



Savannah Education Trust

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www.savannahtrust.org

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Educating Ghana's Poorest Children

The Savannah Education Trust is a charity set up to provide an education for some of the poorest children in West Africa. We now have nine Christian schools in northern Ghana in the villages of Bagri, Gberi, Korh, Pavuu, Mettoh, Tungan-Zagkpee, Boo, Baapari and Danko-Burree.

The charity also ensures every schoolchild receives a meal each day and funds a number of teacher training scholarships to attract teachers to this remote and poor area.



New School at LYSSAH

It is with great excitement that we are able to announce our hope to build a new school in a village called Lyssah. Our schools are all clustered around the market town of Lawra. This would be the furthest north of our schools – about ten miles to the north and east of the market town.



Simple homesteads

Already the Savannah team have held community meetings and drilled a borehole, which as well as providing clean water is also a plentiful source of the water necessary for the building works.

Lyssah is one of the district's largest villages. As you approach it, across the copper red tracks fringed by long pale grass so typical of this area, you catch glimpses of simple scattered homesteads with straw thatched roofs. As in other villages in this area, extended families generally live together in mud homes grouped around a large, open central compound.

As the rising sun brings light and life to the green of the savannah, there is plenty of activity in these compounds. An open wood fire is being prepared for cooking and the women are pounding millet to create a simple staple for their families. Children are heading into the neighbouring field to hoe. Some of the younger boys are herding a few, somewhat emaciated, cows and goats.



Community meeting in Lyssah



Village elders lead the Savannah team to a potential site for a new school

Unlike other villages in this area, however, these children are not preparing to attend school. In those villages, it is a thrilling sight to stand on a piece of raised ground and look in all directions to see young children – in their blue uniforms – walking to a Savannah school. But in Lyssah, the opportunities and benefits provided by a Christian school are largely denied. Without education, their future is difficult - and there are few opportunities other than the grinding challenges of subsistence farming.

When our first school was being planned, a father stood up in a community meeting and said something very striking. "For too long the village has been in darkness, the school will bring light."

We pray that what was true of the first village school (Bagri) will also be true in Lyssah, our tenth village.

UPDATE ON BUILDING WORK

The start to 2021 has been a busy one. At Danko-Burree (as reported in the last newsletter) there has been significant building work during the year. The children in the village are already receiving some education but are now ready to move into their lovely new school building. The school will start with five classes. Across all of the Savannah schools, there is an ongoing maintenance programme of painting and of rewiring. During this period, the Junior High Schools (for children aged 11 to 14) were painted in the villages of Mettoh and Korh. There is now a pressing need to construct a Junior High School for our existing school at Baapari. This is a significant piece of work and will allow our pupils to continue beyond the age of 11 and, eventually, sit the national examination at the age of 14.



Painting completed at Baapari Primary School



Significant building work at Danko Buree

PANDEMIC

It was with a great sense of excitement and thanksgiving that our schools, like all schools in Ghana, fully reopened in January 2021. We are thankful that they have remained open subsequently, and our staff have been working hard to encourage pupils to return to school.

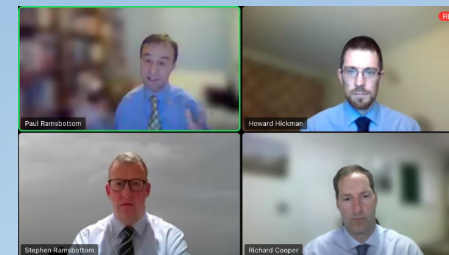
We were somewhat worried that, in these communities where there is not a long tradition of education and where there are many pressures to keep children away from school, many children would simply not return. This was the experience for example in neighbouring countries following closures caused by the Ebola epidemic. It is heartening to be able to report therefore that attendance levels have now exceeded the levels of 2019, which no doubt has much to do with the dedication of our teaching staff.

Covid-19 has not yet affected Ghana as badly as some countries but we are aware that the situation can change quickly. One of the most significant impacts has been increased prices, particularly food prices – a knock on effect of the lockdowns in 2020.

We are very grateful to all who contributed to help cover the extra costs created by the pandemic, including increased allowances for our staff. Across all of our schools, we have provided access to specially adapted washing facilities (dubbed Veronica buckets in Ghana), hand sanitisers as well as face masks for the teachers.

ONLINE TALK

Given that we were unable to hold public Savannah meetings for much of the last year, we organised an online talk in February. The numbers attending – both in the UK and also elsewhere – were hugely encouraging. We very much appreciated the opportunity not only to share photos and an update on the work but also to answer many excellent questions. An additional benefit is that the talk is available on our website to view at any time and, if you missed the talk in February, you might like to access it on our website.



<https://www.savannaheducationtrust.org/2021/02/online-talk-february-2021/>

LEGACIES

Over the years, we have been touched and grateful for gifts that people have made to Savannah in their wills. Indeed a number of recent projects have only been possible because of these kind gifts. We have created an area on our website in case you have any questions about legacies, and we are always happy to respond to queries.

<https://www.savannaheducationtrust.org/what-you-can-do/legacies/>



Socially distant learning



TEACHER TRAINING AND CONFERENCE CENTRE

Although our schools are all located in villages, our activities are centred on the local market town called Lawra (pronounced Laura). It is a fast growing town, but life still revolves around the weekly market. Every six days, produce from across the local area – everything from fish to yams – is sold from small stalls in a large open air market.

On the edge of this town a remarkable new building has been constructed. It is the new centre for Savannah. Our staff were able to move to this new building in January. And, if you walked up to the building in March, you would have witnessed an exciting, auspicious moment: our first training session for the teachers at our schools.

It has been a significant investment for a small charity. What has been our motivation? The Savannah staff have long needed a new office, having become overcrowded in their current, rented accommodation. But that was not the main motivation.

Right from the start, the Trust has recognised that attracting qualified, hard-working teachers to our schools was crucial. The educationalist John Tomsett has said, “truly great schools don’t suddenly exist. You grow great teachers first, who, in turn, grow a truly great school.” In a Christian context, this becomes even more important – because the ethos of the school flows from the character and conduct of the headteacher and teaching staff.



The first professional development session



Discussing pedagogy during training



Teaching in action



Timothy, one of our trained teachers



Abednego leading the training

From before our first school was built, Savannah has run a scholarship programme to train teachers from the local area. Over 50 individuals have now received this support (including Amos, who was featured in our December circular and in a short video on our website).

The new centre (known locally as the ‘conference centre’) aims to provide ongoing support and training for our teachers. Part of this is simply providing mutual support. It can be extremely hard to work as a teacher in the remote villages.

Coming together to share ideas and experiences is crucial. Led by Abednego Karbo, the headteachers of the Savannah schools collaborated with educationalists in the UK to produce a professional development programme appropriate to north west Ghana. The first cycle of professional development explores components of teaching such as setting high expectations, effective questioning and modelling examples. If the Lord will, the centre will also provide Biblical instruction to support teachers and local ministers as they conduct assemblies and services.



NEW TIPPER TRUCK

Our newsletter from last year showed the heart-rending photos of our tipper truck on fire following a major accident. Sadly it was not possible to salvage the truck, although we were very thankful that – remarkably – our driver was not badly hurt.

At the start of the year, we made the decision to proceed with the purchase of a new truck, based on the considerable amount of building work anticipated in the next year or two. The cost of hiring a truck for work is significant, and it therefore makes sense (both financially and in terms of ease of access) to possess our own vehicle.

THANK YOU


This newsletter can only highlight a small fraction of the activities taking place. Savannah has now become (almost to our surprise) a reasonably large sized operation in Ghana. In the UK we have been able to maintain a situation where we have no paid staff and no formal 'fundraising'. This is thanks to the kindness of our loyal supporters, and we want to thank you for your generosity through ongoing direct debits, one-off contributions and legacies. The education and support that we are able to give to 3,090 children and 150 staff is only possible because of your generosity.

Above all, at the very end of this newsletter, we want to return thanks to God.

As our needs grow year on year, we stand in wonder at His provision for our ongoing work.



 Savannah
Education Trust

58 Appledore Gardens, Lindfield,
West Sussex, RH16 2EU
Telephone 01444 483884
www.savannahtrust.org
 savannahtrust