

## **Osiligi Charity Projects Newsletter March 2011**

Hello,

February, another visit to Olepolos, home of the Maasai Warriors. We try to visit every three months to make sure all the Charity's projects are on track. Our work is varied: mucky, frustrating, surprising, tiring, always humbling and sometimes truly rewarding.

### **New School build**

Our centre of excellence is still on schedule to open in January 2012 although the last £40,000 is proving difficult to raise. The lawyer has produced nothing useful since June. We visit him in Nairobi yet again. The only way we will get our paperwork is to sit in his office breathing down his neck until it's done. He shuffles some paper, fiddles a bit on his computer and .....result! Trust documents and a first draft for the school constitution appear, miraculously.

We now have three building contractors preparing quotes. All agree that 60% of their workforce will be local people. One looks at the plans and is anxious about the toilets "you can't put them there, right next to visitor reception!" He has a point.

### **Water**

We are on the brink of the wet season. The billy goat (two yards from our pillow) bellows throughout the night. The Maasai say this means rain is coming. Let's hope so. There is no pasture for the animals, the huts are full of dust and it's hot: 34 degrees. Even the Maasai are listless. The goat was spot on - rain arrives on the 13<sup>th</sup> February. Torrential rain hammers on our tin roof every night. Six inches can fall in a few hours. We wake to floods that evaporate by afternoon. Dirt roads are churned up, impassable.

Our well continues to be the primary source of clean drinking water for miles around, although following this trip, the Moreo Spring is now also providing clean water. On the last visit, we tapped and protected the Moreo Spring. We left a local builder to complete the process. Unfortunately he did not complete it, and the pipe work was damaged by goats. This time we repair the pipe work and erect a fence to keep the goats and donkeys out. This spring will be another important source of clean drinking water during the 8-9 month dry season.



Kid, 4 days old, before he gets noisy and destructive, with a sponsored child, neither noisy nor destructive.

### **Sponsored children**

We now sponsor 14 children at the existing local school in Kisamis. One of our year 8 leavers, a bright girl, did very badly in her KCPE (Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education) exam scoring 156 out of 500 - exam nerves according to her teachers.

We invite her to repeat the year, the alternative being marriage.

Two of our sponsored children, brothers aged five and six, are orphans. They lived with their grandmother who sadly died in February. This being a Maasai community, they are quickly welcomed into new families and now live next door to each other.

One of their new mothers is Lydia - some of you will remember her from the Warrior's tour.

### **Living together**

Thomas aged 15, asks us about our children and where they live. We tell him our son lives with his girlfriend. He is shocked "if I lived with a woman for just one day, my father would kill me" This was not a figure of speech.

### **Going to secondary school**

Finding a place and preparing for secondary school is gruelling and complicated. Schools invite pupils by letter throughout January and February based on their exam marks but even some high scorers are not called. A scramble for places begins. If an invitation does come, the real test comes the next day. The child has one day only, to accept, pay fees and uniform, travel and buy a mountain of stuff. If he turns up later than 3pm his place may be re-allocated and he must return home with this mountain.

#### School administration creaks:

They have no internet, resist using the phone, won't accept cash or cheques, only bank deposit. Fees and uniform money must be deposited in different banks.

#### Bank administration creaks:

Two counter staff - 1.5 hour queue to pay fees.

No inter bank transfers - queue again for 1.5 hours to deposit uniform money. The second bank is two hours away by bus.

#### Secondary School equipment list (all schools are boarding).

1 pair bed sheets, blankets, pillow, 2 pillowcases

1 mattress (yes indeed, this must be carried to school!)

A uniform. 1 pair rubber shoes, 1 pair black leather shoes

3 passport photos certified by former Head teacher

Medical certificate from Government Medical Officer

Photocopy of Birth Certificate

Soap, towel, mirror, comb,

Metal bucket, mug, spoon, plastic plate

Bible, hymn book, Oxford Dictionary (the big one), a novel, ruler, 3 files.

Maths table (yes, log tables for those of you old enough to remember)

Large metal trunk with padlock, rucksack

The family must buy all this on the day of travel because each school list is different. Without a guaranteed place, parents can not afford to buy it speculatively. Most can't afford it at all. On the plus side there will be little else to buy during the four years of school except new shoes.

Total cost of equipment and the first journey to school: about £270.

Typically fees for a year are about £280 but over half of this is due on the first day. This rate is similar for government and private schools.

Some good news: our other Maasai Plains leaver, Bernard, gets a place at Kiambu High School in Muranga, a four hour bus ride away. He buys his mattress in Muranga and makes it to school by 6pm. He is three hours late but all is well. He has worked hard for this. His family is bursting with pride and deeply grateful to his sponsor.



Bernard (left) aged 18, and family. He will finish secondary school aged 22.

**Kisamis** is a collection of 25 shops, a slaughter house and three schools lining a tarmac road from Kiserian to Magadi. The shops are small tin shacks, all selling the same few grocery items. The shopkeeper stands behind bars or wire mesh and sells through a small opening or wooden tunnel. Everything is sold in tiny quantities: enough washing powder for one wash, 10 grams of tea, 1 aspirin, 1 sweet. The typical cost of each sale is between 4 and 13 pence. Kerosene for lamps is decanted into tiny bottles, enough for one or two days. We begin to understand how difficult it is to find the money for school fees or even school lunch money at the start of term. This is demonstrated very graphically one day: walking to Kisamis at about 10:00 we are greeted by a mass exodus from school. The children tell us they have been sent home for not paying their lunch money - about £8 for the term.



### **Kisamis Women's Group**

The women sell 20 solar lamps within a few days, earning a tidy profit for the Group and freeing 20 homes from the dangerous fumes of kerosene lamps (see the last newsletter for more information). The Charity made the Group an interest free loan to support small businesses but we note that many of the women borrow from the Group to pay termly school fees. We are wary of creating a debt culture. The saving grace is that all interest paid on the loans increases the wealth of the Group as a whole, giving security and potential for bigger investments.

The women want to buy a plot of farmland and a maize grinding mill. The projects will provide income for the group and also give much needed local employment. They need funding for these so the Charity will help them prepare a proposal to present to various trust funds. If anyone knows of any funds available for such an enterprise, we would love to hear from you.

The Group has strict rules. Talking out of turn and lateness incur a 40p fine but being Kenya, there is generous leeway. On the day of the meeting it had rained and many women, having cleaned mud from their huts, arrived two hours late. They were not fined. This group is organised, democratic, purposeful and proud.



Sponsor child's mother selling charcoal in Kiserian town

## **A church**

One of the roles of the Charity is to match projects in the Maasai areas to potential donors. In May we saw the foundations for a new church in Olepolos and were asked if we knew anyone who would help finance the rest in partnership with the Maasai congregation. The existing church, a tin hut, is too small for the present and growing congregation. Although the Charity is non-religious we were happy to seek a donor as building the church will provide work for local people and the current church has a history of supporting the very poor in the area, regardless of belief. We found a donor in the UK and the building is now forging ahead.

## **Fundraising for the new School**

We make no apology for a bit of blatant Fair Trade advertising here.

Our "holiday" souvenirs are a few beautiful leather, beaded bracelets and key rings. We are selling them to raise money for the new school build but the biggest benefit will be to the women of Olepolos who make them. For most it's their only source of income. It takes a day to make a bracelet. Money from one buys two 1kg bags of maize flour for ugali- staple food for the family for three or four days. Want to buy one?

Bracelets cost £10.00, keyrings £4.00, including postage.

Send a cheque made out to Osiligi Charity Projects to Elwell House, West Buckland Devon, EX32 0SW. Include your email and home address and state the colours you like. Length of bracelets when closed is 19 - 20.5cm. Key rings are with/without shells. Email [helen.pannell@osiligi.org](mailto:helen.pannell@osiligi.org) if you'd like to know more and availability.



### **Numbers**

Getting accurate facts and figures from Kenyans can be very difficult.

We ask Tumpas "How old are your grandmother and grandfather?"

"Very old - 110!"

### **The Warriors' tour**

The troupe will be performing in Scotland again in early September then in Essex and Dorset in September / October.

Dates will be posted shortly on the Warrior's website.

### **Facebook**

The Charity has joined the Facebook era. If you have a Facebook account, you may wish to "like" our Facebook page, in order to keep up to date with the latest happenings or to write comments. A Facebook link is on our homepage [www.osiligi.org](http://www.osiligi.org)

### **Donating**

Finally, a reminder that if you are thinking of donating to any charity, you may wish to pull this forward into this tax year. The amount of gift aid that a charity can claim is being reduced by 10% from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

A big thank you to all our generous supporters. Without you projects like these could not happen.

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