



Rev. Joseph and Mrs Karin Ayok-Loewenberg

Stanley House | The Street
Charmouth | Dorset DT6 6PN | United Kingdom

Tel: 0044 (0) 7731 670 928

Mail: ayokloewenberg@fastmail.fm

Web: www.undertreeschools.org

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Dear Friends

Joseph has visited the school a few weeks ago and reported to the UTS trustees that the school and church community was making a lot of difference to the girls, their families and the community of Malek. The staff and pupils with the wider community thank everyone who has been supporting the school, they expressed a deep gratitude for all the hard work!

The school is doing well and the teachers are very excited about what they are achieving. They had benefited from the training course in January, both in terms of academic learning (lesson preparation, English, etc) and for the opportunity to socialise and bond. They were happy to do the course in the holiday time as they otherwise had little to do. Teachers' state salaries are often delayed when funds were limited, with counties being paid in turn.

The national crisis has been affecting schools in the area; some relatives are in the army. Seeing the girls going to school is a sign of normality in an otherwise tense situation, it lifts people's spirit beyond the challenges of this time and shows that there is a future for the country. The new State Minister of Education had visited the school and said it was the best in the area. Ten girls from Aweil South county had achieved the top level in state exams, and three of them were UTS girls.

Two of the ten UTS girls who went to secondary school last year had left, because of liaisons with men. This would traditionally be grounds for great shame, but they had both been encouraged to return to school, and this was helping the development of a more enlightened attitude among the girls and their families. Marriage of the girls is still sought by many parents, with the payment of 100-200 cows for a girl being a strong incentive. Also, girls getting schooling were being chased for marriage by educated men. But the school is beginning to change attitudes to early marriage. One of our female teachers has been mentoring the secondary school girls and has been instrumental to mediate with those families of these 2 girls to let them return to school to continue their education. This sends a strong signal to the younger girls and families.



Joseph sent a big batch of sports equipment to the school. Richard, our all-rounder who looks after the maintenance of the school, packed the school pick-up to the brim and drove it back to Malek. This is a 3 day journey from Malek. The youth group at our school chapel also received a batch of balls.



The school animal herd of 13 cows and 2 bulls is a sign to the town that the school continued to progress. On Saturdays the girls take the cattle to the river to drink. The plan is to raise calves next year.

The political situation sadly has not stabilised as much as everyone had hoped. A government of national unity is being formed by July which hopefully will help to take the next step forward.

We have been incredibly thankful for the initiative of a fundraising group for our secondary school bursaries. Here is a message from them:

Local Fundraising Groups Needed!

The Barnes Fund Development Group, led by Sue Davies, is busy raising funds to support the next cohort of graduates from Malek who wish to progress to secondary school next February. Sue is currently trying to recruit more members to her team. If you wish to join, please get in touch, suedavies94@hotmail.com.

These are some of the fun things they are doing this year. In May, there will be a private viewing at the Victoria and Albert Museum for 20 people. This will be given by a senior guide of the V and A. In July, they will have a stall at Barnes Fair with a tombola with children's prizes. In July, a coffee morning at St. Mary's church. In November, a stall at Barnes Christmas Bazaar, selling handmade craft items and they are planning a wine tasting evening with supper in December for 100 attendees. A musical evening for summer 2016 is being considered for 200 attendees.

Under Tree Schools needs more local groups around the country raising funds for the UTS main charity in their local community. If you think you could help us in any way, no matter how small or large the event, please do get in touch, either with Karin or Sue as the Barnes Group is very happy to share what they have learnt so far!

Also, we are linking in with more schools in the UK. We would like to write some lesson plans for Key Stage 1 and 2 incorporating life in South Sudan. This can be applied to all sorts of subjects, from literacy to geography, from maths to RE. If someone with some teaching background would like to help us, we would be delighted. Enabling us to give this material to UK schools will help children here gain a deeper understanding what it takes to form a new country from scratch, life in South Sudan, and the joys and challenges of a very different life compared to here. Please get in touch with Karin.

May we thank you once again for your amazing support.

With our best wishes

Karin and Joseph Ayok-Loewenberg