



Annual Report 2008

University of Withywood

In last year's Annual Report we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the University of Withywood. This year we are targeting the Sponsorship Fund, which has just completed over one hundred sponsorships since we began in 1964. Records of the young people's academic achievements and their subsequent development, together with photographs and drawings, have been carefully preserved and this has made possible the compilation by Anton and Christine of a portfolio with a dossier on each case history. (This does not include children who have passed through the Anton Tuition Centre, the Anton Institute for English or the sewing and dressmaking classes in South India, where it has not been possible to monitor the progress of individuals).

It is hoped to publish copies of this portfolio so that those who have worked so hard to raise money for the Sponsorship Fund and made such generous donations, may form some idea of the overall achievements of the charity. It should also provide guidance on the way forward and much needed publicity.

The Anton Institute for English was set up by Prema for young graduates who have done well at school, but who suffer considerably in trying to get employment because of their lack of English. She approached us in 2006 with the idea of setting up an English language centre in Trichinopoly. We found the funds, a room was rented and teachers were engaged, equipment was bought and Prema has been indefatigable in identifying suitable candidates – all of whom are expected to pay something towards their instruction. One course has been completed and a second is proposed.



Below are some letters of appreciation we have received from the students:



"I am Suresh Bharathi. I am a first year student in B.C.A. I had no chance to learn proper English in my school because my medium of study was Tamil. I realised the importance of English only after joining the college. I felt that I must learn proper English to

complete my studies successfully.

"To solve this problem, I joined at Anton Institute. I attended all the classes regularly and concentrated on all the activities. I got good results. I have improved in conversation, listening, writing, reading and grammar through this course. I am very thankful to the Administration and its members".

"Hello. I am Poovendran. I am doing final year in B. Pharmacy. I experienced that learning English at Anton Institute is worthwhile for students like me because I improved my English and I understood practical and realistic English here.



"Our trainer, Ivy Madam, took much efforts for this purpose. I am very grateful to her. Also I convey my deepest thanks to Mr Anton, our sponsors and our organiser, Prema

Madam for providing this golden opportunity".

"Thanks to God for this opportunity, once again, to extend a word of greetings to you and the entire family of Withywood"

Robert Kigadi, Kenya



I am Jenifer, studying in plus two class. Before I came to Anton Institute, I had difficulty in speaking English. But after I started to attend the English classes here, I slowly developed my speaking skill. At present I can form sentences of my own.

"My biggest thanks to Mr Anton and his group, Prema Mam and our teacher Ivy".



"I am Santhalakshmi. I am a Master Degree holder in Chemistry. During my college days, I was not very fluent in English but after my admission in Anton Institute for English, my fluency has increased. Now I am able to converse with my friends

without any hesitation. This course has given me confidence to apply for jobs in Matriculation Schools.

"My wholehearted thanks to our Donors, our Organiser Prema Madam and our staff, Ivy Madam".

APPEAL

This year we are soliciting your support for the children of Sudan. Since the early 1960s the southern part of Sudan has been devastated by endemic civil war and recurring famines. The towns and villages are in ruins, the infrastructure destroyed and the people have fled. Peace returned in 2005 and the arduous work of reconstruction has begun.

One of our former sponsorees is now working for UNWRR in Southern Sudan on the vital work of rehabilitation. He has already identified seven children who are desperate to get back to school and is setting aside some of his own salary to start the funding. He has sent us case histories and photographs of each one and we publish a few examples here. The price of education for these children averages out at about £35 per term. If you would like to sponsor one of these, your money can be handled by our organisation and will go directly to where it is needed.



Robert Lopia (Sudan) – aged 23
£357 for next year (£119 per term)
wants to do A levels and university degree
to become an electrical engineer

Rose Gune Kizito (Sudan) – aged 12 - £96
for year (£32 per term) wants to be a
teacher.

Betty Joan (Sudan) - aged 13 - £96 for
year (£32 per term)

Paul Etheho (Sudan) – age 24 - £96 for
year (£32 per term)

Lemi Joseph Mary (Sudan) – age 19 - £84
for year (£28 per term)

Moses Yasin (Sudan) – age 15 - £66 for
year (£22 per term)

Museme Soro (Sudan) – age ? - £84 for
year (£28 per term)



THE FUTURE

You may be interested to know that in the last few months the Trustees have been discussing the long-term future of the charity and the Sponsorship Fund. The aim is to ensure its

continuation after the present staff and Trustees feel no longer able to participate. In this respect we have recruited two new Trustees to work alongside the existing ones (who are Anton Bantock, Jane Britton, Royston Griffey, Christine Lillington and Martin Powell). They are Mary James MBE of Castle Farm – a well-known local figure and an active supporter of many good causes and Deen Abu Roomi, a young businessman and son of a former sponsoree.

THE HOME FRONT

As for the home front, it has been an eventful year which began with a “This is Your Life” presentation on the 60th birthday of Thelma Townshend, a pillar of the University and budding star in the Performing Arts Group, and ended with a similar presentation for the 80th birthday of Jane Fidgen with an exhibition of her amazing collections and artistic achievements.

Another highlight was a visit from the poet and writer Bill Pickard, who gave copies of his book “Poet Luck” to all who attended and donated a box of them to the University to distribute to anyone who would make a donation to our fund.

In June we staged a *Son et Lumière* on the turbulent history of Berkeley Castle, prompted by the building of a scale model of the castle by Jane Fidgen and a team of willing supporters who tore up thousands of newspapers to be recycled into papier mâché.

Thursday evening talks. The object of these is to involve as many people as possible in a lively discussion, but this depends on friends coming forward with suggestions, subjects and persons to present them.

Appalling summer weather meant that many outdoor activities had to be cancelled this year, but fortunately the 42” plasma screen came to the rescue and we enjoyed a number of old movies on DVD brought in by the students, among them “A Man for all Seasons” and “How Green was my Valley”.

Summer walks were enjoyed several times this year to learn about old Bedminster, Manor Woods Valley and further afield with Mike Knight and his group.

The Performing Arts Group continues to go from strength to strength, consistently bringing home donations from the many and varied old peoples’ homes and clubs that they entertain on a regular basis. They receive many compliments from the residents after performing and the wardens are always very pleased to see them.

During the past 12 months this group has raised over £650 for the Sponsorship Fund.

French Conversation group

“We discovered recently, to our surprise, that our French Conservation meetings had been going on since 1995. Some members of our two groups have attended regularly since the start. It has become quite natural to address one another in French as soon as people enter the house. For us, speaking a foreign language is a hobby, a way of meeting friends, as well as raising money for the University of Witherwood”.

Marie Jo Coutanche

“Once again, the Thursday French conversation class has been a very interesting experience, with topics ranging from our various pastimes and interests, to life in France, its customs, sometimes its politics, and everyday activities. We try to use current phrases and expressions as much as possible – and even some grammar from time to time – certainly a very necessary process in our learning! But it is all most enjoyable. Thanks to the enthusiasm and encouragement of Marie Jo, the language is brought to life. We all feel that after each session we have understood a little more and we feel more confident when speaking to French people”.

Maureen Pearce

Spanish class

The few friends that meet on Wednesdays enjoy the fellowship and Anton says “*they have learned a considerable amount and a lot more than they think they know. So keep at it!*”.

AND FINALLY a message from Christine Lillington

“For the last 20 years I have administered this charity and tried to keep Anton ‘on the straight and narrow’! Almost daily I receive e-mails from overseas requesting further funds and the total of young people we have helped now numbers over 100. I receive all money that is raised through donations from individuals and groups, through selling Anton’s books and pictures and through fund-raising activities. This is put straight into our account and within days is usually winging its way from Lloyds Bank, Bishopsworth to all corners of the globe.

“Some of the other duties I attend to as Honorary Secretary/Treasurer/Administrator of the University of Witherwood include recording all donations of money received and spent and balancing the books at the end of each month and the year; producing the Annual Report and Accounts; keeping lists of all money sent to sponsorees and priorities for the future; dealing with Standing Orders when people choose to use this method of donating and keeping a list of all donations so that we can claim the tax back through Gift Aid. I also keep records of the

"Friends of the University of Withywood" and remind them each year when their subscription is due; complete annual returns for the Charity Commission; update the mailing list; assist with production of our website and try to promote the University of Withywood in the press.

"So from the initial offer I made in the dim and distant past of "doing a bit of typing", one of my main occupations has become administrating the University of Withywood. Fortunately, since my retirement I have been able to devote a great deal of time to this project, but as I get older I feel that there should be someone who knows how it all works, just in case I am not available in the future. If you feel you could help in any way, please contact Anton or me and we will discuss the situation."

With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year from Anton and the Team and a reminder that our first meeting in 2009 will be on January 8th, when Sylvia Williamson will give us her "Reflections on India". Sylvia was in India recently at the time of the Mumbai attacks.



The Anton Tuition Centre, Thaneerpalli, South India, 2008-2009

We have supported this little school since 1992 when Mrs Prema said, "I set it up so that children who were unable to pay their fees could avail the learning opportunity. All students must benefit - I thought."



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