

Pala – Masogo, Western Kenya.

In 2006 Dave and Betty Ellis were the leaders of a JOAC CWP to the village of Nyalkinyi in Western Kenya. During the project they were taken to the village of Pala. The village at that time was in a poor state, the only access was via a rough track too narrow in places for the land rover so they had to go cross country. In the village there was no health care, no secondary school, no clean water, no electricity and only a few run down huts forming the primary school.



The original school



The new JOAC built school (2009)

On their return to Jersey Dave gave a presentation to the JOAC work project subcommittee and a project was recommended by that subcommittee to build a new primary school, the preferred priority of the villagers. This project took place in 2009 with a team led by Dave and Betty going out to help with the work. During the project the team got to know Richard Gor a respected member of the village who was one of the Pastors of the village Church. Richard had a reasonable command of English and although he had rarely been out of the village was able to send and receive emails, which for him meant having to travel some 20 miles to the nearest town where a computer was available. The team were impressed with the “we want to help ourselves” attitude of the whole village and wanted to continue to help these people. To facilitate this a village committee was elected under Richard’s leadership. This was subsequently registered as the Pala Self Help group and they opened an account in a local bank with a three signature requirement for all transactions.

Dave and Betty already ran the local charity Help from the Rock (HFTR) and it was agreed that all help for Pala would be given under this umbrella charity. As part of the primary school project some semi-permanent huts were built and used initially as accommodation by the team then as staff housing for nurses at the clinic. HFTR negotiated with the land owner and purchased the field on which the staff house were built and then gifted it to the village.



The staff houses and water tower.



The first village clinic

The huts left vacant when the primary school moved to the new buildings were renovated using HFTR funds. The Kenyan government found the funds to build a two block classroom and a local Kenyan Charity built another. These classrooms then became a secondary school, the first ever in the village, with staff and some equipment provided by the government.

The next part of the project was too build a small health clinic on the village field to provide care for the village. This was achieved and Dave and Betty had several meetings with the local MoH to secure staffing and equipment for the new clinic. As Richard became more empowered he took over many of these negotiations and even travelled, for the first time in his life, to Nairobi to address the Ministry of Health committee to get the new clinic registered.

Soon after the clinic opened the MoH approached Dave and Betty and Richard with a request for a Maternity Unit to be built to avoid the current situation whereby babies were being born in the same room that sick patients were being examined and treated and some were still being born at home in a mud hut. HFTR approached JOAC and we are very grateful they were able to give a generous grant towards the cost of this building. Further fund raising took place in Jersey and the work started under Richards's supervision in Pala.



The maternity Unit opened October 2014

At the same time a sponsor was found to pay for a borehole, it was known that electricity was moving closer and it was apparent power would soon be available, at a price, for a pump. In late 2014 Dave and Betty and a few friends went to Pala on a self-funded work project. They were able to help with the finishing off of the building and also attended the official opening. We were so pleased to witness the switching on of the submersible pump in the new and very deep borehole. For the first time ever clean water is available at stand pipes in the village, it is also piped to the clinic and the Maternity Unit.

Although we thought at this stage we had completed all that was needed in Pala the MoH asked for another meeting. He revealed his plan was to turn our village clinic into an area Health Centre, he pointed out that it was being used as such anyway as there were no other free health facilities for 20 miles in any direction. The result of the demand for health care was that our staff were struggling to cope with up to 80 patients a day in cramped conditions in the small clinic. Although initially we had thought only to provide for Pala itself there was no way we or the staff could ignore the needs in the wider community. The request was for us to build a larger clinic to meet the increasing needs. This would have an impact on staffing levels so before agreeing we needed to know how this would be dealt with. The MoH gave us a written assurance he would provide all the staff needed together with equipment and drugs.

Once again JOAC gave us a generous grant towards the building costs and members of the HFTR committee in Jersey again provided support through fund raising. The full cost of the work was raised and work commenced in Pala under Richards supervision. In October 2016 Dave and Betty and two other members of the HFTR committee together with another friend went to Pala to attend the official opening of the new clinic. The opening was performed by the County Minister of Health who spoke highly of the support the village had received from the people of Jersey.



The new clinic opened October 2016

The clinic had been in use for some weeks prior to the official opening and we were pleased that the figures of an average of 25 births per month in the Maternity Unit and 80 patients a day in general clinic was being maintained. Staffing levels were good with 5 nurse/midwives, 2 clinical officers, 1 lab technician, 1 pharmacist, 4 paid counsellors and 4 voluntary counsellors. The supply of drugs and equipment appeared adequate and we were able to “top up” some equipment and drugs. The original small clinic would now be used to house the laboratory and provide some storage space. Money had been donated by HFTR towards additional accommodation and at the time of our visit two small houses were almost completed and only awaited funding from Homa Bay County for the final finishing; this had been approved but not yet provided.

In the 7 years since 2009 thanks to the support of JOAC, Rotary International, All Saints Church, HFTR Committee members and of course the great Jersey public Pala has been provided with a new primary school, a secondary school, a health Centre and a borehole. It would be an understatement to say they are grateful, it is more a case that they cannot believe what has happened in their village as a result of support from complete strangers living more than 4000 miles away. Having said that, it would be wrong not to again pay tribute to the work of the Pala self-help group and in particular its chairman Richard and indeed the whole village who have always been so welcoming on our visits there and who have unhesitatingly turned up whenever voluntary labour was needed.

Although one or two of our members intend to continue visiting every other year or so HFTR has informed the village that no further projects would be undertaken by us. We are of the opinion they are now ready and more than capable of moving forward on their own.

We are grateful for all the support we have had over the years, grateful also for the privilege of meeting so many wonderful people both in Pala and in Jersey as a result of this work and proud to have been associated with all the work undertaken to help a developing community.