

Blog 20 January 24

Happy New Year to all of you wonderful supporters and friends. My but it is cold today.... As I grow older, I swear my blood is thinning. When I think we were in The Gambia this time last year in all that lovely warmth....

Well, we have had another really good year and have now done over 1200 cataract operations. We are both over the moon about this. To make a difference to one person feels lovely, but honestly 1200 people, plus their families and in some case their communities is a real high.

I have to say the team in The Gambia have been amazing, working so hard and being so patient when we are unclear about what is happening when or why a particular thing is so costly. Jim works **so hard** protecting our funds!

So: I left you last time with news of camp 20. I rather spectacular one from our point of view. Today I will report on FIVE more, all successful and full of life changing stories.

Camp 20 Urban camp from April to July 23

We have been really touched and excited about this initiative which began after one of our supporters Mariama a trained ophthalmologist reported back that in the main eye hospital the SZRECC individuals were turning up regularly for cataract surgery and being turned away (regularly) for lack of funds to pay the small sum required for the Interocular lens and necessary medication to ensure the operation was a success, each time with less and less sight. The funds we put aside for this are husbanded VERY carefully and used only when Alasana Touray is convinced of the poverty of that person. Camp 20 produced several heart-rending stories one of a lame man who bought in his blind wife.

Camp 21 at Essau

This ran from 18th July until 23rd August 23rd, it took so long because it is the rainy season and travel is difficult and compounded because the farmers need to work on their crops. It developed from the community screening we did earlier in the year in March. They did 70 operations.

Camp 22 was held in Bansang

This came out of the community screening carried out in Niamina Katamina in The Central River Region in May with the support of an enthusiastic Gambian Based charity called GuiMam, who saw 270 individuals and used drugs provided by us for the simple eye complaints that are rife. The Cataract camp. Twenty-nine cataracts were carried out, and four were treated for Ptergium, which is a triangular shaped growth on the eye caused most often by the sun and by dust. Its removal is simple by a trained operator.

Camp 23 another Urban camp

Twenty ops were done over a period of four months from August to October. One particularly stood out for me. A lady Nyima who is 90 and lives in the Upper River Region, she has only one daughter who had moved away to an area near Kombo. Because she became blind in both eyes she had to go to her daughters, it is a duty in The Gambia for children to care for their parents. Nyima was forced to leave her subsistence farm because she could no longer see. She was advised to go the SZRECC, where she was lucky to find Alasana and our small fund. Here is a photo of her. She is very, very happy with her new sight.

We do not know if she will stay with her daughter or go back to her farm, one thing though, she is no longer disabled by blindness.

Thank you!

This is Isatou, another delighted lady patient!

Camp 24 urban camp

These operations were carried out over the period between October and December 2023. As we are often told it is only the very poorest and those in the direst need who can access this small fund.

One story that took our imagination here is of a young girl Fatoumatta (it seems so many girls share that name, of course it is used most often for the first-born female). She is 14 years old; she had travelled with her sister from Nyaloi village in URR, some 300kms away from Kanifing because she had developed a cataract from an eye' trauma'. They were told it was possible to operate but when the cashiers came to them for payment, they both became very distressed. They simply had no money. Apparently, the nurse on shift felt very sorry for them and contacted Alasana who had gone home who arranged to pay with CAC funds for the operation.



Above is a picture of her, just **after** her operation.... and

The day after!

This makes my heart swell!

In other news: One of the problems always in The Gambia is the lack of basics.... Tools for example. The kind used by our technician. We have once before sent quite a selection of preloved tools, yes - they have all been used but many of them were nearly new.

They were donated to us by Ringwood Tools for Africa, a bunch of amazing guys based in Ringwood who collect, repair and refurbish DIY items and make them fit to send to less fortunate countries. Jim collected a load recently and they will be packed with other items we are sending . There was so many very, very useful things..... we are so grateful.

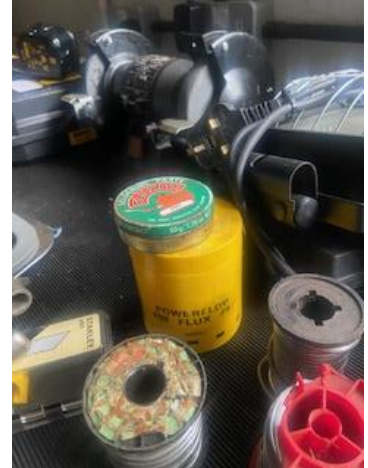




An amazing variety of gear!

We were also most fortunate to have been gifted some impressive ophthalmic equipment. First from a retired optician based in Wales.....we got a slit lamp and some other equipment which has been refurbished and is ready to go now.

More recently a lady called Estelle, who is an orthoptist contacted us to ask if we were interested in two redundant, Field of Vision Analysers.



I now know that these are the big machines that when you visit the optician you stare into it one eye at a time and press a buzzer when you see a light. We checked to ensure they would be useful and Alasana practically bit off our hands. They are having to wait because of the logistics of first getting them to us all the way from Gloucestershire and then to having them checked courtesy of our wonderful, skilful and accommodating friend Gary Evans, from EyeTech Optical.

Estelle was determined the machines go to a place they would be appreciated. She really has been so patient and now they have 'pride' of place in my dining room!! Temporarily..... soon to be shipped off to The Gambia.

Finally, our personal news. I have had both of my cataracts done courtesy of the NHS. Two operations six weeks apart with spectacular results. I can now recommence my bird watching which had become problematic over the last few years. It is amazing how my sight dimmed and lost detail without my real knowledge..... I am chuffed!

After the first operation I simply could not believe that each eye independently see colours differently. I was astonished that a roll neck jumper I had worn for very many years was NOT green but actually grey. Jim is also now also having his done, though he is having to wait for his second eye because of a minor (and rather annoying) infection in the first. He will be clear in another four weeks and then can have the other eye done.

Having the operation and being able to see clearly and drive comfortably has really underlined mine and Jims resolve to do as much as we can while we can for those blighted by unnecessary blindness.

So PLEASE accept our profound thanks for all your support and trust.

Be assured that we will use any dosh sent our way to the very best of ability.

Violet

January 24th 2024