

PURPLE FIELD PRODUCTIONS

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2010/11

It is now seven years since Purple Field Productions was set up in a very small way to make, so we thought, just one film – and although this year has not gone quite as planned, it is perhaps appropriate to a seventh year, that we have been able to use it to set in motion a number of exciting new developments to carry us forward into the future.

The year started, as intended, with the production of our latest film “The Time is Now”, made in Ghana in association with Cerebral Palsy Africa and designed as a tool for local parents and medical staff in their campaign for an increase in services for children with cerebral palsy.

It is a sad fact that in Ghana, today, people with cerebral palsy still rank amongst the lowest on the social and economic ladder and face huge prejudice - too often perceived to be hopeless cases –and even to be ‘bewitched’, or ‘children of vultures’, bringing intense shame on their family.

For the vast majority of young people with cerebral palsy in Africa there is no chance of receiving the crucial physiotherapy treatment that could make a considerable difference to their ability to function, and to the possibility of their becoming part of society.

On meeting these young people, and their brave and loving families, one becomes only too aware of the desperate struggle they face, and of the equally desperate need for change.

“The Time is Now” premiered at the British Council in Accra on the 4th of February and was met with considerable enthusiasm and support. The Representative of the Minister of Health, speaking at the end of the screening, outlined what he felt to be needed in terms of a change in provision for children with cerebral palsy and he assured the audience “This is the beginning of a new thing.” In similar vein, too, the Chairman of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities stated, “I for one have learnt so much this evening. We will push the buttons to ensure that all these issues that come up will be addressed.”

Purple Field Productions, for our part, hope very much that these words really will lead to action.

Our two previous films also premiered in their native countries in 2010 - Mawa Langa in Lilongwe, and “Encourage and I Can” in Phnom Penh. Both are now out and doing their work in the communities for which they were made, and the initial feedback indicates that they really are right for the job.

In Malawi, our partner, YONECO, wrote that Mawa Langa has brought “over-crowding to their drop in centres”, and they sent us an email from one of the Supervisors in which

she writes that “the kids have memorized every scene” and, “are really getting something from this message” and again, “wanting to watch the same film daily”.

To our great delight, this year, Mawa Langa also received the award for best drama over 30 minutes at the Picture this ... film festival in Calgary. This is an enormous credit to the Malawian children acting in the film, and also a great pride to Purple Field Productions. It is the second time that we have won one of the top awards at this prestigious international disability film festival.

Meanwhile, in Cambodia “Encourage, and I Can”, our disability awareness film, is being very effectively used by our partner, Epic Arts. In February, they reported that they had already shown it to audiences totally over 4,000 in 12 schools and 21 communes. The feedback from both school and community screenings there has been very encouraging. My favourite quote is from one of the school children who, on being asked what she had learnt from the film, felt able to reply confidently, “People with disabilities equal non-disabled people.”

Back in the UK, it had been our plan to make a second film during the year, but the partner organisation concerned withdrew at the last moment owing to problems on the ground, and it was too late for us to undertake the necessary preparatory work for an alternative production. This seemed like a great blow at first, but in retrospect, I think that it was not so. The unexpected time at our disposal gave us the opportunity to sit back and review just where we have got to, and what needs to be done to ensure the usefulness of Purple Productions well into the future.

Now that we have seen just how much film can achieve in the field, our great challenge is to make Purple Field Productions sustainable and to ensure that it can continue with its work in the most effective manner. To this end we have taken time to look in-depth at the way we operate, to introduce some immediate changes, and to set in motion a long-term policy of strategic planning.

Without doubt, one of our greatest weaknesses is over dependence on one person, and this we have already taken the first steps to address.

An Administrative Assistant took up post in January and took over various aspects of the office workload as well as taking on some new tasks such as the setting up of a comprehensive supporter database and the production of a new bi-annual newsletter designed to keep all our supporters fully informed about what we are doing.

On the production side, we have been joined by our first Associate Producer, Colin Stevens, who won a Vodafone Award to work full-time with us for two months, and who will continue to support our team in a free lance capacity by undertaking specific production related tasks as needed. During this past year, he has been largely involved in researching a new drama project and in developing our network of partner organisations.

Meanwhile, our fundraising wing has been greatly developed by an enlarged team of three volunteer fundraisers – Zoe Ainsworth-Grigg, Peter Lansdown and Penny Jolley – to all of whom we are extremely grateful. Thanks to their efforts, our income has increased substantially during this past year - a fact that has made possible the essential long term planning indicated.

I should also like to convey my personal thanks to our Honorary Advisors and to our Trustees without whom it would not be possible to run the organisation. In particular, I should like to mention Scott Waldie, who retired from the position of Trustee and Director of Finance shortly after the end of the year. Scott helped in the setting up of Purple Field Productions and throughout the first seven years of its existence has made a considerable input. We shall miss him, but hope that he will now have a little bit more time to enjoy some relaxation.

Amongst the funds received, we have been very grateful for special grants from The Allan & Nesta Ferguson Trust, The Edith M Ellis 1985 Charitable Trust, The James & Grace Anderson Trust, The Pat Ripley Charitable Trust, The Westcroft Trust, the Vodafone Foundation and numerous Local and Area Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

To these, and to all our individual donors, advisors, crew members and supporters, the Trustees extend most heartfelt thanks.

Elsbeth Waldie
30 August 2011