

Manx Links... a series in which Cheryl Cousins from the One World Centre talks to local people, who have lived or worked in the developing world, about remarkable people they have met!

My niece is staying with us during her 7 weeks placement at Nobles hospital. Having completed a placement in the Shetland Isles and worked in Edinburgh, it seems that she is well impressed at the standard of our facilities and health care service here on the Island! It never ceases to surprise me how easily we can grow to believe that our standard of living is the norm... even in comparison with the United Kingdom we are a privileged nation, let alone in comparison with the developing world!

One thing that many people say to me about supporting charities in the developing world is “you never know if the money really gets through.” Well having witnessed a committee meeting for the Manx charity, The Koru Hospital Fund, I can guarantee that every penny is accounted for! The peaceful sunshine and well tidied garden in Onchan were at odds with purposeful meeting I witnessed the other day where strategy planning and accountability of funding, has obviously been the backbone of making this such an impressive project.

Mary Stewart the founder of the charity has worked unceasingly over the last 15 years, supported by the people of the Island, St. Anthony’s Church, private donations and the IoM Overseas Aid budget to raise literally over a hundred thousand pounds to help build the 80 bed Koru hospital in Kenya, to install electricity, bring a bore hole for fresh water, equip and refurbish the maternity ward, provide classrooms, education etc. Over the years she has been joined on her frequent trips to Kenya by over 20 Island volunteers, some with nursing skills, many with general skills and enthusiasm, along with members of N.K. Joinery who have committed time and expertise to help develop various projects.

Now Mary is about to realise a dream for herself, to go out to live and work on the project for the next two years. Having worked as a lecturer and programme manager at the IoM College she will be able to use her obvious organisational ability and skills to help the general running of the project. She will also be working alongside two remarkable women.

During her first visit to the mission in 1991 Mary remembers meeting Beatrice Ayieko, a fourth grade student, because of her amazing singing voice! Now at the age of 33 Sister Beatrice, both a nun and a nurse, is the Koru Hospital Administrator liaising with Mary and the Archbishop of Kisumu the Chairman of the Board. Sister Beatrice’s work includes overseeing the 26 members of staff, nurses, community officers, clinical health workers and cleaning staff whilst practicing as a nurse herself and liaising with architects and builders during the development and refurbishing programme.

Situated in the rural area of Koru where subsistence farming is the norm, the hospital serves a community of 27,000, dealing mainly with cases of TB, malaria, & work related injuries. It has a maternity unit and operates a mobile clinic, a disability centre, health education programmes and is developing a volunteer team to assist in the running of the

HIV/AIDS education programme. Health care is not free in Kenya, it is hoped that this year the Kenyan Government will pay 50% of the costs. Mary and Sister Beatrice are working together to create a development plan that will make the hospital a fully operational and sustainable, self funding project by the year 2009.

It is estimated that 1 in 4 people in this area are affected with the HIV/AIDS virus, resulting in a devastating psychological and sociological impact upon the community. Mary plans to work alongside Martha Ayieko assisting her in her orphan feeding programme. Martha is a 60 year old retired banker, and a member of the hospital board who has been instrumental in driving forward the Hospital development programme.

She has returned to live in her home area, working her own shamba and experimenting to introduce high yield crops to help create a more balanced diet. Though a professional woman, she has chosen to give up her car and to live in the simple corrugated-iron house which is the norm for poor people here. Targeting 250 primary schools she has identified orphan children who are undernourished, and has personally sold land to raise funds for the programme. She now oversees the feeding of vitamin enriched porridge twice a day to aid orphans, and is noticing a decline in sickness rate... and an increase in school attendance!

The Koru Hospital is not comparable to Nobles, but it does offer health care and health education on a level that was unimaginable to the community. Some of the dreams of three remarkable women have already become reality, but when Mary moves out to Kenya and they become a team, who knows what they will achieve for the community! If you would like any more information about the Koru Fund, or would like to become involved with the project or to support it in its work please contact Mary Stewart on: 673568 or mary_stewart@manx.net