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Education for everyone



When our colleague Janine Smith told us she was volunteering at a school in Kenya, we wanted to find out more – and tell you how your crochet can help

Our first instinct was to find out why Janine was visiting the school, and our second, to ask if we could get involved, too. Janine explains, “My plans to visit Kenya came about because in 2021, my youngest child Sonny was diagnosed with severe nonverbal autism and learning difficulties.” About 18 months later, Sonny started to attend a specialist school in Bath. “We were blown away by how incredible the staff were,” Janine continues, “so kind, caring and selfless. I instantly formed a great bond with Sonny’s Special Needs Teacher Veryan Cranston, and she mentioned that in the holidays, she volunteered for a charity at the Melon Mission School in Nakuru, Kenya.”

FROM ONE SCHOOL TO ANOTHER

Veryan told Janine that she had travelled with Elizabeth Henderson, a Consultant Speech and Language Therapist who is also based at Threeways School in Bath. Elizabeth has been involved in a partnership project with the Melon Mission School on a volunteer basis since 2019. She says, “My colleagues and I play a very small part in providing training, support, mentoring, equipment, advice, skills and funding – we work with our amazing Kenyan colleagues to develop sustainable change in their school and in their community. Having visited once – leading a group of 30 teenage Explorer Scouts – I couldn’t keep away.”

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Later in 2019, Elizabeth was asked to provide ‘special needs training’ for the teaching staff. This was the beginning of the conversations and planning that would eventually lead to the conception of their Guardians’ Group.

The pandemic dealt a huge blow to the school, cutting off the possibilities, hope and ideas visitors bring, which are so appreciated by headmaster Mr Dalmas, as well as funding. But in 2022 Elizabeth returned, this time with Veryan. With the school, they developed a new initiative – a community outreach for



Top: some of the 400 children aged 9-13 that attend the school, with donated toys
Far left: knitted toys being handed out to keen little ones at the Melon Mission School
Left: Janine Smith with her loving boy, Sonny, the inspiration behind her upcoming trip



Above and left: these knitted toys will be very well taken care of by their new owners
Far left: the children at the school come from far and wide, and their families have become a supportive network for each other

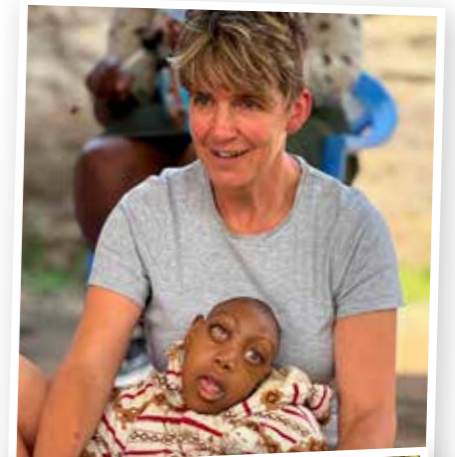
families of children with special needs, as there is very little state-funded educational provision for these children.

Melon Mission’s social worker, Damaris, held a gathering for families caring for children with a range of disabilities. Elizabeth and Veryan spoke about their work in the UK with children just like theirs, and the group has grown hugely – over 25 families now benefit. Elizabeth smiles, “The regular pupils (and staff!) at Melon Mission were curious about the new faces when our group met. They are used to it now and this fledgling ‘inclusion’ is really important.” Parents and guardians are keen to learn how to encourage their child’s development, and many have noticed significant developmental improvements.

James Kagema, the Director of Melon Mission School, and the son of the founders says, “Since 2004, Melon Mission has provided

for the basic needs of school-age children living in Kwa Rhoda village. Families face a daily struggle for sufficient food, shelter, health care, safety, sanitation, education, and opportunity. All children, regardless of circumstance, deserve to live and learn in a safe, supportive environment. We strive to provide that in hopes of giving children the opportunity to grow to their full potential and have a chance to break the cycle of generational poverty, leading to brighter futures for the children and community.

“With the coming of friends like Elizabeth and Veryan, Melon Mission has not only become a refuge to the children, but is now a beacon of hope to our very dear group of the children with special needs, their guardians and the community at large.”



Above top: the community outreach group gets children with special needs involved in developmental and therapeutic activities
Above: the hilarity of peekaboo games transcends age and language differences!

HOOK NOW TO HELP THE SCHOOL

Join us in sending some crocheted joy to the Melon Mission School! We’ve put together suitable patterns as requested by Elizabeth, with hats, toys, dolls, and brooches for older pupils, guardians and teachers. Download patterns for FREE at www.gathered.how/melonmission, and you can also send lap blankets, and motifs and squares to be used as fidget shapes. To be in time for Elizabeth, Veryan and Janine’s next visit in April, please send your items to arrive by 15 March; items sent later will not be wasted but will be taken on following trips.

Please send finished items to: Elizabeth Henderson, The Hawthornes, Bruton Road, Evercreech, Somerset BA4 6HY

