

Newsletter February 2012

It's open!

After a bumpy start, Osiligi Obaya Academy is now open. The walls may look bare and the paint still wet, but 55 children are attending lessons.

We have just returned from a 9 day visit to our new school. It is still a building site but the teachers and parents are eager to start lessons so the builders and children are working around each other. There is constant hammering and the lack of glass in the windows and strong wind ensure a thick layer of dust on the school books.

Health and Safety? Hmm... The builders have to be reminded several times not to leave pieces of wood with nails sticking up just where the children walk and play. It's not an ideal school environment but they are managing and it is wonderful to hear the children singing and reciting the alphabet. The teachers leave the children alone on the building site for over an hour during the long lunch break where they are loosely supervised by the day security guard. Both the length of the lunch break and the freedom from supervision are normal for Kenya.

We thought we had planned so well but as always the spanner gets jammed in the works. We have 45 sponsored children - just the right number for two classes so we are surprised when we find an extra 10 children, already in uniform, in class. Who are they? - local children whose parents want to pay.



The classes.

We wonder how their parents afford the fees? Simple answer, they can't. We are learning that the Maasai have a well-developed "fingers crossed" approach - God will provide. The fees will dribble in weekly or fortnightly instead of termly as we hoped and soon many will default. They have all sold a goat to buy school uniform so we can't send them home.

Our solution will be to find more UK sponsors who can help by paying half the school fees, the parent paying the other half. If you would like to help, we would love to hear from you, see www.osiligi.org/sponsor.html
The extra 10 means over large classes already. Also the teachers report that many children are behind, despite having been to other schools already so we are forced to quickly recruit a Baby Class teacher and equip another classroom. Baby class starts on the 6th February and meanwhile, the Nursery teacher will cope with 35 children.

Our classes are Baby, Nursery, and Pre-unit. Baby class is the equivalent of play school, but being Kenya, the style of teaching is much more formal. Pre-unit is like our reception class. The children are aged between four and seven - probably!

Osiligi Charity Projects

We interview the children to know something about their lives for their UK sponsors. Most children are desperately shy and the youngest

Starting school is terrifying

won't say a word. We are probably the first white people they have seen. A local head teacher tells us that starting school is terrifying. Not only are they homesick, but many fear entering a big room with a high ceiling in case it falls on them. Their huts - the only buildings they have ever seen - are low and dark. The hard concrete floor is so different from the mud floors they are used to. Even the teacher in a smart suit is apparently frightening as she looks so little like their mothers who wear Maasai dress.



The 6 classrooms and toilet

In a few weeks, the children will become used to all the new experiences. This is when the real lessons begin. Lessons in Kenya are much more formal than the UK. There is very little learning via play. Knowledge is drilled into the children rather than the children discovering knowledge themselves. This is good for passing exams but not good for life skills. Over time, we hope to combine the best Kenyan and Western teaching methods.

The school kitchen is still not ready. In the meantime, our wonderful cook copes with a small cramped makeshift kitchen.

Cooking for 58 children and staff is performed in a pot balanced on 3 stones over an open fire. The dining room is also not available so Richard, the Osiligi troupe leader has kindly loaned the use of his garden when it is not occupied by goats or donkeys.



Children eating lunch in Richard's garden.

Lunch is usually rice or ugali with a vegetable stew. For many children, this is the only solid food they will receive all day. Even though the cost of ingredients for lunch is around 26p, it represents about a third to a quarter of the school fees.

The kitchen will be ready by the middle of February. To reduce the amount of wood consumed, it is fitted with energy saving stoves.



The two energy efficient stoves

Kenya is a country where the basic services that we all take for granted, ie water, sewage, electricity, gas etc are simply not there, especially in the rural areas. The Maasai lifestyle has been one of the most environmentally friendly, but like everywhere, is now changing.

A green sustainable school

The charity is trying to make the school as environmentally friendly as possible. Our goal is to produce no waste and to only buy in food. Water will be harvested from the roof and stored. Already we have built a 50,000L water store. We need 2 more to complete the storage. Sewage will either be decomposed in our septic tank or composting toilets will turn sewage into soil and fertilizer. Electricity is generated



The solar panels producing electricity for the school

by a 450W solar system - sun being plentiful all year round in Kenya. Cooking fuel is minimized using energy efficient stoves. When we have sufficient money, we will install a biogas plant to power the kitchens. Not only is the school good for the local environment, it also teaches the children that progress can be accomplished in a green sustainable way. Many of the ideas employed at the school are equally applicable at their homes.

Osiligi Charity Projects is a UK registered charity number 1135331

The solar electric lighting and power will allow the school to be used at night for teaching adults. The school will soon be running adult evening classes in literacy, numeracy and computing skills. The charity has already started its first adult class in farming.



Maasai farmer and teacher David on the land soon to be used for teaching agriculture.

The Maasai, because of their nomadic background, have very little knowledge of how to grow food. The Charity has employed David, a farmer, to teach the community about soil management and growing vegetables. The lessons will start in the next few weeks, once the rains start. The rains only last about 8-12 weeks so the crops have to be fast growing. This year the lessons will concentrate on maize, beans and green leafy vegetables. Maize and beans will be dried and stored for eating in the dry season. The charity has given David seeds to give to the students, so they can practice at home.

Our thanks as always go to the many supporters of the charity. Without all the donors, sponsors and people offering their time, the above projects could not happen. If you would like to help in any way, please contact us.

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Roger & Helen Pannell February 2012
Email - info@osiligi.org