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The Village News

www.bmiss.org News and Updates from Building Minds in South Sudan SUMMER 2021 VOL. 11

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ALL GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL



In 2020, the Bill Cook High School officially opened, which was a huge achievement. The King and Laima Beck High School for girls was a future plan that year. A sign for the school was placed on the site granted to BMISS by the village chief, but there was no groundbreaking at the end of 2020 or the beginning of 2021 because of COVID and the lack of funds. The dawning of spring of 2021 made this future plan a reality. One of the four rooms was donated by a long time supportive couple that has a passion for helping educate underprivileged children. The second room was donated by a friend of Judy Schwartz' in honor of her 80th birthday. We are half way there with these two rooms and can move ahead with the construction of the all-girls high school. History has been made, not only in the village, but in the entire country!

2021 EVENT UPDATE

Dear Friends,

As I began last year, the Building Minds in South Sudan Board hopes that you are all well and safe during this pandemic. We hoped that we could celebrate in person with everyone this June, but the restrictions at party venues make it really difficult. We brainstormed about other ways to get together and came up with what we hope is a wonderful way to bridge the gap. Michael Van der Gaag, a BMISS board member, made a video featuring Sebastian and Mathon. The video, **BMISS 2021 Celebration Interview w Pictures**, provides you with an idea of this past year in Mayen-Abun during Sebastian's and Mathon's visits, our goals for next year and years to come, how COVID has affected the village, update on the farming project for women, the school soccer teams, and more. Here is the link to the video: <https://youtu.be/mDswZoAnok0>

COVID restricted our fundraising efforts, but we were very successful thanks to our generous and caring donors, like you. Our sincere wish is to have our Annual Celebration Dinner next year when everyone is hopefully vaccinated. Thank you all for your continued support of BMISS.

Take care, be well and stay safe.
Judy Schwartz
BMISS Board, Chair

Mission Statement

This has been a year of updates. Our new Mission Statement now reflects Building Minds in South Sudan more accurately. It will give you a clearer picture of who we are and what we do.

OUR MISSION: After fleeing a war-torn region years ago as "lost boys", our founders, Sebastian and Mathon, decided to return to their homeland - a newly-formed country - to improve literacy, equality and economic opportunity.

WHY: To enhance the lives of South Sudanese families through community-based educational programs and facilities.

WHAT: We serve local communities by constructing schools and creating programs that lift-up African children and provide incentives for small-businesses.

- HOW:** Our program goals include:
- Advancing gender equality and literacy
 - Providing a safe educational environment to help children reach their full potential
 - Empowering current and future women-entrepreneurs by expanding educational access and offering microfinance grants
 - Working with local, regional and national governments to develop educational policies and contribute to building security and faculty training
 - Fueling South Sudan's economy by enhancing upward mobility and economic independence
 - Promoting school buildings as centers of healthy activity and opportunity
 - Cultivating community gardens to increase sustainable food sources and support local agriculture



Let's Play Soccer!

All three of our schools now have soccer teams with bright new uniforms, thanks to a gift from the Bill Cook Foundation.

Since soccer is a boys' sport in South Sudan, there are two teams of boys from Ajong Primary School. One team represents Ajong, while the other represents Majok-Keen, the all-girls' school. We always find a way to include both boys and girls! These two teams play each other.

The Bill Cook High School's team is called "Bill's Stars." Bill's Stars play community teams of young adults in the Wunrock and Mayen Abun areas. They also travel ten miles to play the team of the Catholic high school in Turalai.

This healthy and fun endeavor is the latest way that BMISS is furthering our vision of creating a community hub centered around schools and education.



PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for Our High School Students!

Thanks to a generous donor, **Michelle Chiantera, Vice President, America's Growth Marketing for Cisco Systems, Inc.**, students in our three schools could follow standard health protocols when they returned to in-person learning in May. Her gift provides PPE -- including a year's supply of masks -- for all 1,912 students, plastic water containers with spigots for hand washing, and soaps.

About her gift, Michelle spoke enthusiastically. "One of my passions in and out of my corporate life is giving back, with the aim of changing a young life," she said. "I am so proud to grow alongside this altruistic organization that helps students realize their full human potential and development."



HIGHLIGHTS OF SEBASTIAN'S AND MATHON'S VISIT

South Sudan placed restrictions early on throughout the country to protect the people from contracting COVID. All borders into the country were closed as well as those between states. Borders reopened in early May. There are still no testing supplies in the country, except perhaps in the capital city, Juba. There are no vaccines either. If villagers get sick, they think it's malaria.

The girls are very excited because they know that in December 2021 the groundbreaking for their high school will take place when Sebastian arrives and construction will begin immediately. Two very, very generous donors each donated enough funds for a classroom to be built. The foundation will be for four classrooms. If funds are received for a third classroom by the end of 2021, it will be built and the builder will give BMISS a line of credit and build the fourth and final room for the school. The villagers, especially the parents, are very supportive of the girls high school.

A 19th woman received her own garden plot and began farming immediately. This is the part of the large garden that was developed last year. Thanks to King Beck, there is a water system with hoses for the women to use to water their crops. The women are still amazed by the hose with water coming out of it.

A sports program is part of every middle and high school here in the USA, but not always true in primitive countries like South Sudan. The Bill Cook Foundation graciously donated funds to buy uniforms for three soccer teams in Mayen-Abun. There are two teams at Ajong Primary School and one at the Bill Cook High School. There are 18 on a team, plus the goalie. The first match between the schools will take place in November 2021 to welcome Sebastian for his annual visit.



Check Out Our New Logo!

BMISS has a new logo. We are grateful to Kyle Beck, a graduate of Austin Center for Design and son of Laima and King Beck. The Becks are long-time patrons of BMISS. We also thank Laura Castro, a marketing intern from Cisco Systems Inc. Each contributed creative designs and added enduring patience to the mix. After considering a multitude of options and how best to represent our mission and initiatives, we chose a design that updates our original logo and has a more eye-catching and whimsical design. We like it! Hope you do too.

