

S·V·P News 3

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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In November 1998 SVP began sending longer term volunteers with appointments of three months or more. By March 1999 nineteen volunteers had been sent on this programme. In mid-July 1999 twenty four SVP volunteers assembled at Heathrow and set off for Khartoum for SVP's third **summer programme** of nine weeks. Momen Osman Salih and his colleague Saad Yousif had accepted the arduous task organising their work and accommodation in Khartoum, meeting the plane, getting everybody to the hostel, answering all sorts of questions and seeing that the schools and colleges were ready to receive them. It turned out to be a demanding and time consuming job for these and the other members of **SVP Sudan**. Our thanks go to all who helped and gave so much hospitality to our volunteers.

As in former years there is much to be learnt from the experience of this programme which will be relevant to future plans for SVP. But as before we know there is a great demand and welcome for our volunteers at all levels of education, and that SVP has many friends in Sudan eager to help and support our expansion and improvement in service and expertise.

*Kersty
McCourt
with friends*



A note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the third issue of SVP News. It contains extracts from some of the many reports received from our volunteers in this year's programmes. We hope that others will join us in this really worthwhile work. SVP now has volunteers in Sudan throughout the academic year there from July to April.

SVP thanks all the volunteers of the 1998-99 season: Jacky Mullen, Spike Woods, Vince Mehers, Lester Dickenson-Flint, Rachel Cohen, Ozair Suleiman Desai, Susie Williamson, Nigel Croft, Gerald Wall, Jessica Newton, Tanveer Hussein, Alison Howse, Gareth Howell, Simon Blow, Peter Ashton, Eamon Slowey.

And in the Summer Programme: Helen Bartlett, Sara'a Faisal ElMahdi, Bilqees Esmail, Harriet Fink, Angela Gray, Xana Jones, Kersty McCourt, Paula McLean, Anna Roberts, Jessie Teggin, Victoria Ward, Colette Warriner, Laura Winton, Rocco Blume, Rorie Duncan, Jonathan Emery, Martin Fisher, Chris Lack, Barry Martin, Robert McCourt, David McManus, Menelik Miller, James Miller, Nick Tomkins.

SVP could not exist without its members and supporters. If you would like to help or to keep in touch, please become a member. There is more about SVP on the back page.

Ahmed Bedri

Shakespeare in Sudan

At the University of Khartoum in September 1999 the exciting news was that the students were staging of their own version of Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo & Juliet*, an adaptation they helped write themselves and perform under tuition from SVP. Set in ElFasher in the west, it was renamed *Adam & Saeeda*

Eight volunteers were placed at the University of Khartoum between July and September. They were part of the group of 24 sent out by SVP, the biggest group so far. Between them, eight volunteers ran English classes all day every day, at 'basic', 'intermediate' and 'advanced' levels. Open to students from all faculties they also ran classes in English literature, Art History and the work of the UN.

Martin Fisher who had the idea before leaving the UK, first had to read the play and then work out the structure of Shakespeare's tragedy. Next he re-wrote the scenes in plain English, re-setting the play in Sudan.

Martin Fisher, who then produced the play, writes: "As each scene was finished, Xana and I read and discussed it with the students who chose the new names for the feuding Montagues and Capulets to be the Rezegats and Zagawas. The students checked all references and made the script consistently and authentically Sudanese. All customs were made to conform to those in the west of Sudan. It took two weeks to finish the text, the students editing every line. Auditions were held and players chosen., of course some would-be players were disappointed..

"There were more than 20 parts and over the next weeks a number of players came and went. Xana directed and slowly the confidence of the students built up. Other volunteers joined in: **Sarra'a ElMahdi** ran costume classes and developed an overall approach to wardrobe and make-up. **Menelik Miller** became an understudy for most parts and entered negotiations with the university about staging and budgeting. **Christopher Lack** designed and painted the scenery. **Momen Osman Salih** of IMI Trading provided office support services and loaned a budget of SL200,000.

In an act of great generosity, the University made available the Sharjah Hall, an auditorium seating 300 people. Posters were printed and tickets went on sale for LS500, the price of a Pepsi. Both performances were a sell-out. With hindsight, they could have staged four or five performances.

"Now the script has been donated to SVP and is available for any others who might want to stage it. The experience has proved a valuable lesson in how a group project can become a vehicle for teaching English."



Zakariah, Martin, Sarra'a, Xana, Mubarak & Nuha after the first show

Xana Jones writes: "I had no idea the play would develop into such a full scale project - but then I never expected the students to be as enthusiastic and dedicated as they were. It was the students who really made the play a success The project was not only a learning experience for the students (whose English speaking skills improved dramatically but also one for Martin and myself, giving us a unique insight into Sudanese culture and customs. The classes proceeded for about two weeks, every day a new instalment of the script was read over and analysed by the students. . . They advised us on the content; pointing out any words they didn't understand (thereby learning new vocab), debating(in English (that was one ground rule only English was to be spoken) whether or not to keep a certain line or word. They also came up with names for the characters, and of the tribes,) as well as details of daily life - who would carry a sword, what would one eat or drink etc. and aspects of culture - like the marriage ceremony.

They debated the issues of the play as a group: contentious issues included the suicide of Adam and Saeeda and their marriage - could Saeeda be present or not - could the Mazoon marry them if their parents had not consented? These debates often continued outside the classroom! I decided that the cast should warm up before every rehearsal so they played games and did basic voice and body warm-ups. The students weren't too sure about this sort of thing at first but they quickly relaxed and became quite a close-knit group. Rehearsals had their good and bad days - sometimes I came home filled with excitement because they had been so brilliant, other days I was sure that the play was never going to happen. Some of the students had no confidence in their acting ability - but after four weeks of daily rehearsals they had become star characters..

As soon as the script started to come alive for the students, it was impossible to contain their enthusiasm. I had only thought of music in terms of something simple like a drum, but as soon as they heard the music, the students erupted into discussion and Martin and I stood back and watched as they took over and basically choreographed the whole party scene where the two lovers meet. I think it was at this point that they realised that the play was really theirs and as a group, they suddenly became much more focused and determined.

The play told us all something of the sorrow and folly of war. . .the audience was particularly receptive to this message, cheering and clapping at the reconciliation.

Life & Work at Omdurman Ahlia University

by Anna Roberts

I had every reason to feel vastly under-qualified to teach at Ahlia. I had no previous experience and was almost without exception younger than my students many of whom had already completed military service, holding down jobs to support their education and some even studying simultaneously for a degree at another university!

Yet they all gave me every reason to feel welcome and loved. I taught my lessons in an area of outdoor seating under the trees which was the home of the Challenge Society - an English speaking club. Because of the general friendliness of Sudan and the fact that many students were already close friends, each lesson was delayed until the elaborate ritual of greeting and hand-shaking had been completed.

At the same time I was frequently correcting my misconceptions of Islam and Sudan. The things I had heard most about Sudan before I arrived were the Civil War and the famine, but I have never felt so safe in a capital city and have never been so well fed! The

Sudanese tradition of hospitality is amazing. I thought that after the initial period the flood of invitations would dry up but week after week my diary would become filled by appointments in students' homes

Though my students showed much curiosity about the West, and often expressed a desire to live or study there instead of in Sudan, they also displayed a great love for Sudan and a desire to show me its history and its culture. It was, they told me 'my second country and my second home'. Thus they made sure that I saw all the sights of Khartoum and Omdurman and these took many forms.

...Your plans will forever be changing and you will end up doing something quite different from what you expected. But you learn to relax and to find the pleasure that Sudanese people find - in friendship, in song, in dancing and in laughter. In Sudan, chance and the people have a wonderful way of looking after you.

Nick Tomkins writes 'Have been teaching the guitar and leading the sing alongs at a home for about 50 people, mainly children, all with polio. It is a great place and many of the kids are there early enough in their lives to get treated reasonably successfully. Most of their arms and hands are fine so I let them borrow my guitar and am also teaching the children to juggle.I've now started to learn to read and write Arabic which is great fun and am reading a translation of the Quran.'

Jessie Teggin writes We were invited to a wedding. . .we had a great time being encouraged to dance, sing, clapping and clicking wildly. The village is the most idyllic place you can imagine. The houses are made out of sand and mud, and all interconnect with paths like little mazes. Animals live with the families. Actually, on the first night I befriended a sweet little goat. We stayed there a couple of days, reading, relaxing and drinking shaay and quawa.

All the people I've met have been really welcoming and friendly. We are constantly invited out. I've been to five weddings already. . .

In Kassala, Maowiya helped us find a hotel. He's a student who is doing a year's military service before getting his degree results. He's an



Helen, Tito Abele Taban and Harriet at Kinnetti

absolutely lovely guy and we spent the next few days with him and his family. He took us around his grandfathers' fruit farm. It was incredibly lush and rich with guava, bananas, grapefruit and mangoes. As we

were wondering around in this paradise a party started up close by. So we watched the sun setting over the incredible Takka mountains, surrounded by banana trees and the sound of heavy African drumming, an amazing experience. We spent one of the days there climbing around the Jebbals.

Rorie Duncan writes: We arrived at ComputerMan on day of our arrival in Sudan. We could not have had a warmer welcome. Hisham, a graduate student, and Amal, Student Liason Officer, had been given the task of introducing us to the college and extended every kindness to make us feel comfortable and at home. We met Dr Abu Bakr that same day and he welcomed us to the college and gave us all the information we needed to start work. He extended an open door policy to us throughout our stay and was extremely helpful on the numerous occasions we sought his assistance. Our brief was to teach spoken English. This coincided exactly with the wishes of the students. Classes were designed to engage the students in conversation in part with us but more particularly between themselves. We structured each lesson around a specific subject or area of vocabulary and employed different lesson formats all relying on conversation; word games, role playing, scenarios and debates were all successfully used.

More about SVP

Until about 15 years ago the medium of instruction in Sudan in most secondary education as well as in higher was English (as it still is in some subjects). However, as in many other 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 classes, these factors have left the younger generation of teachers and pupils with little colloquial experience of English. The need for English language teaching 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.

Many people ask about the conflict between the south and the central government based in Khartoum which has been going on since independence in 1956. Fighting and famine has led to great suffering and displacement but the northern areas 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 seek to continue the traditions of cordiality and friendliness in personal relations which have been important for so long. Sudanese people, as they always have been, are very hospitable and welcoming, particularly to strangers. Their charm and courtesy has to be experienced as anyone who has been there will tell you, their 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 needs native English speaking under-graduates and graduates who are prepared to give their time to this urgent cause. Many have experience of working or travelling abroad and some have experience of teaching English. Each volunteer has to raise money for the cost of their own airfare to Sudan, which is about £430 and to cover their travel and living expenses in the UK for selection interviews, briefing and de-briefing.

The host colleges will provide free accommodation and medical cover. **SVP** pays for the travel insurance costs for each volunteer and arranges a modest living allowance while in Sudan, sometimes paid by the host institution. 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 dramas, 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 volunteer with **SVP**, please contact us at the address below.

SVP's friends

SVP is working with an experienced and capable group of colleagues in Khartoum, Momen Osman Salih, Dr Ahmed Abdalla, formerly English Language Officer at the British Council, Saif Hag ElSafi, Nasreldin Shulgami, Ustaz AbdelAziz Moheddin, Muna Muhalab Ali Taha, Abdalla Bedri Rasheed ElAmin Hamid and Saad Yousif Abbas who see to the welfare of the volunteers and who advise on placements and academic policy. **SVP Khartoum** is being registered as a Sudanese charitable association.

SVP is a registered charity, based in London, incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. The trustees who comprise **SVP**'s committee of management are: Ahmed Bedri (*chairman*), Samya Muddathir AbdelRahim (*vice-chair*), Nadir El Gadi (*treasurer*), David Wolton (*secretary*), Jehan Osama AbdelHamid, Mohamed Hireika, Mamoon Ibrahim El Tayeb, AbdelMoniem Ali, Babikir Yahia, Osama Mahmoud Salih, Bushra Asrag Mustafa

We hope you will join **SVP** as a member and persuade 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 is £25.00 per year or £10.00 concessionary rate which 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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