



GAMBIA IRELAND VOLUNTEERS IN EDUCATION (GIVE) REPORT

FOLLOWING VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES

IN

THE GAMBIA 2017



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GIVE 2017 - Report on Early Childhood Education Workshops for Teachers in Nursery Schools

On the preparatory visit to The Gambia in November 2016, Fr Jarju, Secretary of the Catholic Education Secretariat (CES) and Mr Edward Gibba, Coordinator of Nursery School Education expressed their interest in this sector receiving support from GIVE in 2017.

Early Childhood Education has been at the heart of GIVE work since the programme started in 2011. That year many schools were visited and various stake holders in education in The Gambia were met, this was a starting point and guide to the direction GIVE should take. At that time, many teachers in the nursery sector were untrained and it was clear that these schools would benefit from support. Nursery schools cater for children from three to six years and follow a formal curriculum somewhat comparable to the Junior and Senior Infants curriculum in Ireland, though a lot more ambitious in the scope of the curriculum in Mathematics. Bishop Robert Ellison, who had requested Joe Griffin to look into the possibility of retired Irish teachers offering support in schools in The Gambia, and thus pre-empted the founding of GIVE, expressed a strong opinion that GIVE support should start at nursery school level where the foundations are laid.

Early Childhood Education in Nursery Schools became a priority project for GIVE from the start. In the early years Irish teachers visited classrooms and supported teachers in their work. However, it was apparent that it would be a lot more effective to bring teachers together in a workshop model where they would benefit from modules in the core areas of Early Childhood Education delivered by GIVE volunteers and at the same time benefit from the support teachers offer each other and in particular support from their trained colleagues. Over the intervening years, most teachers at this level have received some training at the Gambia College of Education but there is still a very apparent need for support.

GIVE volunteers have worked this workshop model since 2013. At first, week long workshops were held for attending teachers. These took place in the greater Banjul area and in other centres around the country. By 2015, it was apparent that a number of attending teachers with the right support from GIVE volunteers could facilitate the workshops themselves. For the past three years a number of selected teachers have attended workshops designed to assist them in this respect. The attending teachers come from different areas of the country and now facilitate workshops for the teachers in their own schools and in their own particular area throughout the year.

On May 2nd 2017, three GIVE volunteers left Ireland for The Gambia to continue this support for facilitators. They had previously prepared at a number of meetings in Ireland and had been in contact with Mr Gibba with regard to the workshop model for 2017.



At an initial meeting held at the Catholic Education Secretariat on Thursday May 4th, Fr Jarju, spoke of the importance of relating the programme both to the practice of teachers in their schools and to addressing the teachers' particular needs. He requested that we work on an assessment tool that would indicate the implementation of work done in the workshops. We were happy to agree to this and provided the Secretariat with such a document before leaving at the end of May.

The first few days were spent visiting participating teachers in their schools. Workshops started on May 8th, these were held in the hall at the CES in Westfield and ran for two weeks. Twelve teachers, all of whom had previously trained as facilitators, were once again in attendance along with one new participant. The theme adopted and referred to throughout was 'Reflection and Assessment for Best Teaching and Learning' We operated a model which engaged the participants actively at every stage and involved them in reflecting on their presentation and the content of their delivery and its relevance to their colleagues. Presentation skills were prioritised and practised and reflection encouraged at all times on practice both as a facilitator and teacher.

Areas covered were English which included Oral English, Jolly Phonics, Early hand writing skills and a couple of trial sessions on Jolly Grammar (which the participants enjoyed and felt of benefit to themselves), Mathematics - with an emphasis on use of concrete materials and engaging children actively in their learning, Classroom Management which was centred on reflective work in three areas, that of the child, the teacher and the classroom environment and importantly, Presentation Skills. The use of Rhyme and Song in the nursery class was interwoven into the various areas covered and included a session on how to teach a poem.

The participants were most impressive in their engagement and commitment. Many days they continued working well into the evening, long after we had left. This work was in support of each other and concentrated on developing presentation skills in the different subject areas. The work culminated on Wednesday May 17th when, twenty four colleagues from schools in the area attended a day long workshop conducted entirely by the facilitators. It was wonderful to witness the standard of the workshops. The rest of the week was spent in review of this day as a reflective and learning exercise.

Before leaving The Gambia on May 24th, we met once again with the Catholic Education Secretariat to review our work and deliver the Assessment Document which was well received.

All three volunteers involved in this project in May 2017 believe that it was both practical and worthwhile. It was most encouraging to see the level of effort amongst the participants and their ability to deliver a workshop to their colleagues. Our small team of volunteers worked well and comfortably as a team and also found time to relax together and enjoy ourselves. We are very



grateful to Bishop Robert Ellison for his support of our work and kindness to us during our stay. We also appreciate the interest and guidance of Father Jarju and the involvement of Mr Edward Gibba from the start, through the preparatory stages and at every stage through to our final meeting. His encouragement of his teachers and keen involvement in the programme has been core to the success of this work. Our gratitude is extended to all, we appreciate the privilege of working with the Gambian teachers and the special cooperation of the Catholic Education Secretariat and hope to continue the work into the future.

Volunteers working with Early Childhood Education Workshops for Teachers in Nursery Schools:

Margaret Boucher

Margaret Cunningham

Patricia Britton



GIVE 2017 – Report on Lower Basic, Grade 1 Workshops

In 2015, GIVE was invited by the Catholic Education Secretariat (CES) to develop links with Lower Basic Schools. These schools cater for Grades 1-6. The average age in Grade 1 is 6/7 years old. The long-term aim of this project is that Gambian teachers, who have participated with GIVE volunteers, will work with the staff of their own schools and with school clusters demonstrating the methods and the course content they have experienced during this In-Service Training.

This year's team of GIVE volunteers returned to schools in Kanifing, Lamin, Brikama, Kitty, Bullock, Bwiam and Kaimo, meeting with ten teachers who had participated in the 2016 workshops and also their school principals. These ten teachers would consolidate last year's work and continue their Professional Development, becoming Trainers of Teachers (ToT's) with the Catholic Education Secretariat. The course took place in the CES hall and continued for 4 weeks.

Curriculum topics Maths, Literacy (Jolly Phonics, Early Reading, Writing, Oral English, poems and songs), Integrated Studies, P.E. and also Classroom Management were addressed in our course. Each subject was introduced through seminars led initially by GIVE volunteers. These sessions were followed by a Reflective Practice Session. Feedback from the teachers provided the basis for planning the following 3 week course when 16 more Gambian teachers brought the total number attending to 26.

Text books for pupils and Teachers' Guides to the National Curriculum come under the title "The Gambian Basic and Secondary Education Course". Using the Grade 1 Teachers Guides and the pupils text books, along with planning templates for Maths, English and Jolly Phonics, GIVE volunteers each worked with 3 ToT's, developing strategies with them to support their colleagues in creating specific aims and outcomes for their lesson plans.

By the end of the course of Workshops, the group of ten newly-established Gambian Trainers of Teachers had each worked with groups of eight Lower Basic Grade 1 teachers. They had supported those teachers in planning lessons. They had demonstrated lessons to the whole group using active-learning methods. Also, each of the 16 teachers attending the workshops demonstrated lessons to the whole group.

The experience of working together with so many enthusiastic and talented Lower Basic Grade 1 teachers was uplifting, enriching and Great Fun!





Volunteers working with Lower Basic, Grade 1 Workshops

Pauline Moran

Mary Cunningham

Eibhlin McNamara

Heather Evans



GIVE 2017 – Report on Volunteers in Skills Centres Literacy Programme 2017

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. GIVE has been involved in supporting the work of Skills Centres since first visiting The Gambia in 2011.

GIVE is working to provide a suitable Literacy programme. This years' project involved working directly with students, using the British Ability Reading Scale assessment tool to establish a baseline of ability against which progress could be measured. The students attended classes diligently and their confidence and self-esteem improved greatly over the five weeks tuition. Testing with the BAS after five weeks showed that satisfactory progress had been made.

As each Skills Centre runs Sewing classes, some of our volunteers were also able to share their own expertise and offer practical help in working with fabrics. The students completed finished items to a good standard.

Skills Centre Computer Class

One of the Skill Centres runs a two-year Computer Class for six students. GIVE supports these students in improving their computer skills, with the help of one of our volunteers. Time was spent on correct keyboard techniques followed by skills exercises. Some time was also spent advising students on the preparation of Curriculum Vitae together with covering letters.

GIVE has also provided a Secretarial Class to School Secretaries. Following from last years' successful programme, our volunteer continued to provide training in office procedures and organisation.

The volunteers worked in co-operation with the staff of Skills Centre and very much enjoyed the experience of working with the students and staff.

St. Peter's Skills Centre
St. Martha's Skills Centre
Presentation Convent, Banjul, Skills Centre.



Volunteers working in Skills Centres 2017

Sean Lyons

Mary Hayes

Carmel Harrison

Éilis Fagan-Sheils

Betty Brosnan

Tom Mullins

Bríd Milton