

Rug Aid Newsletter 19 August 2010

The long wait is over!

It's been a while since our last newsletter, especially when you compare how many we have sent you 2010 with the number last year, when we were very busy organising the wonderful Rug Rave, of course. There isn't a big event like that this year to keep writing to you about and, in addition, the Rug Aid team have all been very busy in other areas of their lives! We hope you don't feel too neglected.

Pam and Kenny's fund-raising



Let's start this newsletter with something wonderful – Pam and Kenny Bolam's fundraising event! You may remember that this lovely couple, who have been friends with Heather and Les for many years, visited the workshop in The Gambia with the Ritchies in March 2010. They were so inspired by what they saw there that they decided to do as much fund-raising as they could. Kenny and his brother-in-law Paul undertook a bike ride of over 70 miles from South Shields (where Pam and Kenny live) to Reeth (where Heather and Les live). As a result, they were able to

donate over £400 to Rug Aid – that's wonderful and we are so very grateful to all of them. The photo left shows Kenny (with the beard) and Paul either side of Pam just after they arrived in Reeth – they all look very fit and happy, and it looks like they are having a well-earned glass of something sparkling to celebrate their marvellous achievement!

Heather's next visit to The Gambia

Heather will revisit the workshop in November: Christine Lelliott and her friend will accompany Heather for one week.

For the first time, Heather's visit will last two weeks: at certain times of the year it is possible to have two weeks in The Gambia for very little more than the cost of a one week visit – it's the flights that are costly, not the accommodation. Heather plans to use her 'extra' time visiting other voluntary organisations working in The Gambia to see how they manage their projects remotely. That's one of the biggest challenges facing Rug Aid at the moment: we can only afford to send Heather twice a year but we need to ensure that the workshop is functioning as we would all like it to between her visits. We have tried appointing local managers but, even if we pay them a small wage to keep an eye on the workshop, communication problems mean that we don't get the feedback we need to be sure everything is going well in Heather's absence.

'Our' Heather met Heather Armstrong during her March 2010 visit: Heather A (as we'll call her to avoid confusion) runs a donkey sanctuary in The Gambia and she asked Heather R to teach women living nearby to make rugs to support the sanctuary. There probably won't be time during the November visit, but if we can afford to extend a future visit to two weeks that may well happen.

Other bodies working in The Gambia include Sightsavers – they have a direct input into the GOVI School in Serrekunde where the Rug Aid workshop is located. Heather has not previously had the time to meet them and discuss how we could work together to benefit people with visual impairments, but we hope that this extended visit will provide that opportunity.

At some point, Heather also hopes to return to the Women's Museum 'Mama Africa' which had just been opened when she visited in March. The founder, internationally-renowned artist Isha Fofana, was very interested in taking Rug Aid trainee's work for display and Heather sent her some of the best rugs from the workshop before she left The Gambia.

David Blunkett - exciting news!

The wonderful, generous Pam Bolam (who was mentioned at the start of this newsletter) also took it on herself to contact a British Member of Parliament, David Blunkett, to tell him about Rug Aid. For those of our supporters who do not live in the UK and may not have heard of Mr Blunkett, he was born blind and was first elected as Labour MP for Sheffield in 1987. After the 1997 election he became the country's first blind cabinet minister and was promoted to Home Secretary after the 2001 election.

Mr Blunkett is one of the most prominent visually-impaired people in Britain today and it is typical of 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' Pam to contact him! We were very pleased when he replied, in April 2010, that he was interested in learning more about Rug Aid but, as the country was about to have another election, he suggested leaving the matter for a month or two. In June, Heather contacted him again and, as a result of Pam's initial work, Heather and Lesley will meet Mr Blunkett in September 2010. This is a great honour and a wonderful opportunity to present Rug Aid to someone who really understands the difficulties involved in what we are trying to achieve. We hope to persuade him to become more involved in Rug Aid now that the Labour party is in opposition and he is slightly less busy. We'll let you know how the meeting goes and what comes out of it.

Christmas 2010

We got some positive feedback from supporters about the possibility of producing Rug Aid Christmas cards, but we have decided that printing, stocking and distributing cards is not the best use of the money you entrust to us. We hope that you are not too disappointed.

We are delighted to announce that, thanks to the skill and generosity of Audrey Atkin of Belford in Northumberland, we have a unique rug for sale to raise funds for Rug Aid. This is the blue version of the Rug Rave rug which she made last Autumn and anyone who is lucky enough to get a personal Christmas card from Heather will recognise the design as Heather's 2010 card. Audrey donated the rug to Rug Aid to use in any way we please: because she introduced Christmas elements into the design - the Madonna, the star - we thought about using it as a Christmas card. After consideration, we decided that selling it is preferable because, that way, we will get an immediate income for no outlay.

If you would like to bid for this unique work of art, please send an email to christmas.rug@rug-aid.org During the next week we will create a page on the Rug Aid website where you can keep an eye on the bidding and see more photos of this lovely rug: there will be a link to this page from the 'home page', the first page you get to, to make it easy to find.

Other news

Hilary, one of the directors of Rug Aid and a very long-term friend of Heather's, took part in a table-top sale and sold surplus items from her home to raise funds. It poured with rain but she still raised £60 during the couple of hours that the sun shone: thank you, Hilary!

Several sizeable donations have been received since we last wrote to you: two separate donations of £300 came in from organisations Heather talked to, and one private individual also gave Rug Aid £300. We won't name that person, but they know who they are and they know how much that money means to us: thank you very much.

And finally: Heather often gives talks about Rug Aid, and they are very inspiring. If you belong to an organisation which is based in the north-east of England and you haven't yet had a talk about Rug Aid by its founder and figurehead, do get in touch using the email address below: there are still a few dates free in Heather's busy diary for 2010 and 2011.

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You can make a donation to Rug Aid in any currency through our website www.rug-aid.org where you'll find a lot more information about Heather and rug making. You can send a cheque (Sterling only, please) to Rug Aid's registered office, Greencroft, Reeth, North Yorkshire DL11 6QT. You can ring Rug Aid on +44 (0)1748 884435 or send an email to heather@rug-aid.org

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