

## **Newsletter from Sister Mary, St Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired, Makeni**

Most importantly, we wish to say a huge thank you to all our supporters for all their kindness and generosity. From Daniel O'Donnell to St Anselms, Friends of St Joseph's and countless others, you make a huge difference to all we do. Thank you again.

In recent months the elections have caused a lot of disruption to the school, with the school closing for voting days. With the new president announced yesterday, we hope and pray for stability and peace. The older pupils and those taking their exams are currently at school studying, and many of the teachers are giving up their holiday time to help them study. We hope the majority of the pupils will return within the next two weeks.

### **Building Work**

There is lots of building work at present, as we are building a new carpentry workshop and kitchen lean to, as well as making changes to the school's toilets – we are in desperate need of toilets for adults and disabled access toilets, and are looking to convert existing storerooms and build a small new block of suitable toilets. We have plans for these and are being supported by the Friends of St Joseph's.

The new block of toilets and showers which they funded is working well, and a few small changes are still being made – building secure lockers for the children's belongings and bigger table for the senior pupils to eat at.

We are also looking at fire safety in the school with help from Makeni City Council and the Friends of St Joseph's to make sure that the pupils and staff are as safe as possible from fire risks.

### **The Guesthouse**

The guesthouse has been very busy recently, with regular bookings from Irish NGO Trocaire using the conference facilities to host workshops. We have also been visited by Global Schoolroom, who have stayed and also held training sessions for Cluny Primary and Secondary schools. The guesthouse is featured in the Lonely Planet guide to West Africa, and the Brandt Guide to Sierra Leone!

### **The Farm**

The farm continues to produce palm oil, vegetables and eggs. The poultry are doing well, and the sale of their eggs provides a small income to the school. Feed is bought from Freetown, which is a challenge, but this feed means that the poultry remain in good health and grow well. The male chickens are being sold for meat when they reach full weight, and we expect a lot of orders in time for Ramadan.

Alfred, who supervises the pupils on the farm, has begun to plant cucumbers in the swamp, and hopes to harvest the previously planted cashew plants in the next few months. These can be sold to a nearby cashew processing plant. However, Alfred has some concerns about the security of these trees and some of the larger palm oil trees, and hopes to build a small house for a security guard and his family in order to safeguard the income of the farm! We have approval from Sister Catherine to begin to go ahead with this, and we are currently awaiting quotes for the amount this will cost.

Alfred also hopes to invest in new tools for the farm workers to make harvesting more efficient. Five senior boys live up at the farm. One major problem facing the farm is lack of transport for the pupils, workers and staff, alongside the problem of getting feed and equipment to the farm – as it is over 30 minutes drive away in a good vehicle, and the school has only one car and driver,

this can often hold up progress on the farm, and means that monitoring the activities there is often a challenge.

### **The Tailoring Workshop**

The pupils in the tailoring workshop are learning well and are making products to sell for a profit at the school's guesthouse. They are making shopping bags with the school's logo on, and have taken an order of bow ties from some visitors to the school. These will be sold by friends of the school in the UK, to help fundraise. Bobson, one of the senior pupils, oversees a small container shop which visitors to the school guesthouse can buy items from.



(Above, pupils in the tailoring workshop study profit and loss)

### **Carpentry**

The boys undertaking carpentry training are continuing their lessons. They have also learned new skills, like concrete formwork and scaffolding, from the professional builders working on the school's boundary wall. We hope to introduce modules in technical drawing in the near future, to help them formalise their skills.



### **Art**

One of our most talented pupils, Sembu, will be taking a carving lesson from a local professional carver who makes signs and ornamental carvings to sell.

Another pupil, Marie, is practicing weaving country cloth, and younger pupils are learning from her. Many of the pupils learn art skills in their lessons, and enjoy drawing.

## Catering

Pupils learning catering have been practicing their skills in the container cookshop, selling breakfast and lunches to local schoolchildren and workers in the area. Salimatu, one of our teachers who specialises in business, has been monitoring the pupils progress in learning business skills. Pupils have also cooked meals for guests staying at the school guesthouse, and sold cakes to the local community over the Christmas period.

(Right, Marie in the cookshop)



## Teacher Training

Thanks to the Makeni Trust fund, we have four teachers completing their HTC in special education. Samuel and Siddie have both graduated with their B Ed, which Mustafa is still completing his. An additional six teachers have begun their HTC certificates.

## Akim

Akim, one of our pupils who fell from a tree and was paralyzed, had typhoid which is was bad news, but thanks to the care of Loreto clinic and Sister Philomena has now recovered. He has made some progress recovering from his fall, but the bedsores he has and his injuries are still extremely serious. One of the older pupils, Marie Koloko, who trained as a masseuse at Loreto clinic, visits each day to help with physiotherapy. Staff and pupils at the school try to visit him as often as possible. He is regaining some feeling, which means that though he is now conscious of the pain from the sores, long term, with the right treatment, we can have some small hope for his recovery.

## Outreach Activities

Two of our teachers, Siddie and Samuel, participated in workshops and monitoring for teachers in rural schools, hosted by Dr McCaul who held the workshops at UNIMAK on the topic of inclusion and special needs education. The follow up activity undertaken by Siddie and Samuel was to monitor how the teachers implemented the skills they learned in the workshop. Guy Le Fanu, from Sightsavers UK, visited UNIMAK and was amazed at the impact that the workshop had on changing the attitudes of teachers and families towards children with disabilities, who had previously been stigmatized. Mr le Fanu was impressed at the impact the teachers of St Joseph's have had on changing the mindsets of communities, and the work of the special education department in UNIMAK. He came to assess the work done by the ISNE team and wishes to prioritise sharing their work across the country.

Another example of how the school has a wide reaching impact is a recent story of one of our former teachers, who identified a pupil's dyslexia, which he had learned to recognise whilst training at St Josephs.

The staff have been involved in a lot of advocacy work, ensuring that pupils taking exams are given appropriate support, such as extra time or exemption from oral and listening tests.