

# Irish Volunteers find water in South Africa

Phillippa Doran reports from Gorey

Myself and Deirdre Donohoe decided to volunteer with MSCs in South Africa and for this we fundraised €4,380 locally. We paid our own fares. On arrival we were met by Fr. Pat Galvin, msc who is so dedicated to helping the villagers of Bordeaux - a village untouched by foreign aid.

What a country of contrasts ... from the expensive cars and exclusive houses of Johannesburg to the shacks that some South Africans call houses. Carcasses of cows and donkeys lay on the roadside. The drought has a devastating effect on man and beast. We were shocked at the sights we encountered. We weren't able to shower during our time there ... instead we used a good old fashioned bucket and bit of soap!

We visited the Alergrane School in the village where 2 galvanised sheds were used as classrooms ... a hot place to be trying to educate yourself. The children were so welcoming and would keep touching our milk bottle skin to see if it was real as a white person was a rare sight to many of them. Some small kids would cry as we approached saying 'Malungu' meaning white person but soon they realised that we were there to help them.

Toilets in Bordeaux were non existent with a population of 200 families. I found this very difficult to comprehend. We met with the village committee to discuss their needs. The water issue was critical so we decided to use the money towards providing a well to give them an independent water supply.

Fr. Galvin helped us greatly in organising the project. After many set-backs the well driller drilled for hours that seemed like an eternity. We prayed that God would look on us and see that we were trying to make a difference. When we hit water and lots of it the joy and relief was tremendous. The

villagers agreed that they would all give a small donation per family towards the water pump because if it was owned by them all, no one individual could claim it as their's.

We then bought 32 wheelbarrows for the villagers. These will be used by families to ferry 10 gallon drums of water from the well. The remainder of the money was used to buy bricks towards the new classroom so as to get the children into a better environment to learn than a galvanised shed in the blistering heat.

I will never forget our time there. It was a life-changing time for us. I appreciate things so much

more now. It's so hard to explain what we saw .. the poverty, the sickness, the corruption but above all the lack of basic things that we here take for granted.

Fr. Galvin is a man I have so much admiration for. He has dedicated his life to Africa and when he walks into a crowd you can see the respect that he has earned from them. I will return there some day to try and improve Bordeaux a little further. It is important to know

that foreign aid is a great thing and can do fantastic things but when people learn to depend on it the purpose of aid can be stained.

It's very hard to help someone who won't help themselves but a helping hand to guide someone who yearns to improve themselves is very effective. That's why we involved the villagers and asked for their help. That, I believe, is the way missionaries have worked for decades ... guiding and bringing people along for their betterment.

We're just happy that these people have their own well. I couldn't have seen it coming soon had we not initiated it. Our friends in Annagh and Gorey who supported our fundraising can be proud of their contribution to the welfare of the people of Bordeaux.



Conveying water in plastic drums is part of normal life in South Africa. It is a common chore for children.