selected teachers preparing them to facilitate these workshops for their colleagues. The Gambian teachers (facilitators) conducted workshops during the year and returned to review and develop this work with us in January 2016.

Nine facilitators returned to attend GIVE workshops in January 2016. Five newly selected teachers also took part to train as facilitators and benefitted from the sharing of experience gained by their colleagues during the year.

Three GIVE volunteers were assigned to conduct workshops for this group, two returning volunteers and one new member of the team. A further two new volunteers worked four days a week in a nursery school and joined the workshop team on Fridays.

The programme started with a review of the year's work. Feedback was given by the teachers on the relevance of subject areas covered within the workshops. Each facilitator gave a personal written review in the form of responses to a written questionnaire and all engaged in an open forum where aspects of the programme were discussed.

The teachers were keen to continue the format as set out in 2015, to cover the same subjects as before with the inclusion of some new areas. Edward Gibba, Coordinator of Early Childhood Education at the Catholic Education Secretariat (CES), agreed that this was the right approach. Mr Gibba had been in touch by email and phone throughout the year and had met the GIVE planning group who visited The Gambia in November ahead of the 2016 programme. As ECE coordinator, he has an overview of practice in schools and is in the best position to advise and guide us. He attended workshops on a regular basis and was hugely valuable in the contributions he made.

Once we had established how the programme was to proceed, we spent a number of days working with the teachers on revision of subject areas. These included Jolly Phonics, Oral Language Mathematics/Number and Classroom Management. In addition, we included requested modules on 'The Value of Rhyme and Song' and 'Development of Skills for Early Handwriting'. Before the end of the programme we also included a module on 'Craftwork for Young Children' and 'Physical Education'. PE was treated as a subject that benefits children both physically and mentally as well as being an excellent opportunity to integrate with other learning e.g. through number/language games. As in previous years, it was requested that an emphasis should be put on promoting the acquisition of teaching methodologies for the phonics programme, 'Jolly Phonics'. Some time was given each day to making teaching resources.

During the second week of the programme, twenty-five teachers from schools in the local area were invited to attend workshops. These workshops were jointly conducted by the

facilitators and the three GIVE volunteers. The experience of sharing themes and working together was useful and worthwhile. Planning together and sharing the workload is valuable as the facilitators work in pairs when conducting workshops throughout the year.

The facilitators returned to their schools in the third week where they were visited by GIVE volunteers to work together on the practical application of the work done in the workshops in a classroom setting. This will, in turn, contribute to future development of the programme. Volunteers visited local schools and travelled further afield including up country to Bwiam and Farafenni and to Barra on the North Bank. School visits are an important part of the work. As well as giving the volunteers an opportunity to work with the teachers and gauge the practical relevance of the work done in workshops, the visits give an appreciation of the challenges that the facilitators and their teaching colleagues face on a daily basis.

Many nursery classrooms are over-crowded with as many as sixty in some schools. Resources are thin on the ground and classroom furniture and blackboards are often found to be in poor repair. Nobody knows or understands these difficulties better than the teachers themselves and the officials at the CES. Part of our challenge is to appreciate what these difficulties mean for the teachers and work with them so that good teaching and learning takes place. In any teaching environment the very best resource available to the pupils is the teacher herself/himself. Our support of teachers includes working with them on teaching methodologies in curricular subject areas. Central to the work done in the workshops is the promotion of an appreciation of the importance of positive classroom management and an awareness of the value of pupils' positive self-esteem. This should transfer to the classroom along with the proper use of the teacher's voice, use of teacher's time and use of freely available concrete materials and teacher made resources. All of which amounts to a basic understanding of the psychology of teaching and learning and is part of providing a happy classroom environment where teaching opportunities are maximised for the benefit of learning.

On completion of the school visits, facilitators returned to the workshops to review the programme to date and to further extend their experience by visiting selected classrooms together to see modelled lessons in a classroom setting.

One such visit was to a Nursery 3 class where one of the facilitators demonstrated teaching a lesson in Jolly Phonics. This was a most worthwhile experience which demonstrated to the facilitators how well such a class can be conducted.

At the same time as workshops were taking place, two GIVE volunteers were working in a nursery school in Lamin. A volunteer with years of experience of working in Early Childhood Education in Ireland and Africa and an assisting volunteer were placed in a nursery school in response to a request from the school manager. The request was for these volunteers to work alongside a teacher in a nursery class utilising methodologies and classroom management techniques which reflect best practice. The volunteers were made most welcome by the principal and teachers in the school and were particularly welcomed by the class teacher who worked alongside them four days each week. The two volunteers joined the workshop group on Fridays.

This proved to be an interesting and worthwhile venture. It was an opportunity to consider how effectively certain methodologies transfer to the Gambian system and how they are received and used. As part of the workshop experience, the facilitators visited this classroom,

the visit was unavoidably short on the day but was very well considered by Mr Gibba, who felt that it was a valuable experience for the teachers. It is worth giving this model serious consideration for future programmes so that many more teachers may have an opportunity to share/observe this experience. This is a matter for discussion with Mr Gibba once planning for next year gets under way.

During the last week of workshops for the facilitators, a day was given to Craft in the Nursery Classroom. Mr Gibba asked if we could work on craft for young children at 'No cost or low cost'. The facilitators brought all kinds of everything to the session as did the volunteers. There was paper, card, newspaper, crayons, markers, twigs, string, bits of fabric, sand, glue...the list goes on. This material was spread across the floor with all present sitting in a circle brainstorming possibilities. The results were wonderful. Some worked creatively on individual pieces whilst others worked on joint collages, such as one beautiful piece that illustrated a poem about the beach that had been worked on in Number and Oral Language.

On our last day of work in The Gambia, a facilitator, who teaches in a very big school locally, invited us all to attend a workshop she had arranged for the teachers in her school. A number of other facilitators supported her in this effort. It was so good to see such accomplished and professional delivery and to witness the enthusiasm of the teachers attending. It brought home to us the need for these workshops and how well they are received by teachers.

Our experience of working with such enthusiastic teachers and with the amazing support of Mr Gibba, was most rewarding. We are grateful to the CES who enable this exchange and sharing of experience to take place and look forward to continued cooperation into the future.

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

- Margaret Boucher (Coordinator)
- Joan McCann
- Margaret Cunningham
- Mary Weekes
- Pauline Moran
- Anne Fitzgerald Giffney

Report on Lower Basic, Grade 1

This year, for the first time, GIVE volunteers conducted workshops for teachers of Lower Basic Grade One. These took place from January 23rd to March 6th 2016. Grade One is the first year of formal primary education for Gambian children, though most will have benefited from Early Childhood Education in nursery school. Most grade one children are aged seven years. The overall aim of the programme was to introduce and develop in-service training in Oral English, Jolly Phonics, Maths and Classroom Management.

The programme followed the same workshop principles as the GIVE Nursery Programme in

Early Childhood Education which had been successfully established over the past five years.

Prior to the arrival of the GIVE volunteers, forty-one teachers (mostly qualified), from thirty-five schools were divided into three clusters by the Coordinator of Education for Lower Basic Schools at the Catholic Education Secretariat, Mr Dawda Faye. Each cluster was offered an eight-day workshop which facilitated whole group/small group and one to one sessions. The workshops were aimed at updating the teachers' methods of teaching and encouraging them to move from a **repetitive style of teaching to one that engages the child more actively through a focus on experiential teaching and learning.**

The level of English, teaching skills and general ability varied from cluster to cluster and even within each cluster. This necessitated a re-think and a refinement of our own teaching approaches in delivering the workshops. Less became more!!

The following were some **key points** which were emphasised in the workshop training:

- The importance of the **Grade One Curriculum** which formed the basis of the workshop.
- The effective use of the limited **resources available**, for example, the Teacher's book in Maths and English
- The ability to draw up **clear and specific objectives** when planning a lesson
- The ability to **integrate lesson plans** in Maths and English within school plans
- The essential importance of using **concrete materials** when teaching Maths and English etc

During the first week in The Gambia, the GIVE team visited teachers of Lower Basic Grade 1 and observed curriculum delivery and daily classroom routines. This was very useful as it offered some insight into the environment in which the lower basic teachers work. It certainly highlighted the daily challenges faced with regard to class sizes and available resources.

As part of the workshop format, GIVE volunteers returned to the classrooms with clusters 1 and 2.

The aim was to help and support the teachers as they tried to implement and integrate some elements of the course into their classroom teaching. This approach had some success but a more successful approach came about because of the Geography of The Gambia!

Due to the remoteness of their schools, it was not possible for volunteers to visit cluster 3 so the third group of course participants had the opportunity to work "in house" i.e. they all delivered their lessons in St. Teresa's Lower Basic 1 classrooms instead of in their own classrooms. This was to the benefit of all participants as each lesson was observed by at least 6 participants as well as the Irish GIVE team. This was the most successful option as is further highlighted in our recommendations for next year.

The Gambian teachers were all very cooperative, enthusiastic and eager to learn improved ways of delivering the curriculum. There were very definite signs that the new methodologies were being adopted. For this to continue active support and encouragement will be required by school Principals and Mr Dawda Faye Coordinator of Lower Basic Education at the Catholic Education Secretariat.

The success of the work was due in no small way to the weeks and months of preparation that preceded the trip. The November visit to The Gambia to establish areas of need in all sectors was very positive. Throughout the summer and autumn, a series of in- service meetings were held here in Ireland where lessons in English and Maths were drafted and redrafted so as to ensure the best possible outcomes. The goal was that all the GIVE volunteers working in Lower Basic Education would be clear and confident about their specific subject area before leaving Dublin!

Reflections and suggestions

- These first steps into workshops for Lower Basic Teachers were very promising. As requested, Mr Faye was given a list of workshop participants who could possibly become future facilitators of workshops for their colleagues. Whether this will materialise during the current school year or whether the names forwarded will become the core group in another phase of the programme i.e specific peer group training is not yet known.
- On reflection, running three workshops in five weeks was not really the best option. It was very intense, resulting at times in overload for both participants and team. One of the options put forward for consideration is to have fewer workshops but with more participants in each.
- For future programmes it would be advisable to select a venue that is not based in a school due to inevitable noise.
- Visits to the classroom are essential especially for GIVE members who are unfamiliar with the Gambian school system. Knowing the environment in which the local teachers work is important both in the planning and delivery of our programmes.
- The experience of teacher observation afforded by cluster three participants working in a local school proved most valuable and could be looked at in planning for future programmes.
- The workshop also highlighted how very few resources are available to the teachers in lower basic grade one classes. The delight and appreciation of the teachers were very obvious when GIVE supplied each with the Teacher's manual in English and Maths. Supplying essential aids for the implementation of our programme is, as always, a factor in future planning.
- On-going school visits by one of the team members was also very positive. Her role was one of support and guidance, helping teachers implement the workshop guidelines in their own environments. This is an important element in the project.
- Working in **small groups** became very important. It was through small group work that the volunteers learned the constraints of the school planning system, and the general difficulty experienced in going from 'principles' to practical application, from theory to practice, from teachers' notes to a specific lesson plan! In any future planning, it is recommended that more time given to intensive small group sessions.
- These are just some of the reflections and suggestions that have emerged from this

year's programme. The hope is that they will help guide and inform any future planning for Lower Basic workshops. In particular, it is hoped that plans will allow for visits to teachers and principals in the more remote schools who most need support. Practical measures to enable this should be part of planning.

The GIVE volunteers worked in cooperation to deliver this programme. All commented on how rewarding they found the experience. Thanks and appreciation are due to Mr Dawda Faye and to all the teachers who participated in the workshops.

The following GIVE Volunteers were involved in Lower Basic Team in The Gambia:

Margaret Cunningham - Coordinator
Mary Cunningham
Pauline Moran
Mary Weekes
Patricia Britton

GIVE Volunteers in Secondary Schools 2016

An increasing number of secondary teachers are showing an interest in volunteering with GIVE, due to this and a request from the Catholic Education Secretariat, it was decided to allocate five volunteers to three secondary schools in 2016. Two were teachers of Maths and two of Geography. The fifth volunteer was a teacher at third level who offered his skills in the area of ICT. A number of other secondary teachers were allocated to Skills Centres.

The secondary schools involved were St Joseph's Senior Girls' School and St Augustine's Senior Boys' School in Banjul and St Peter's Senior Technical School in Lamin. St Joseph's

and St Augustine's shared a Maths and Geography teacher as these schools are situated next door to each other. The other two teachers, one each of Maths and Geography were allocated to St Peter's. The ICT teacher worked in St Augustine's.

The geography teachers worked on the area of map reading which was requested by the schools.

Maths is a particular challenge needing in depth consideration and support due to the high failure rates in schools generally.

ICT teaching in St Joseph's is based on teaching Microsoft Office Word, Excel and PowerPoint. Each class has a ½ hour per week and is not a core, examined subject. This is a minimal response to providing students in all classes with some useful ICT skills and background. The GIVE teacher taught classes 11 and 12 and believed that it might have been better to have concentrated on classes 10 and 11 as class 12 was involved in preparing for examinations.

The content of the lessons was to explain the basic operation of a computer. This was not too complicated but too demanding for ½ hour per week. The students would need more time to become familiar with these new concepts. The volunteer provided posters to remind interested students of what was presented to them. Towards the end the volunteer gave the students a brief history of computing which was of more general interest and talked about good approaches to learning. Even relatively low quality, posters and charts would be helpful for student learning, retention, recall and revision. Simple posters are effective and easily produced.

Teaching staff were receptive and helpful in facilitating the work of the volunteers. It was understood from the preparatory trip in November that these volunteers would work alongside class teachers displaying good methodologies and subject knowledge, establishing a rapport with students and enhancing their learning experience. In reality, most volunteers regularly found themselves teaching classes without the teacher present, pupils undoubtedly benefitted from the experience. However, for a sustainable impact, it would be necessary to have a shared collaboration between teachers and volunteers involving team teaching and thus allowing a professional relationship to develop. It would also ensure that class and school protocols are adhered to within the classroom.

The volunteers' use of engaging teaching methods leading to strong student involvement and the provision of meaningful classroom stimuli especially in the area of geography, where a data projector was used to demonstrate lessons, enhanced the learning experience of the pupils. Before leaving The Gambia a USB was given to head teachers containing this valuable educational material.

The positive response of students, teachers and school management to the volunteers' work was encouraging and appreciated. Feedback from school management as relayed at the final group meeting offered a strong validation.

The students in all three schools were courteous, motivated and well behaved.

Over the past number of years an increasing number of teachers have volunteered to work at secondary level. Their skills are valued and sought after in schools in The Gambia, however there are reasons why it is more difficult to make the projects at secondary level work to best effect.

- Volunteers in this sector have not returned to The Gambia, this limits the development of continuity within the programme. A number of these volunteers have been on career break and not available.
- Secondary school calendars include assessment weeks and other incidental non-teaching days e.g. sports days and national holidays. This leads to some volunteers having a significant amount of free time.
- Unlike practice in primary teaching, secondary teachers' work is subject based. Some subjects appear on class timetables twice a week. In this case a volunteer would need to be attached to a number of classes in order to be effectively utilised. Secondary schools are large institutions and very busy places, it is appreciated that fitting volunteers into working schedules is a time consuming task, however, for schools to benefit from the six week input of volunteers, it would be necessary for this planning to be in place.

A workshop model along the lines of that operated with GIVE volunteers in Early Childhood Education and Grade One Lower Basic Education is worth looking at as a way of considering planning and management issues as well as working with subject teachers. This would depend on returning volunteers with the relevant experience and expertise taking part and strong communication with the school authorities in order to prepare the types of workshops required. A short planning/management pilot workshop in the fourth or fifth week of the project could be a good starting point and is worth considering. Due to the lack of resources, a workshop on the production of simple classroom teaching aids would also be useful.

Overall the work of the GIVE volunteers had a positive impact on the learning of pupils and GIVE is grateful to the Head teachers and teachers for their warm hospitality and for making this experience possible.

Volunteers in Secondary Schools 2016

Denis Cronin Coordinator

Sean Kerins

Sean McEvoy

Michael Carty

Eamon McQuade also involved in discussions on the establishment of St Francis
University of Science and Technology

St Francis University of Science and Technology

The Catholic Education Secretariat is currently involved in investigating the possibility of establishing a University of Science and Technology for The Gambia. As we were fortunate enough to have a volunteer who was a Dean of Engineering and Professor of Computer Engineering now Emeritus Professor at University College Limerick and with extensive

experience of working with a number of developing universities overseas, it was an opportunity for him to meet with key people involved in this project. He shared the University of Limerick's approach and gave a PowerPoint presentation.

Professor McQuade wrote a report which we hope will be of use to those involved in the planning process. This has been forwarded to the Catholic Education Secretariat in The Gambia.

GIVE Volunteers in Skills Centres 2016

Skills Centre Literacy Programme Report

GIVE has been involved in supporting the work of Skills Centres since first visiting The Gambia in 2011. Skills Centres are vocational centres catering for the needs of young women in their late teens and early twenties who are seeking to learn skills that will enhance their employment opportunities.

Having supported the teaching of Literacy in Skills Centres since 2011, it was decided that the Jolly Phonics Programme should be looked at with a view to adapting it for use with adult learners. This would then constitute an intensive literacy programme to be delivered over a six-week period in 2016. Three volunteers set about this task in July 2015.

In November, Ken Ryan, the coordinator of the literacy programme, travelled to The Gambia. This was a preparatory trip, he travelled with two other volunteers preparing for other GIVE programmes. He piloted the literacy programme in the three Skills Centres: St Martha's, St Peter's and Presentation Banjul. On completion of this pilot run, it was agreed that the programme would be both suitable and effective. Reading material to compliment the programme was sourced and paid for by GIVE as well as 6 white boards for the centres and a marquee (5mx5m) for St Martha's so that classes could be held out of the heat of the sun.

Volunteers travelled to The Gambia on January 23rd for a six week stay. Work on the literacy programme started immediately. Four volunteers were allocated to the Presentation Skills Centre, two to St Martha's and one to St Peter's.

On the first day of work, all the students were tested on their reading ability and those students whose reading ages fell between 4:0 and 8:0 years were deemed suitable to take part on the programme.

Four students with a reading age of 4:0 years were tutored individually in the staff room at the Presentation Skills Centre. Fifteen students were taught in a classroom by another

volunteer whilst the remaining twenty-eight were taught by two volunteers who shared the hair dressing salon.

At St Martha's two volunteers tutored 15 first year and 18 second year pupils. Work took place in the new marquee purchased by GIVE. The programme included second year pupils in this centre at the request of Sr Mary Francis.

Due to lack of space, only one volunteer working on the literacy programme could be accommodated at St Peter's Skills Centre. It soon became apparent that the programme was too intense and demanding for one teacher to implement on his/her own so it was decided that work in this centre would involve general English and include the phonics programme as far as possible. Oral and written English work was covered based on themes relating to the lives of the students. Reading in St Peters was not re-tested after 6 weeks.

The programme was accepted with enthusiasm in all Skills Centres. The students and staff were very engaged. Punctuality and attendance were both excellent.

At the end of the six-week period the students' reading was re-tested. Reading ages had increased by an average of 15mths. This was a very pleasing result for the Irish teachers involved in the programme and justified all the effort invested.

In order to sustain the programme throughout the year, two days were set aside to train 5 teachers of English working in the three Centres. This training took place at the Catholic Education Secretariat and was very worthwhile. Some of these teachers also benefitted from extra tuition in their Skills Centres. In planning for the future it would be worth increasing these two teacher tuition days to five. This would support the delivery of the programme in a more comprehensive way and make a more sustainable impact.

A decision was reached to retain the purchased reading books for the continuation of the programme on the return of volunteers in 2017. It would be advisable to consider ways of allowing these books to be used throughout the year so that the students benefit from using this reading material over the twelve months.

It would be very beneficial for the success of the programme if St Martha's Skills Centre were in a position to offer more teaching hours in English.

The programme was successful and achieved its objective. The schools are to be highly commended for their cooperation at all points. Thanks are due to the Head Teachers, teachers and students who worked together with the volunteers to ensure a successful outcome.

Commercial Language and Health Education

Alongside the work in literacy in the Skills Centres, support was given by a number of volunteers in other areas where this was requested.

In St. Peter's Skills Centre, secretarial skills were taught, in particular basic computer skills. The students in the secretarial classes attended and this year for the first time the students in the sewing class were also given the opportunity to attend. This was very well received.

Two volunteers who were assigned to a neighbouring Nursery School worked in St Peter's Skills Centre for an hour at the end of each working day. They taught two classes on the subject of Health Education for Young Women. Sr Marie Pierre had identified this as an area of particular need and was very pleased with the support.

In the Presentation Skills Centre a volunteer taught business to students in the Commercial Class. The standard was comparable to the Irish Junior Cert. She also covered preparation for the world of work including composing CV's, and preparation for interviews. This is an important part of the work done in Skills Centres where some students are prepared to seek out work in the Commercial sector.

Another volunteer in the Presentation Skills Centre taught French to the students. The overall aim was to improve spoken French with a view to enhancing prospects of employment in the tourist industry. This volunteer also gave classes in general knowledge and spoken and written English. Sr Rosene appreciated all this support.

The volunteers were made most welcome in all three centres and are grateful for the happy and rewarding experience.

Volunteers working in Skills Centres

Ken Ryan Coordinator
Anne Dunk
Marie Daly
Carmel Harrison
Phil Dineen
Rosemary McQuade
Mary McCarthy
Mary Hayes also delivered training to school secretaries
Anne Fitzgerald Giffney
Eilis Fagan Shields
Annie Halferty also Early Childhood Education
Joyce Berkeley also Early Childhood Education
Ciaran Black full-time GIVE Volunteer

GIVE Report on two day workshop to School Secretaries 2016

The Workshops took place over a two-day period. The Secretaries were enthusiastic and willing to learn. They were very receptive to apply a new routine and methodology to their office skills.

The following topics were covered:

- Planning & Organising of Work
- Receiving Visitors
- Telephone Techniques
- Effective File Management
- Dealing with the Post
- Proof-reading and correct display of Business Letters etc.

Extensive hand-outs were given for reference.

The volunteer made recommendations for the purchase of essential office resources.

This work was both rewarding and enjoyed by the volunteer.

St Peters Skills Centre

Ciaran Black is a full-time volunteer at the above Skills Centre since 2011 and his work involves general support of the centre with particular emphasis on integrating both English and Computers which is most successful.