

Hello,

My name is Averil Sessions. I met Christina on a Greek island, where we had both enrolled on a yoga course. By the time we parted company, I had agreed to go to Malawi for a month as a volunteer. I'm British, and Christina was confident that I could easily teach English to some of the children. I wasn't so sure, so I went off and took a short course in teaching English to speakers of other languages before I left. And she also asked me to teach some of the ladies to knit. I have retired from my work as a lawyer but I can tell you, I worked jolly hard! And I



was extremely glad I had done that course!



Teaching English took me into some of the primary schools. I was keen to see how the children were taught by their Malawi teachers, primarily because I wanted to make sure that what I was doing complemented their school work, and didn't confuse them. I was shocked. And the more I learnt about the school system, the sadder I became. There are very few facilities. There are so many children whose families cannot afford to send them to school, or buy the exercise books, pens, uniforms and equipment that they need. The situation in the secondary school is particularly worrying. The children who are selected to go

there are some of the brightest in the district. If *their* families cannot afford their fees, then the country is failing to educate the very people who can make a difference in the future.

I live in a beautiful village in West Sussex, in the south of England. When I came back, I gave a presentation to my friends and neighbours, and I raised a surprising amount of money to help pay school fees, and buy solar lamps for the children to study by. In the autumn of 2016 I set up The Malawi Schools Project (MSP) and by the time I returned to Malawi at Christmas 2016 I had raised enough money to pay for a new school block for Mwanazanga Primary School, as well as to fund school fees and other forms of assistance for the children. We had a wonderful opening ceremony for the new school block when I was in Malawi in June 2017. Christina and I decorated it with ribbons in the colours of the Malawi flag, the school committee put up a canopy for visitors to sit under, we had pots of plants all around, dancing, singing, a drama, and of course many speeches.

The knitting has borne fruit too. Christina has been able to set up a small income-generating activity for the 13 ladies whom I originally taught to knit. Their work is very good, and we are able to sell some of the things they make, using any profits to fund Afrogarden and MSP's activities. Of course the ladies receive a good income for their work, which I'm sure must make a huge difference to their families.

I am fortunate in so many ways, when I visit Malawi. Christina is always there and we work very close together. I stay with a delightful village family – my “Malawi home”, who look after me and kindly help me with whatever I need. Their children (like so many Malawi children) are a delight: bright, funny and engaging. And though the people are not effusive (it's not their way) they are charming and kind, and I am sure they are genuinely grateful for the help we bring, and our commitment to making life better for them.



Greetings from Averil

www.themalawischoolsproject.org