

SVP News 1

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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In this first year of SVP, ten volunteers went to Sudan in mid-July for a seven week programme to teach in schools and colleges in the Khartoum and Omdurman area. They returned to the UK in early September. They reported they had been received with warm hospitality and real friendship. They felt they had been able to do useful work with their students, and some even hope that they will soon be returning as guests at a Sudanese wedding this winter!

There is much to be learnt from the experience of this first programme which will be relevant to any future plans for SVP but most importantly we now can be sure that there is a great demand for our volunteers at all levels of education, and that SVP has many friends in Sudan eager to help and who will support our expansion and improvement in service and expertise.

*Hugh
Bakere
working
with
students in
Khartoum*



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**A note from
the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme**

Welcome to all readers of SVP News 1, our first newsletter directed to volunteers, members, and other supporters of SVP whose participation has made SVP's work possible.

Inside you will find some personal accounts from our volunteers which will tell you more than anything else can how much there is to be done and how valuable and how rewarding for the volunteers themselves this work can be.

Education in its widest sense has always been central to the aspirations and hopes of every Sudanese family. Nowadays this means being

educated to recognise and respect the value of one's own culture as well as that of others, to communicate and to learn across these boundaries between individuals and groups. Language skill is necessary for all of this.

SVP exists to help in this process introducing people from outside to work with Sudanese and learn about the unique Sudanese way of life. Remember that SVP needs members to support its work; join us if you can: use the attached application or telephone for one.

Ahmed Bedri

The Volunteer Experience

"It is impossible to prepare for the enthusiasm, the commitment, the warmth, the surprises that teaching in Sudan will give you."

Angela Bamgbose, a social worker in Mental Health, took two months unpaid leave from work in Manchester to volunteer for SVP this summer. Here she writes about her teaching experiences in Sudan, where she taught in both a primary and a secondary school...

"How can you prepare for standing in front of sixty-three eager, fresh faced young girls, in temperatures of 40 degrees plus, with the aim of teaching English?

You are in a strange country, still tired from a journey that seemed never-ending, don't speak a word of the language, and unable to quench the thirst. Yet despite all this there is the thrill of anticipation that somehow enables you to open your mouth and introduce yourself.

I taught with another volunteer in two girls schools, Ahfad Basic Primary and Omdurman Model Secondary School. The primary school was both fun and exhausting, and the children, young as they were, appeared to benefit from us introducing them to the English language and fulfilling some of their childish curiosities.

At the secondary school I taught English Literature to three classes of Grade 2 (year 10 in British schools) students. The standard of English was much higher than I had anticipated and it sounded as if it was higher than some of the students that were being taught by other volunteers in the universities.

The classes had between 35 to 63 pupils, but classroom management was not a problem at all. There were the odd cases of whispering and giggling but what do you expect from 14-15 year olds being faced with someone who could have dropped off the moon for all they knew? Yes, initially I think that I was seen as peculiar as that! The girls did not think they could understand me because they had never met a native English speaker before and had made up their minds that they would not be able to communicate because the

English that I spoke was not the same English as they had been studying. For my part I spoke slowly and clearly and tried to disguise the twang to my accent. Their confidence was nurtured and they began to feel more able to understand and finally to speak.

I was relieved to be teaching literature as opposed to language, as my knowledge of grammar is vastly inferior to my Sudanese colleagues and it enabled a more creative approach to English teaching than the formal language curriculum. *A Book of Modern Shorter Stories* was not the most familiar of books but we covered a couple in the time that I was there, and used

the stories as a platform to discuss Britain and the differing customs and traditions, colloquial English and correct pronunciation. In this way I think it was useful.

We also assisted the English Society and in a mad moment decided that we would put on a pantomime in preference to the potentially dull discussion groups. That is how *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* came to find their way to Omdurman with an all

singing, and dancing cast of sixty.

The girls enjoyed it, their parents enjoyed it, the audience of the friends that we had made in Sudan enjoyed it, the school enjoyed it and finally I enjoyed it with the maternal relief that follows a mother watching her child walk its first steps alone without faltering. Relief, happiness, wonder, these girls had achieved something that even ten minutes before the performance I doubted they would manage. But I learnt that Sudan is a country where the unexpected always happens!

So how do you prepare for the delights of teaching in Sudan? I have no idea: I think it is impossible to prepare for the enthusiasm, the commitment, the warmth, the surprises that teaching in Sudan will give you. Just be prepared to gain much more than you could ever hope to give."



Angela teaches an enthusiastic group of students

Living with a Sudanese Family

Some SVP volunteers were accommodated in the schools and universities where they were working, while others lived in Sudanese homes. Here Fiona Macilwham, a social anthropology student from London, describes her experiences....

"Living with a Sudanese family was definitely an advantage socially. It enabled us to integrate more fully into Sudanese life and consequently learn more about Sudan and its very rich culture. Angie and I were exceptionally well looked after by Abdallah, Atfa and the rest of the family. Minimal restrictions to our freedom were more than compensated by a fantastic two months spent with our generous hosts."

SVP and Unipal

SVP's approach is modelled on the charity Unipal (Universities' Fund for Educational Exchange with Palestinians), now based in Durham, which over 20 years has sent more than 500 volunteers to teach Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Jordan. This has proved a remarkably effective way of introducing the volunteers to the culture and situation of their hosts and for many has provided an introduction to what has become a permanent relationship. David Brightwell and Peter Williams, both with long experience of teaching and organising for Unipal, have generously given much of their time and expertise to SVP.



A waterfall in Jebel Marra

A visit to Jebel Marra

Sudan is a spectacular country, whose fabled scenery lies far outside any tourist trails. Here SVP volunteer Andy Benfied describes a journey to Jebel Marra in the far west of Sudan

"The Jebel Marra region is, Hugh and I were informed, the furthest one can get from the sea on the African continent. Probably true, but when we were also told that it was a land with people aged 150+, oranges the size of footballs, and upflowing rivers, I became a little dubious.

The place was wonderful and certainly has a mystical feel about it. We were driven there across the savannah in the back of a pick-up. The mountains loom above the surrounding countryside, their lush green slopes fading into rocky peaks containing an ancient extinct volcano. There was hardly any traffic on the road but we still had to watch out for the hazards of goats, donkeys, cattle and camels all of which seemed determined to see the underside of our truck. People in this district live in conical mud and straw huts and some, they say, never come down from the mountains.

The vegetation became increasingly lush as we headed off road into the foothills. We visited some breathtaking waterfalls before a lamb was slaughtered and cooked on our behalf. We spent the night in a hut waking early to see the sun rise over the mountain tops. We had a

splendid view over the plains below us across to Chad. The day was spent off-roading in the pick-up, stopping off at villages and waterfalls along the way. A local man assured me that the other side of the mountains - unreachable at that time due to the rains - was even more beautiful and "just like Essex" - fortunately not true!

We broke the drive back with a stop at the village of Bulbul, where we had been told that we must try a famous drink called *birkeep*. It went down okay, though afterwards we were taken aback on finding out it was made by leaving milk in the sun for a week and then adding sugar!

Jebel Marra was definitely the highlight of my travels in Sudan, adding awe-inspiring scenery and a truly African feel to the ever-present experience of disarming Sudanese hospitality."

A Letter from Sudan

Dear SVP,

I am glad that all I dreamed of turned out to be true and we had the volunteers and they finished as planned. It was really successful and our students benefitted a lot and they enjoyed having native speakers to practice with. I and my colleagues enjoyed it and the volunteers were really friendly, helpful, patient and genuine. They had a very good effect and we hope to see them again.

Atfa Abdalla

Atfa Abdalla is an English teacher at Omdurman Model Secondary School for Girls and a friend of SVP. Along with other SVP supporters in Sudan she worked very hard this summer to ensure that our project was a success.

More about SVP

Until about 15 years ago the medium of instruction in Sudan in much secondary education as well as in higher was in English (as it still is in some subjects). However, as in many Middle Eastern countries there has been a policy of Arabisation of the medium of instruction. Combined with the reduction in the number of English language teachers, these factors have left the younger generation of teachers and pupils with little colloquial experience of English. This lack is now recognised by many to be of critical importance and the initiative by Sudan Volunteer Programme to send volunteer English language teachers has been welcomed on all sides.

Virtually since independence in 1956 there has been conflict between the south and the central government based in Khartoum. Fighting and famine has led to great suffering and displacement but the northern part where SVP is working has remained peaceful. The government which came to power in 1989 has been boycotted by some countries and some NGOs have withdrawn or reduced their operations in the last few years. SVP is looking for volunteers whose work will challenge this isolation and will seek to re-establish the traditions of cordiality and friendliness in personal relations which have for so long been important both to Britain and Sudan. Sudanese people are, as they always have been, very hospitable and welcoming, particularly to strangers. Their charm and courtesy has to be experienced as anyone who has been there will tell you. The desire to work with SVP is genuine and whole-hearted. SVP plans to extend its work to towns outside Khartoum and Omdurman. SVP volunteers have found that travel within the country is particularly sociable and friendly.

SVP volunteers

SVP is working with under-graduates and graduates who are prepared to give their summer vacations to this urgent cause. Some have experience of working in other parts of Africa and the Middle East and some have experience of teaching English. Each has had to raise money for the cost of their own airfare to Sudan, which is about £450 and to cover their travel and living expenses in the UK for selection interviews, orientation and briefing and de-briefing.

The host colleges will provide free accommodation and medical cover but do not pay a salary. SVP pays for travel insurance costs for each volunteer and a modest living allowance while in Sudan. Volunteers look after themselves on the college premises. Teaching is informal in style with contact time not more than 4 or 5 hours a day. Volunteers have the chance to plan their own scheme. They can arrange games and

competitions and devise tests towards the assessment of the skills gained by students and progress made in the period. They are close enough to the other colleges with SVP volunteers to allow them to get together regularly and profit by each other's experience.

If you would like to apply to work for SVP, please contact us at the address below.

SVP's friends

SVP is working with an experienced and capable group of colleagues in Khartoum, Dr Ahmed Abdullah, English Language Officer at the British Council, Saif Hag ElSafi, Nasreldin Shulgami, Ustaz AbdELAziz Moheddin, and Hanan Abbas AbdelKarim who see to the welfare of the volunteers and who advise on placements and academic policy. In addition there is a group of people who are SVP supporters or members of the recently formed English Language Foundation (ELF) who have taken a close interest in the development of SVP.

SVP is a registered charity based in London, formed as a company limited by guarantee. The first trustees who comprise SVP's committee of management are: Ahmed Bedri (*chairman*), Samya Muddathir AbdelRahim (*vice-chair*), Sadig Muhalab Ali Taha, Nadir El Gadi (*treasurer*), David Wolton (*secretary*), Mohamed Hireika, Amira Omer Gorani, FathiElRahman Kabbashi Agil, Mamoon Ibrahim El Tayeb, AbdelMoniem Ali, Babikir Yahia, Ahmed Zakaria ElHashim.

We hope you will join SVP by applying as a member and by persuading your friends to do likewise. Membership entitles you to take part and to vote in SVP's general meetings, to receive our news, reports and accounts. The membership fee you can choose to renew annually; there are no legal obligations or liabilities.

Whilst SVP's administration is done wholly by volunteers without paid staff, it still has to find money for its own administrative expenses and to give the volunteers a living allowance while in Sudan and to provide their insurance cover. All this costs money and we need your help to make it possible.

Please join us by filling in the membership application form and, if you can, allow us to mention your name in our literature as being 'among our members.' There is much to be done; your help is needed and your comments and suggestions are welcome.

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