**2015 Report from Shelley O’Callaghan on her May visit to Twitti School**

I have just returned from a week at the Twitti School with my sister in law, Jo O’Callaghan.  The first thing I did, according to Zambian custom, was to visit Simon Maonde’s gravesite with Lydia and their children to pay my respects.  I planted flowers and Lydia and I shed tears and hugged each other.  It is hard to be here without Simon but the school that he worked so hard for is flourishing and continues as a legacy for the community.

Each time I return, I am impressed with the care everyone takes with the school.  The buildings are well kept, the grounds pristine, flowers and shrubs flourishing.  The school resounds with the pride the children feel. As soon as they see us, the children shout out welcomes, huge smiles on their faces. We visit each classroom and give each child a Canada Pin, which quickly becomes a coveted item.  A few hours later, a few children come to me in tears because they have somehow lost their pin.  Luckily, I have many pins, provided by my local MP’s office, so they all get replacements.

We brought extra suitcases filled with books for the library, puzzles and games, and lots of school supplies.  Thank you to all of you who donated these.  When the first group of children came to the library, the jigsaw puzzles were immediately pounced upon and soon the whole library floor was covered in puzzle pieces.  Jo spent her days meeting all the sponsored children, thirty in all, finding out how each child is doing, and taking photos.  One morning all the guardians of these children (most are orphans, and looked after by grandparents) came to meet with us.  I was told time and again, “Please thank the sponsors in Canada.  Without their support, my grandchild would not be able to go to school.”  When asked, they said that what else they most needed was shoes, socks and book bags.  We will consider adding this to our sponsorship program in the future.

Friends for Zambia decided to fund an award in honour of Simon Maonde.  We will establish a fund to provide a scholarship to the grade 9 student who achieves the highest results in the government exams.  This scholarship will fund tuition to the student’s next year of school.  With Lydia, we have designed a plaque that will be hung at the school.

I had productive meetings with the teachers, headmaster, the PTA and the Board of Trustees.  Their top priority for the school is a new and larger school bus.  The administration is researching buses and will send details soon.  The next priority is a multi purpose hall and kitchen.  A committee has been formed to look into feasibility.  The hall could be a source of revenue for the school for rentals to community groups.  The kitchen could provide a basic meal, much needed for the sponsored children who come to school without anything to eat.  The hall would be used in shifts as a place to eat the mid morning snack, especially needed in the five-month rainy season from November to March.

The school’s partnership with Lafarge continues to be strong.  I met with Lafarge’s community liaison who reaffirmed Lafarge’s commitment to donate cement to the school for future projects.  This will be a big boost to our efforts for a hall and kitchen. Another project that needs support is a new playground.  The school’s current equipment is rusty and dilapidated.  The administration is looking into alternatives available in Lusaka.  The computers donated several years ago by Rotary Club are in constant use.  The school has established IT as a special focus and the grade 8 class have already finished their curriculum guide and are moving forward to more advanced material.  All in all, it was a visit that left me in great admiration for what the school continues to achieve, a balance of high educational standards with support of the vulnerable.

Donations can be made online at our website: [friendsforzambia.org](http://friendsforzambia.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) or sent to me as follows:

Friends for Zambia Society c/o Shelley O’Callaghan

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I thank you all for your support of our school.

Shelley