



# Long-term teaching overseas

## Challenged and stretched

What was it like? A privilege! We spent 11 of the best years of our lives committed to teaching and caring for missionaries' kids. Most of the children we worked with made a commitment to God and grew in their faith.

The boarding school community had to be organised to a well-ordered timetable. Despite the fact that it was intense at times, our work offered great rewards in the form of close friendships and support, and the opportunity to play a huge part in the children's lives and spiritual growth.

Because Bourofaye Christian School was so small we had to be adaptable. Often we found ourselves being challenged and stretched; teaching outside of our age range and subject specialisms, often to multi-age classes. We also had to be innovative when it came to managing resources, adapting equipment and making the most of what we could find locally.

Some children needed extra English-language support and we learnt to be culturally sensitive to non-Anglophone students. In a school like Bourofaye children grow up as 'third culture kids'; not part of the host country nor their parents' country, but something else entirely.

Steve and Gill Bryant are now the education advisers to WEC (Worldwide Evangelization for Christ) International. They were in Senegal from 1990 to 2001 with their three boys, teaching at Bourofaye Christian School. Bourofaye was set up as a boarding school to teach the children of WEC families in Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Senegal, but now has a wider catchment area due to its proximity to Dakar airport and has children from a large number of missions. Gill taught history and French and Steve taught a wide variety of subjects and was headteacher from 1993 onwards.

The school staff was multinational too, and somewhat ephemeral. Every year saw new short-term teachers arrive... and leave. In fact annual turnover was typically 50% or more. We often had to work with a shortfall of one or two teachers because of the difficulty recruiting teachers from the West to work in overseas schools for missionaries' kids.

## Abundant fresh fruit

The biggest challenges for us early on were cultural and practical. We had to adapt to a more basic lifestyle in the African bush, and we had to learn to fit in with the disparate demands and expectations of the school community on the one hand and local villagers on the other.

The school had no telephone access so we had to make calls whenever we were in town; news came via the radio, not through the TV or the internet; and air mail letters, rather than emails, were the main communication channel with friends and family back home.

Western items such as chocolate bars and breakfast cereals were unavailable or grossly overpriced. Once we were used to this, though, we learned to really enjoy the local produce – abundant fresh fruit, tasty rice recipes, fresh bread and doughnuts and much, much more.

## Keur Massar

But our time in Senegal presented greater challenges than a lack of chocolate or television. An insurrection by local separatists in the region around the school meant we came close to being evacuated in 1992–93. Then, when fresh trouble flared in 1997 evacuation became inevitable. Thankfully, the children weren't at school at the time because it was the long 'summer' (rainy season) holiday.

Fighting came close to the school as the army and rebels shot and shelled each other and we pulled out to face a very uncertain future. Within days we had heard of a disused (and very dilapidated) Bible College site in Keur Massar on the edge of Dakar that we could use temporarily. Within two weeks we were on site, cleaning it up and beginning to move in enough equipment for the coming academic term.

A term became a year, and one year became five as the school continued to operate in its 'temporary' premises. Keur Massar means 'the house of testing'; a very apt name at times, but in that period of testing and uncertainty we also saw a great growth in many children's faith as they had to

trust God for the present and the future. We thank God for the miracle of being able to continue during those years of conflict.

## A new school building

Praise God! The Christian School now occupies new, purpose-built premises – again this was a miraculous answer to prayer. God opened the way for us to turn a bare site into a functioning school; graciously providing the money, the technical know-how and even the builders to bring about His purpose.

As the school is still close to Dakar in a village called Kiniabour, many of the Western 'luxury' items (like chocolate) are now freely available. Phone links, running water and a reliable electricity supply are the norm. In one go, the school jumped straight into the 21st century! All this means that new teachers do not have to adjust to a rudimentary lifestyle.

During our time there I often used to think there was nothing else I would rather be doing, and nowhere else I would rather be doing it! Just imagine teaching small, willing classes of students who want to learn. Surely this is the dream of teachers who face large classes containing disruptive students with little interest in learning.

## Supported and respected

The parents fully supported and respected the teachers in the school, just as the teachers in the school fully supported and respected the ministries of the pupils' parents. (How refreshing is that?!) Whilst the parents were busy planting and growing churches, or translating the Bible, or engaging in crucial development projects, or carrying out essential medical work, we were teaching their children. The parents knew that, were it not for our school, some of their work could not have been done.



African school staff

As teachers we played a crucial role in building up God's Kingdom. Firstly, we were responsible for educating the next generation of Christian missionaries. Secondly, in so doing, we released the present generation of Christian missionaries to heed their calling. And, to top it all, we also knew that God had led us to that place, and there is no better place to be than where God wants us.

## In it for the long-term

Our own children were privileged to share our adventure. Having grown up at a time of political unrest and immense blessing, they are now going on with God themselves. Many of the children from the 1990s have already been on short-term mission trips; some are preparing for longer-term service. Yet others are serving God right where they are in their passport countries as full-time Christian missionaries in a variety of 'secular' and 'Christian' workplaces. The important thing is that they want to be where God wants them.

Not every school for missionaries' kids is like Bourofaye. But many face similar issues, not least the constant turnover of staff and the annual battle for teacher recruitment. The inexorable shift towards shorter and shorter mission commitments exaggerates this problem as each year goes by. Yes, there is a place for short-term teachers, but there is as big a need as ever for long-term teachers who can bring continuity and stability and keep mission families in place. There are challenges, but the rewards of serving the Lord in this way are immense. Any mission agency in the UK would be delighted to hear from a teacher looking to serve using their God-given talents in this way.

We have no regrets about our long-term commitment to teaching missionaries' kids and know that virtually every other long-term teacher would say the same. So, how about considering this for yourself?

■ Steve and Gill Bryant



Senior classes and their teachers