

## **Pretty fantastic helpers: COSBY & UJETA**

### **A band from Munich helps 500 schoolchildren in Malawi**

The band Cosby was in Malawi in September 2017 and had a plan to fit out 3 school buildings with electricity and to install a PV (photovoltaic) plant.

In an interview with Robin Karow and Marie Kobylka, Markus Pflüger discovers how this adventure panned out, and whether the school was ultimately flooded in bright light.

Markus:

Hallo Robin and Marie. Great to have you here. You've just been in Malawi for 10 days. What gave you the idea of helping a school locally?

Marie:

It was really Robin's idea. Through someone the band knows, we found out that schools in Malawi are massively in need of help. They particularly need electricity, in the form of solar energy, so that the children can be taught properly. You see, in winter it gets dark there very early, which means school ends early. That's why we wanted to install a PV system at a school.

Another part of the plan was for the nursery and the two school buildings to be fitted out to have a decent electricity supply. That involved a lot of preparation to do with the planning, searching out partner companies – and vaccinations for us, too.

Markus:

Did the whole band go?

Robin:

Yes, that's right. The whole band and Dave, a cameraman in our film crew, all went on the trip.

Markus:

You mentioned that the schools were in a relatively poor area. What was getting to the school like? And what were your first impressions?

Robin:

We drove to the school along an incredibly stony gravel track. We could hardly believe it was meant to be the access to the school. It really did head straight into an abyss. The school itself was situated on a small mountain. That first arrival was full of impressions – on both sides. At first, the children seemed curious, and at the same time strangely shocked to see us. We were welcomed very warmly by the head teacher and her deputy. After that, we went on an instant tour of the school, with a meet and greet in each class.

Markus:

Did you make a start on your building project straight away?

Robin:

Everything kicked off on the second day. We had contracted an electrician, who had hoped to finish everything over a weekend. That way, there would be no disturbance to lessons. Of course, things didn't go to plan. We worked on getting the electricity supply in for 8 days in a row. We drove to the DIY store and came back with several hundred metres of cables and pipes. Despite a few stumbling-blocks, at the end of the ten days all the cables and pipes were run and the lighting installed.

Markus:

And you had a special commission too. UJETA and the BRENT! agency donated a UJETA water treatment system with full replacement filters for the project. How was that received?

Robin:

At first, the kids had no idea what it was and what it did. But when we showed them the film of how it made crystal-clear water out of a dirty mix of water from the Isar and cola, they were totally fascinated! So then I was standing there, with 50 children around me, and I put the UJETA Care together. After that, the teacher sent the children to collect some muddy water. I went along with them, and I was really shocked by what I saw. Behind the school were pools with the dirtiest water I've ever seen. It was real cholera water. It makes you feel really uncomfortable, knowing that you are about to give that to children to drink.

Markus:

And what was the water like after filtering? Did you drink it?

Robin:

The water tasted good, and it was crystal clear. Naturally it was lukewarm, because it had been standing in the sun the whole time. To be honest, drinking that water really overcame my fears. Above all, I realised how much I had to trust this system so that I could give that water to small children to drink too. The little ones really enjoyed pumping the water, and one after another they went off to get more water, so that they could use the filter again. It was really brilliant to see how much they enjoyed it.

Markus:

And did everyone get on well with drinking it?

Dave:

Yes, definitely. We all found drinking it okay.

Markus:

What did you do with the water filters and the two UJETA Care devices?

Robin:

We left it up to the school management to decide what to do with them. They will keep one of your UJETA Care devices for the school. They are considering opening a small business using the other one. For instance, they were considering supplying filtered water to hospitals. And other schools and villages that have to travel several miles to access fresh water are set to benefit from it too.

They are simply brilliant helpers, instantly alleviating need and able to save lives.

Markus:

I'm really pleased to hear that you were able to put the filters to good use and make arrangements so that they can continue being used.

Going back to the PV system and the electricity supply to the school buildings – were you able to get that up and running in the end?

Robin:

Yes and no. The panels were still stuck in customs. We were being asked to pay an additional EUR 3,500 in VAT, even though goods for charitable purposes are actually exempt. On our last-but-one day there, the head teacher drove with us to the customs office to explain the situation. It involved an incredible amount of paperwork, which now still needs to be checked over.

Markus:

So did you get the panels in the end?

Robin:

No, it's still taking its time, which naturally I'm not very happy about. But we've prepared everything else as far as we can. A fitter from our German partner is all set to go. As soon as the panels arrive, he will be flying to Malawi immediately and installing them.

Markus:

So you didn't get to see your lighting in action in the school buildings in the end?

Robin:

Yes, we did. After all, we had to try it out to check that everything was working. So to do that, we got hold of a generator. When the three school buildings were lit inside and out ... that was a fantastic feeling for all of us.

Markus:

I'm glad you have so many positive impressions from your time in Malawi. And particularly that you have not only paved the way to a functioning electricity supply for 500 children, but also to them having fresh drinking water. That's a tremendous achievement. Thank you for the interview.