
AKANY AVOKO ANNUAL NEWSLETTER - 2009



Welcome to the Akany Avoko annual newsletter! In a year when Madagascar has hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons, we are happy to share with you a more positive side to life out here in the Indian Ocean. Whilst political violence and turmoil have weakened our island's economy and made day to day life rather scary at times, we are thankful that, with your help, we have been able to continue caring for the 135 children dependent on Akany Avoko and that they in turn have been able to continue their journey towards adulthood and independence.

By now I am sure that many of you, our wonderful supporters, are familiar with the work that takes place within the walls of Akany Avoko. Over the years you have made it possible for us to provide food, education, healthcare, shelter and love to literally thousands of abandoned, orphaned, destitute or mistreated children. What you may be less familiar with is our work in the world outside of Akany Avoko. In this year's newsletter we would like to focus on our work supporting children and young people on their return to society, and to tell the stories of some of those helped by the team here dedicated to preparing for and supporting our children's return to society.

New Beginnings...

The children who we care for at Akany Avoko have the same needs as children all over the world – love, security, education, and the chance to develop as individuals. Before arriving at the centre, almost every child has suffered from hunger, neglect, or abuse of some sort, often Akany Avoko is the only place that they have ever felt truly safe. Leaving this protective environment to return to society can be a daunting experience. The emotional pressures of leaving the centre are compounded by the harsh conditions of the labour market which make work very hard to find.

In 2008, thanks to the kindness of supporters overseas, we were able to establish a "Reintroduction" team of two social workers and a careers officer whose sole focus is ensuring that children and young people leaving Akany Avoko are well prepared for life outside, and that they continue to be monitored and supported once they leave the centre. Over the past year this team has helped more than twenty children and young people leave Akany Avoko and begin new lives outside of the centre. Ensuring that those leaving have a secure place to live and either family to care for them or the means to support themselves independently is the main part of their work. In the past year the team has also ensured that, wherever possible, every child has a copy of their birth certificate and has made a visit to what family members (if any) they have. These visits help us evaluate the viability of a life outside of Akany Avoko for every child at the centre. They also help a great deal with our children's emotional stability.



Akany Avoko's Re-introduction team

Whilst Akany Avoko is home to many abandoned and orphaned children, some of the children at our centre have been placed here through neglect or because their parents or families have been unable to provide them with adequate care or education. To help improve the chances of some of our children one day returning home, this year Akany Avoko founded a "School for Parents". Every week the families of children are invited to attend lessons in childcare, parenting, health, hygiene and child psychology. As well as ensuring that the children have more contact with their loved ones we hope that the classes will help to provide the awareness, skills and capacity that will allow their families to one day care for them at home.

2008-2009, a year in stories....

Reuniting families...

Little Olivia was placed with us after being rescued from an abusive family who found her wandering alone on the streets. She had no idea what had become of her real family. This year our social workers were able to locate her family and reunite her with her delighted father and younger siblings who hadn't seen her for more than a year. Seeing Olivia walk out of the gates of Akany Avoko hand in hand with her little brother and sister was emotional for all of us. Olivia is one of several children that our Reintroduction team were able to reunite this year with families who thought they had lost their children, brothers or sisters forever.



Celebrating life...

Having lived on the streets of Antananarivo for most of her life, Angeline Kely had no idea of her age or birthday when she arrived at Akany Avoko. After much searching we were finally able to locate official records of her birth. On the 11th of August we celebrated her "first" real birthday with chocolate cake, gifts and singing. Many of the children cared for by our centre have been abandoned or orphaned long ago and do not know even the most basic facts about their own lives. We believe that every child has the right to know everything possible about his or her identity and we conduct extensive research into their backgrounds to ensure that this is the case.



Realising dreams...

We hope that you share our enormous pride in announcing that this year three young women supported by Akany Avoko graduated from university. Manana (pictured) completed a degree in Tourism and both Fabie and Olivia obtained degrees in social work. At present we have another three students at university reading accountancy, journalism and pharmacology. Over recent years, a number of Akany Avoko's graduates have returned to work at the centre and help future generations of children including Mme Hanta who leads the Reintroduction team discussed earlier in the newsletter. Your support alone has made these successes possible.



Starting over...

17 year old Noelline was placed with us after her family were unable to pay for her school fees or food. This year we were able to pay for her family to build a pig-house and purchase livestock which allowed Noelline to return to live with them, safe in the knowledge that they have a source of income sufficient to feed and educate her. Noelline's project is one of more than twenty Reintroduction projects sponsored over the previous year which have allowed young people to return to live with their loved ones on a long-term, sustainable, basis.



The world of work...

The last year has seen several of Akany Avoko's young people start their first jobs. Tiana (pictured) began work at a local clothing business, Iary returned from a year's study abroad to begin work as a receptionist in a city legal firm and several young women began small businesses of their own.

Finding work in Madagascar is extremely hard for anyone here, regardless of background. Our careers officer and educators work hard to identify possible careers, training needs and work placements whilst our social workers conduct follow up visits to ensure that all is well in the newly-independent persons life and career.



Five years on...

One of the most rewarding elements of our work is enjoying the successes of people who have long since flown the nest and left Akany Avoko for an independent life. August saw the opening of "Miss Pink", a hairdressing salon managed by Mbolatiana (pictured—left) who left Akany Avoko five years ago. Such success stories provide a great example for children growing up here and are a reminder of how much our young people are capable of achieving with your support.



Other News

Akany Avoko cares for more than 135 children which makes summarising 12 months in their lives in just two pages of A4 an almost impossible task!! Nevertheless, here are a few highlights...



September 2008 saw the completion of construction of an extension to our childcare centre, providing additional classroom space for our pre-school education classes and much needed play-space for all of our tots when the rainy season forces them inside. Throughout the year we have also worked hard to improve the efficiency and sustainability of Akany Avoko through a comprehensive series of repairs to our water system, the installation of energy efficient bulbs in all buildings and also a thorough reorganisation of our accounting

and financial reporting systems to ensure that not a single Pound, Euro or Dollar of your donations is wasted.

As all of our supporters well know, Akany Avoko never misses an excuse for a party. Christmas 2008 was a huge success with parties before, on and after Christmas Day. In our pre-christmas party the children performed festive songs and sketches for an audience of family and supporters. Christmas is invariably a time when peoples thoughts turn to family and friends so we made sure that the children's timetable was full of fun and activities throughout the festive season.

To kick off the school holidays we invited the Malagasy pop sensation "Marion" to perform as a surprise for our children. Whilst this newsletter could barely hope to capture the level of hysteria his performance induced, this photo of the children's faces when he made his entrance speaks a thousand words!!



July saw our primary school children celebrate a 100% pass rate in the secondary school entrance examinations (for the fourth consecutive year!!!!). This means that yet another classroom full of Akany Avoko children will be starting their education at the local secondary school in October. Four of the six children sitting their BEPC (GCSE Level) examinations were also successful. For children deprived of education or care for most of their lives before Akany Avoko gaining these qualifications is an amazing achievement.

Whilst, given the current political climate, it would be unwise for us to comment directly on recent events, we can say that in recent years Akany Avoko has done much to increase the amount of revenue we generate for the centre through tourist visits. This year's political crisis decimated tourism on the island, and has had a corresponding effect on our finances. The closure of many businesses across the country is also likely to lead to an influx of destitute children at Akany Avoko making demand for places here even greater than usual. If you would like to help then please make a donation on-line (www.akanyavoko.com/helping_us.htm) or by bank transfer. Better still – why not persuade one of your friends to sponsor a child at Akany Avoko. For between £20 and £40 a month they can share in the joy of changing a child's life forever. Contact akany.avoko@moov.mg for more information.

It is so hard to convey to you all exactly how much your support means to our kids but I hope that we have succeeded in giving you a taste of what we they have been able to achieve over the previous year thanks to your help.

With love and gratitude from every one of the staff and children here at Akany Avoko xx

