



Trip Report: Karatina Special School

by Brenda Birrell
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When I visited the Karatina Special School in May I could tell that it was a special place, with very special people. However, the buildings were shabby, with a number of problems and challenges.

On arriving back, 4 months later, the school looks fresh and polished, and I could feel a hum of excitement all over the campus. The changes, all made thanks to funding from SNCCF, have made a dramatic difference to everyone at the campus.

The principal welcomed me warmly, and the teachers and students were clearly happy to see me. After we had the official unveiling of the plaque, I planted a tree, in celebration of all the fruit trees planted by the students. Each student has planted their own tree and is responsible for looking after it (under the supervision of the agriculture teacher). The students are taking great pride in personally caring for something living.



I was given a full tour of the school so I could see all the improvements that had been made since I was there, last. It was breathtaking to see! Not only were the drainage and erosion problems fixed, access grills were added for easy clean-out in the future. This will ensure that the problem doesn't happen again.

The dormitories are dry and comfortable with no more leaking — the rainwater now runs off into gutters that drain into large water storage tanks. The water can be used for many purposes, including watering the trees during the dry season. And the washing machines are saving the housemothers many hours a week which they are using to help the students with meaningful activities.

The rooms have been painted inside and out and everything looks bright and welcoming. The difference is astounding! The renovated inside meal preparation area, and the outside dishwashing and drying area, are easy to clean and are visually appealing. They are now up to the high standards of the nice kitchen the school already had.



The supplies of wool, beads, knitting needles, and a sewing machine, have meant that the students are now able to make enough latch hook rugs, bags and knitted goods that they can be sold at the market. This brings in money for the activities to be self-sustaining, which is important for them to be continued. Teacher Rose is a good seamstress and is teaching students to use the new treadle machine. She made me a dress. Not only are the students able to improve their handcraft skills, but they are also learning to price the items they make. Their self-esteem is soaring.



Thank you, Zia, Nathan and SNCCF for the difference you have made in the lives of these wonderful special needs students and their teachers. They are very grateful and asked me to convey their love and thanks!

After a wonderful time of singing, dancing, and celebrating, the students clung to me when it was time for me to leave. They really are very *special* children, and I am so

happy that we were able to realize your vision of making such a profound impact on their lives. They are gaining skills and confidence and the world is going to be a better place for them. And it will be a better place *because* of them. Thank you for your generosity and thoughtfulness that has made this possible.