

S·V·P News 4

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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From November 1998 SVP began sending longer term volunteers with commitments of three months or more. By March 2000 over fifty volunteers had been sent on these terms. In addition, SVP's fourth **summer programme** began from mid June 2000 with twenty four SVP volunteers arriving in Khartoum. Momen Osman Salih, Saif Haj El Safi and Saad Yousif undertook the arduous task organising their placement at work, their accommodation in Khartoum, meeting the planes, getting everybody to the hostel, answering all sorts of questions and seeing that the schools and colleges were ready to receive them. It was 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 time and hospitality to our volunteers.

As in former years SVP continues to learn from its experience in many ways which will be relevant to future plans. We rely on the great demand and welcome for our volunteers at all levels of education, and our many friends in Sudan eager to help our expansion and improvement in service and expertise.

*Alison Holman,
Rachel Bingham &
Anna Roberts
with friends at
Omdurman Ahlia
University*



A note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the fourth issue of SVP News. It contains stories received from our volunteers in this year's programmes. We hope that these will encourage others to join us in our really urgently needed work of teaching English. SVP now has volunteers throughout the Sudan academic year from July to April.

SVP thanks all the volunteers of the 1999-2000 season: Barry Marston, Zarina Davis, Peter Hotton, Stephen Harrison, Sarah Nesling, Ali Pickard, Sonia Farrey, Nick Tomkins, Darren Clark, Anna Roberts, Peter Dawson, Ian Winterton, John King, Gemma Cannings, Ken Darmanin, Alice Doyle, Michael Metcalf, Jason Trickett, Tim Grimble, Gavin Dunn, Jaime Tweedie, Kate Prottey.

In the Summer 2000 Programme: Nasrin Akhter, Clare Bagley, Rachel Bingham, Kate Brown, Dinny Burge, Emily Chamblin, Alison Holman, Anjudel Johnson, Anna Roberts, Eleanor Williams, Adam Connors, James Edleston, Barney Hinnigan, Graham Hogg, John McAfee, Mark Miller, Joe Moorhouse, Madoc Thriepland, Stephen Nash, Gareth Price, Matthew Scott, Haroon Shirwani, David Westwood, Nick Whatley, Colin Wong.

In the Autumn 2000 programme: Patricia Somerset, Catherine Palmer, Fatimah Kelleher, Mike Dubinin, Simon Watkinson, Lucy Cridland, Jo O'Brien, Esther Shaw, Amira Hamza Malik.

SVP could not exist without members and supporters. Please continue your help and keep in touch: if not one already - please become a member. There is more about SVP on the back page.

Ahmed Bedri

Dinny Burge, a medical student at Bristol University

taught at Academia Medical School. She writes:

When I was told that I would be living with a Sudanese family during my stay in Khartoum, I was excited to be given a unique opportunity to experience Sudanese culture at first hand.

My delightful family consisted of around thirty members of all ages. Even by the end of my two-month stay I had not quite worked out how everyone was related to each other, as the size of the families means that nieces can be older than their aunts, and at least four generations merged into one another. The house was large enough to accommodate all these people, with most sleeping out under the stars in the courtyard at the back of the house, or on the roof. As the khawajiyya (foreigner), I slept in the air-conditioned (sometimes) guest room, which I shared with two or three others.

During the frequent power cuts, we all moved into the relative cool of the outside and would wake covered in a layer of fine dust.

Although the family never stopped worrying about me, they got used to the idea that I could travel around Khartoum alone and would not get lost (much). I think the girls, who had never spoken to a westerner before, were more affected by the culture shock of my arrival than I was. In a

traditional family like this, the women do not leave the house unless they have a good reason, especially in the evening. At first it was difficult to balance my activities in Khartoum, and in particular the numerous invitations from my students, with family life, but with both sides willing to adjust I soon settled in.

The girls were constantly bemused by many aspects of their new sister/daughter. Why did I have no nice clothes? Sudanese women take exquisite care of their appearance when outside the home and my baggy T-shirts and long skirts, mostly from Oxfam, could not compete with their finery. Why did I cut my beautiful yellow hair? Why was I so thin? Why didn't I live at home with my parents and grandparents? Why did men cook? Why wasn't I married? So many questions which I couldn't begin to answer without first embarking on a description of British life and culture. However long I spent explaining, I felt that my audience would never really understand what I was saying unless they came to Britain themselves, just as I could not visualise or understand Sudanese life and culture until

immersed in it. I desperately wanted to bring some of my new sisters home with me, just so they could have a glimpse of a country so different.

Food was prepared for the family by Haboba (grandmother) or another of the older women. Before moving in with the family I had tried one or two dishes from the stalls on the street, and had not been impressed. However, the cooking in my new home was superb. Vegetables stuffed with rice and meat, chicken with peanut sauce, root vegetable and beef stews, salad with peppery rocket, goats cheese and juicy olives, fresh mango and guava juice. Being unhealthily thin by Sudanese standards, I was expected to eat twice as much as everyone else. Not wanting to offend, I did my best but Haboba was always disappointed by my efforts. Although my visit was as much of an education for my



outside the clinic at Soba Aradi

host family as for me, I could not dispel all the misconceptions about British life which they and my students had. No, there are people without enough food. No, it is sometimes sunny in England. No, not all students have a car.

As part of the family, I was exposed to situations which I would otherwise not have been able to experience. One evening I accompanied

the women to a neighbour's house, where the 21-year-old daughter was preparing for her wedding in two weeks. A professional singer and dancer had been asked to the house, along with forty or so friends and family (all female), to teach the bride-to-be to dance. It was a wonderful party atmosphere, with lots of singing, clapping and dancing - I was dragged reluctantly onto the dance floor and made to imitate the rest, causing much hilarity.

A few weeks later I was fortunate enough to be invited by another family to the wedding ceremony itself. A Sudanese wedding lasts for several days with various ceremonies. There was the traditional dancing of the bride for an all-female audience and her husband. At least 150 women had gathered on the roof of the house, and after a few lighting problems due to power cuts, the bride and groom arrived. She was wearing the most beautiful tob (traditional Sudanese dress), and got onto the stage and began to dance. After a while she shed her tob. Underneath she was wearing just a short skirt

and skimpy top - hence the female-only audience. There were three dancing sessions, each time the bride wearing a different outfit, while the groom walked around the audience shaking a sword in the air, or joining his bride on the stage to dance. The ceremony lasted around three hours, finishing with a ritual involving the couple sitting on cushions surrounded by close family, while perfume was sprayed around the audience and oil was splashed onto the heads of the newly-weds.

My host family treated me as one of their own, and it was a pleasure to come home each day from teaching and have a home and family to talk to and joke with, and to sit around the table with 15 others sharing a delicious meal. I had a truly Sudanese experience which I will not forget.

at the Clinic

Aradi, Aradi, Soba Aradi, came the call from the boy jogging alongside the bus - I grabbed at the door and hauled myself on. As we pressed through the crowd of people moving about the souk (market), I looked out at the busy scene around me. Men drifting by in their elegant white jalabia, some women in startling shades of

every colour, others invisible behind their black veils and gloves. People leaned against shop counters enjoying fresh mango and guava juice, children thrust packets of biscuits through the window in the hope that the khwajiyya would part with a few of her Dinars. Again I marvelled at the fortitude of those who sit all day in forty eight degree heat selling their wares.

Internally displaced people who have fled the violence in the south are now living in camps and villages around Khartoum, joining refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Chad. It was to one of these camps I was now travelling, for my weekly visit to St Philips's Health Centre.

The bus soon left the smooth tarmac of the main road and juddered across the sand, whipping up the dust which instantly covers every surface and fills eyes, ears and throat. Not a day for contact lenses. Out of the brown clouds ahead emerged the horizon of low mud buildings which lay sprawled across the desert, blending into the background of sand so that it was impossible to see where

they ended. Donkeys skittered with surprising energy between houses which were little more than walls, and children chased after our bus yelling excitedly at the khawajiyya, a rare sight.

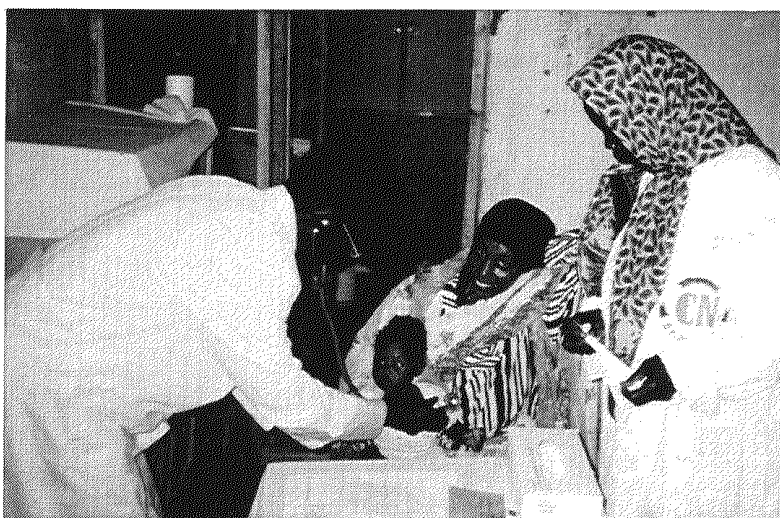
As I trudged through the dust towards the centre and edged through the hordes of school children on their morning break, a tall man in a white coat smiled and saluted me from the door of the clinic. Abraham was always delighted to welcome a visitor to his outpatient department, however hectic and cramped it already was. This morning looked typically busy but as usual, everyone was organised. The twenty or so patients sat under a grass shelter with a numbered ticket, and new arrivals checked in with the receptionist. There is no electricity or running water in the health centre. Without fans the

heat is exhausting, and barrels of water are carried each day from the communal pump 500m away.

In the small room which served as a surgery, Abraham and another health assistant received the patients and carefully noted the history. Diarrhoea, fever or respiratory symptoms were the usual complaints. In the 'lab' next door, which had space for two standing, the great enthusiast Quintino worked through his list of

investigations. 'Sister, sister,' would come the cry, and I was summoned to peer at slides of lively Giardia whizzing about, or the spiky eggs of Schistosoma. Malaria is the most common illness, closely followed by gastro-enteritis and respiratory tract infections - not surprising in a community which has no running water and where ten children share a bedroom. Some of the patients can afford the 35 pence charge for an investigation, but many cannot, and often the health workers must make a diagnosis without the information they need.

By two o'clock the last of the patients had left and we sat outside in the shade of a mud wall with a cola and biscuits, while Abraham and the others told me about their plans for expanding the health project here. As well as the general clinic they run, there are units for ante-natal care, growth monitoring, vaccination and oral re-hydration. They aim to start a health education programme next, hoping to target some of the people who live too far from the centre to come for treatment.



inside the clinic

from James Edleston's diary

The centre of Khartoum is a throng of shops predominantly selling fresh fruit juice, sharwama kebabs, packets of C&A style, smart casual trousers and shirts, or batteries, pens and cigarettes. There are, of course, shops selling most of what you need but it does take a bit of a search and in the morning and daytime sun that can be draining. I had a bit of a turn this afternoon on my way to the British Council. English fool that I am, I had gone out with no hat and no sun cream to shop for a lot of things. When the wind picks up, each gust can feel like a physical blow, or at least something similar to the hot blast you get from opening the oven door. I was hit by one such blast and reeled into the shade desperate for a drink and worried I might collapse. I got myself some of the amazing, addictive fresh lime juice, which is ladled from a vast cauldron filled with bricks of ice, and slowly recovered. When I got back to the guest house I crashed (quite literally) onto my bed and was woken 3 hours later. I had learnt my lesson.

I have not visited the other areas of Khartoum and not spent long enough out and about to get a full and realistic picture of the city. But so far I love it- the bustle- the noise; young bus conductors yelling their destination, 'burri, burri, burri', and the sound of horns, hawkers, and holy men reciting the Koran. I love the smells; the cooking meat to whet my persistent appetite, even the wafts of decomposing rubbish, the dust carried through the city by the breeze, gives an aroma of Khartoum itself. Khartoum has very few tall buildings and therefore few identifiable landmarks for the wandering visitor. Everything is close to the ground: woman crouch in the markets selling tea; fruit and vegetables form small pyramids in the sand, and clothes are sold from the backs of cars. Although it not a busy city in the same way as Bombay or Bangkok, or even London, I get a similar feeling of claustrophobia. The intensity of the sun plays a part in that, and the number of buses surrounding the central souk adds to the feeling of enclosure. Walking in central Khartoum is like finding your way around a moving labyrinth, unable to see above the tops of the buses as they inch past you in all directions. But down amongst the shops, just beyond the souk, life is a little different. I haven't really got to grips with it yet but there seem to be a lot of people just hanging about. There is still a feeling of fervent activity but I think that comes from the volume of people literally just hanging about. This is where the more established shops are: hundreds of places for passport photos for instance, and the Tottenham Court Road of Khartoum where all the shop fronts display phoney Playstations and mobile phones. Thankfully, most of the shops are in the arched covered walkways of now defunct hotels and office blocks. Most notably so far is the renowned fast food restaurant, Maxim Burger, where for about 30p you can gorge on a 'Jumbo Burger' topped with unidentified frying objects, and sip a Pepsi in the shade. I have been drinking absurd quantities of Pepsi, but after a couple of litres of water it is refreshing to drink something that tastes.

SVP is looking for volunteers whose work of teaching English will build on the traditions of cordiality and friendliness in personal relations which have been important for so long between Sudanese and English speaking people. Sudanese have always 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.

SVP needs native English speaking under-graduates and graduates who are prepared to give their time to our 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 £434 and to cover their travel and living expenses in the UK for selection and briefing.

The host colleges will provide free accommodation. **SVP** pays for the medical and travel insurance for each volunteer and arranges a modest living allowance while in Sudan, usually 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 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**, have a look at our website and then contact us at the address below.

SVP is working with an experienced and capable group of colleagues in Khartoum, Momen Osman Salih, Saif Hag ElSafi, Mirghani Yousif, and colleagues who see to the welfare of the volunteers and who advise on placements and academic policy.

SVP is a UK 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*), Osama Mahmoud Salih, David Wolton (*secretary*), Jehan Osama AbdelHamid, Mohamed Hireika, Mamoon Ibrahim ElTayeb, AbdelMoniem Ali, Babikir Yahia, 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: we need your help to make it possible.

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