

Assembly Two

Schoolchildren for Children activates young people through exercise to benefit disadvantaged young people worldwide. Pupils such as you are encouraged to walk, jog or run a minimum of a mile to raise a pound. 50% of the money goes to your school to assist with the development of extra-curricular sporting activities. 50% will be channelled to some of the poorest countries of the world, where it will be used to pay for books, materials, school equipment, school meal programmes and to assist gap year students in delivering education programmes.

If you are asked the question ‘Do you want to be successful?’ I am sure that most of you would answer ‘yes’. If you are then asked the question ‘How would you go about being successful?’, you would probably be less sure of your answer. Some may say ‘hard work’, others ‘commitment’ - the answers would vary considerably. One of the first questions to be resolved would be ‘What exactly is success?’. Are we talking about lots of money, academic achievement, a good social life, sporting prowess and so on? Another problem is prioritising the answers. Some may go hand in hand whilst others are not mutually compatible. A good social life would not necessarily lead to either sporting prowess or academic achievement. One of our other problems is the society that we live in with its culture of instant success – ‘And I want it Now’. Being successful is a journey not a destination. You can be successful as soon as you start the journey – for example if you want to get fit, you start the process by successfully jogging a set distance. The next day you maintain your success by jogging the same distance or going a little bit further or faster. You will know that come exams, most of you will work harder. You work harder because at that moment in time you believe it is the most important aspect of your lives. You might want a full and vibrant social life, but you prioritise and alter your goals and targets. Of course as you all know, those that work constantly throughout the year have more chance of success in their exams. Those that pursue the process are more likely to reach their destination sooner.

If I asked how many of you would like to be fit and healthy and live a long life, I would imagine that most of you would answer ‘yes’. If I said that to achieve that aim you would need to make sacrifices, then maybe you would not be so certain. Fitness and health is something that most of us have the ability to control. Not everybody all of the time, but most of us for most of the time. At least half an hour’s exercise at least three times a week is something that is not beyond even those of us with a busy schedule. Eating five portions of fruit or vegetables is not beyond the financial means of most of us. Not eating sweet or fatty food is often no more than a question of discipline. Refusing drugs, whether nicotine, alcohol or chemical, is clearly a matter of strength of personality. How many of you are prepared to make your own decisions and not roll over to peer pressure. Of course many of these choices that we are faced with stem from the society in which we exist. Many children in this world do not have the luxury of being able to make these choices for themselves.

Let me tell you briefly about just one school that Schoolchildren for Children is helping at this moment in time. Schoolchildren for Children is only able to help because of the efforts of pupils such as yourselves. Shadrach Kimalel School is based in Kibera. Kibera is infamous for being Africa’s largest and poorest slum. Situated on the outskirts of Nairobi in Kenya it is home to more than 800,000 people, most of

them below the poverty line. Disease is rampant; Aids has made orphans of thousands of Kibera's children. The average wage for those lucky enough to get work is less than a pound a week. The school, built in 1983, is a primary school named after Shadrac Kimalel, who was the Kenyan High Commissioner in London. The school was supposed to take 800 pupils, but since free primary education was introduced in 2003, the numbers have soared to 1500. There are 27 staff, with teachers servicing classes of around 70. The school takes children up to 14 years but does not turn away people of 18 who are desperate for education. There were limited sanitary facilities even before the numbers doubled. Toilet paper is a luxury. The school tries to feed some of the pupils at lunchtime with a small bowl of maize meal porridge. For many, this is their only meal of the day. There is one textbook to every three children. However, despite the class sizes and conditions, the school has no discipline or absentee problems. Pupils are there because they see education as their only way out of poverty.

I wanted to tell you about the Shadrac Kimalel school not just to make you aware of how important your efforts and your money is to these children, but also hopefully to give you a feel of how privileged we really are in this country. For most of us most of the time, food, education, adequate sanitation, water, clothing, housing and health are aspects of life that we do not need to spend time worrying about. Enough money to enjoy ourselves is normally our only concern, but when we compare this to an average income of less than a pound a week we can realise just how lucky we are in this country.

The questions that I asked you to think about at the start - 'What is success and how does one go about achieving it?' are questions that many people on this planet do not have the luxury of asking. Life itself is being successful. Staying alive is the only aim. The actual quality of life is something way beyond their control.

Through Schoolchildren for Children you can make a difference and not only have an influence on your own lives by keeping fit and healthy, but on the lives of others far less fortunate than you. That would be success on two counts.