



## Latest news – June 2024

Dear Friends, the work that we support in South Sudan continues, with very little input needed from here in the UK. The clinic is running very well; the teachers and health students are studying hard, some with exams in May, and the second phase of the youth discipleship training ran smoothly for a week in May.

You'll recall that we were trying to assist the Diocese of KajoKeji to re-open a primary school that had been closed since January 2017. During that time of conflict, things such as doors and windows were removed and the whole school compound became very bushy. With small grants from two UK charities, we raised sufficient funds to enable the school to be repaired and repainted and four new latrines to be dug, ready for the start of term. Some teachers who had been trained with The Brickworks' scholarships were recruited and the number of pupils is rising gradually, currently just 40.

The Martha Eye Clinic has had a very busy quarter, as there has been an outbreak of "red eye disease". This is viral conjunctivitis and unfortunately people have been trying a range of home-made remedies and damaging their eyes as a result. Even household items such as paraffin and hand sanitiser have been used by patients, causing complications for the eyes. The Eye Clinic Ophthalmic Clinical Officer, Abui Costa, has been speaking to school children to educate them about the disease so that they can tell their parents and neighbours how to avoid such local remedies and treatments. This photo shows Abui, addressing a school assembly.



In our last news update, we mentioned that the annual cataract camp would take place at the end of March. This year's camp was funded by Bradley Stoke Evangelical Church, for which we are extremely grateful. The week was a great success. While we tend to focus on the 101 cataract operations, the actual number of patients seen and treated was 315, as many conditions required medication rather than surgery. Abui Costa wrote to us afterwards saying: "Joy and happiness were witnessed from patients who regained their sight after some years of blindness, especially the four children and a woman who said that she wanted to see her daughter before she died."

You may recall that we were concerned about the funding of the Martha Clinic due to the ending of the Health Pooled Fund, resulting from cuts to the UK international aid budget. This fund had provided some medicines for the clinic and paid the salaries of some of the staff. UNICEF took over in April and so far The Brickworks has not needed to increase its funding for the clinic, which we had feared. Nevertheless, the

demand for medicines seems to be increasing and we continue to source the majority of these from a reliable not-for-profit supplier in Uganda. These have been transported safely by road, crossing the border and then driven to the clinic in Yei.

Looking ahead, five of us are preparing for a visit to Yei at the end of September. The two of us will be joined by two members of our church and another young person from a church in Ringwood. For two of the team, it will be their first visit to Africa so do be praying for all of us, as we plan what each member of the team will do during the week in Yei, as well as visa applications, travel arrangements and obtaining all the necessary vaccinations.

A big thank you to those of you who signed up to use easyfundraising. The website takes a bit of getting used to but our supporters have so far raised £268 for The Brickworks just by clicking on the easyfundraising website, on the way to shopping online with John Lewis, M&S, Tesco, booking.com, LV insurance, and over 7000 other brands. It's very easy and costs you nothing! One of us recently signed up for WHICH? gaining a £4 donation, and when we switched our home insurance to LV, The Brickworks received £9.

Last year, we held our AGM on Zoom and were delighted when we were joined by supporters from all over the UK, as well as USA and Uganda. The trustees have decided to continue with this approach for 2024 and so please make a note in your calendar of Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm. This date has been chosen so that you can hear from the team that will have recently returned from South Sudan, hopefully with great stories to share with you all.

Thank you so much for your prayers and support.

John and Poppy Spens

*After the cataract surgery, patients receiving eye drops.*



*Young people responding to a call to follow Jesus, during the week of discipleship training in Yei, South Sudan.*