



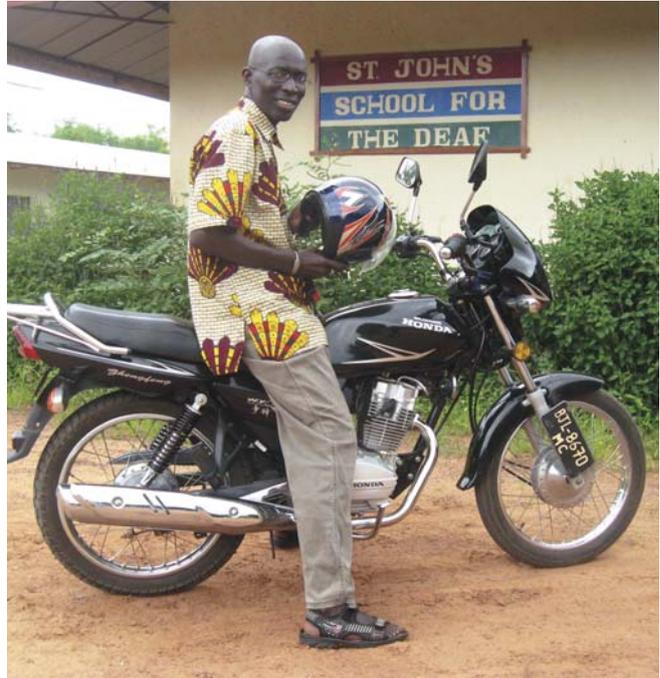
Deaf Children in The Gambia, West Africa

Malcolm Garner shares some of his memories of travelling to and working in Gambia providing training courses for local teachers

Gambia is the smallest country in Africa being only 30 miles wide for much of its length. If one end were to be placed at Bristol the other end would only just reach Lands End! It is also a very poor country with few natural resources. Its people are nonetheless friendly and welcoming and it is sometimes known as the 'Smiling Coast of Africa'. Like many other developing and tropical countries, the pace of life and change is often slower than in the developed world and I have heard it said, not without a little pride, that 'In Gambia we leave time behind at the airport' and that GMT means 'Gambia maybe time'!

I first went there in 2004, driving overland, and delivered a large quantity of second hand hearing aids, radio aids, audiometers and other audiological equipment. However, I found that, although there is a day school for the deaf (St John's School for the Deaf), there were no qualified Teachers of the Deaf in the country. There was very little by way of hearing aid use, nor was there any regular or routine assessment of hearing loss in children, or facilities and staff available to treat ear infections etc.

Since that first visit I have returned to the country more than thirty times, usually accompanied by one or more willing Teachers of the Deaf colleagues, and between us we have worked over the years to bring about change and improve provision and practice of both audiological assessment and support, and also the availability and quality of educational support for deaf children.



Itinerant (peripatetic) Teacher Ali Jatta with new motorbike

Initially we provided training courses for teachers at St John's and from mainstream schools where a few deaf children were placed, without any support. We also set up the 'Gambian Deaf Children's Support Project' (GDCSP) to try and publicise the needs and attract support for our work www.gambiandeafchildren.com



HARK mobile clinic with staff and patients at Bansang

Then, as we began to see the range of need, we widened our involvement and were successful in persuading Sound Seekers (formerly the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf) to raise funds and provide a brand new mobile hearing assessment clinic, called the HARK. Local staff from both education and health services were trained in audiological assessment, earmould making and hearing aid fitting in order to work on the HARK and it started visiting local clinics around the country in 2008.

Since then both GDCSP and Sound Seekers www.sound-seekers.org.uk have worked in partnership and initiated a range of projects. While GDCSP members have often paid their own



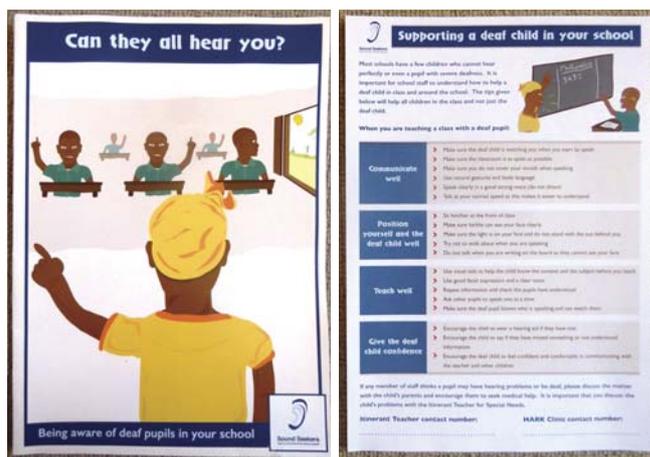
Earmould Workshop at St John's School before and after

costs, project funding has been provided by a number of generous individuals and agencies. Significant projects have included the following:

- Introduced the first peripatetic (itinerant) Teachers of the Deaf. We trained and funded two specialist teachers and provided motorbikes and fuel to enable them to visit deaf children in mainstream schools. (Note: the Education Ministry subsequently adopted this model of provision and trained and now employs 30 itinerant teachers for SEN, including deafness).
- Converted two rooms at Bansang Regional Hospital for use as an audiology clinic and funded training in audiology for a Gambian national to work at the clinic.
- Converted a spare classroom at St John's into an audiology clinic with an earmould making workshop, and a separate sound proof testing room.
- Opened the first unit for

deaf children, in a primary school at Basse in the Upper River Region. Started with eight children in 2014, now with 29 pupils. New classroom block completed Jan 2016. (Education Ministry once again has copied our model and opened a second unit, at Essau, in September 2016.)

- Funded and assisted with the appointment and training of two sign language interpreters. One works with the Gambian Association for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GADHOH), the other is now employed by the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) supporting deaf students in a number of departments.
- Provided training in HI and VI for all senior education advisers (Cluster Monitors) to raise awareness of the needs of deaf and visually impaired children in their regions.
- Assisted with provision of school transport for pupils at St John's, notably provision of a replacement engine and overhaul of one of the school buses.
- Run numerous other training courses and workshops for staff from St John's School and arranged for one



Training Folder plus one of the pages



Babs Day & Lynda Holland training teachers in Gambia



QToD from Longwill School in Birmingham to spend six weeks working at the school in 2014.

- Currently in process of designing and building a large extension to the Audiology Clinic at the country's main hospital in Banjul and equipping it with modern and efficient test and treatment facilities.

Another of our more recent projects has been one of the most successful. In July 2015 Babs Day, David Couch, Lynda Holland and myself spent a week in Gambia and trained the thirty SEN itinerant teachers to themselves be trainers, and showed them how to deliver a two-hour long course in deaf awareness to schools they visit across the country.

This is referred to as 'Step-Down Training' and, as part of our input, we provided the itinerant teachers with specially designed training materials. These have

culturally appropriate content and are intended to help mainstream teachers identify and then manage deaf children in their classes.

Sufficient copies were produced so every school could have a copy, and the Itinerant teachers were paid a small allowance for each course they delivered. The actual step-down training programme started in January 2016 and the itinerant teachers have worked really hard to make it a success. Amazingly, the latest report shows that between them they have delivered more than 398 courses and provided deaf awareness training to well over 4000 teachers!

The feedback forms from teachers have been universally positive about the training and said how valuable it has been, and many have said they would like further similar training, possibly also regarding visual impairments or other SEN.



The boost in confidence among the Itinerant teachers has been very evident and they have clearly enjoyed the training role. Thanks are due to Sound Seekers and the States of Jersey for supporting and funding this remarkable initiative and we now hope the training materials can, with only small adaptations, prove equally useful in raising deaf awareness among teachers in other African countries.

Malcolm Garner is the Chair of the Gambian Deaf Children's Support Project and a Trustee of Sound Seekers.

Training Course on deafness for Cluster Monitors

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