

## Manager wanted for aid project in Africa

**The after-school daycare center Susanne Heckmann supports in Mauritania now cares for 50 children. Heckmann, who lives in Regensburg, now wants to hand over her job to others.**



**Susanne Heckmann helps to finance the after-school daycare center. Our photo shows her with the teacher who works there. Photo: Heckmann**

By Thomas Rieke, MZ

REGENSBURG. Milestone birthdays are not only a cause for celebration. In many cases they are also cause for reflection. What have I done with my life? What can I still do in the time left? Susanne Heckmann, who made headlines in the MZ as "Woman of the Desert" exactly two years ago, also wasn't spared from taking stock of her life recently on the occasion of her "80th". And what she has been especially concerned about since then is how the aid project "La porte de l'espoir" ("The Door to Hope") she supports in Mauritania will continue once she is gone. "It shouldn't die with me ..."

A quick reminder: Heckmann, a mother of four who studied law and most recently worked as a marriage counselor, discovered her love of the

desert in the early 90s on a trip to Israel. The view of the Jordanian mountains cast a spell over her. "I felt at the time that this is where my soul is at home" From then on she regularly travelled to countries that are defined by the Sahara desert. In Atar, a Mauritanian oasis town of approximately 25,000 inhabitants, Heckmann met a police officer and his wife Mame Sy. She works in a mother-child center run by Spanish nuns and toyed with the idea of establishing an after-school daycare center for the poorest children. On her walks through the neighborhood she encountered great misery, and it was clear to her that this could not be changed through individual donations here and there.

### Increased financial aid

Mame Sy immediately found an enthusiastic supporter in Susanne Heckmann. The woman from Regensburg, amazingly youthful for her age, agreed to take care of the financing. 300 euros a month should be enough for a start. Friends and former classmates never tired of making donations. And so Mame Sy suddenly found herself in a position to rent a house for the after-school daycare center. She named it "La porte de l'espoir". It started operating in June 2011. Every day, Mame Sy serves the children a fresh, home-cooked meal - often the only one the pupils get. And teachers provide professional lessons in the afternoons. Recently, all those who had applied for a place at a secondary school passed their the entrance

exam. - What better reward could there be for Mame Sy and Susanne Heckmann?



**Poor, but apparently not unhappy:  
Children who get a daily meal at "La porte de  
l'espoir".  
In return they love to learn, even after school.  
Photo: Heckmann**

Initially, there were ten to 15 children who voluntarily visited the after-school daycare center, but soon those figures should double. Her enterprising nature allowed Susanne Heckmann to increase the financial support accordingly. Today, it is already 700 euros per month that go to the after-school daycare center in a roundabout way, but without the loss of one cent. To the benefit of 50 children.

### **Soon more space for the children**

Encouraged by the success and the ongoing support, Mame Sy has launched a new construction project. After all, more children also need more space. An Englishman bought the necessary land, and construction is to start soon. The move to the new premises is planned for October.

So everything would be just fine if it wasn't for "nature". This year, "Desert Susanne" for the first time felt that it's not only the cold winters at home (from which she escapes every year) that take a lot out of her, but that her body no longer can take the high temperatures as well as before. "It's time to look for a successor", Heckmann has decided. A solution already seemed within reach, but a near commitment from a good friend turned out to be a misunderstanding. "I was devastated ..."

Now there is another attempt to solve the problem. On Saturday, Heckmann has called for a meeting with friends on a gorgeous terrace overlooking the rooftops of the old city, friends to whom she would like to entrust her legacy. If everyone contributes his skills and the jobs are divided accordingly, it should be possible to keep the "door to hope" open as a team.



**The gateway to the new after-school daycare center is like a work of art. Meanwhile, it is open 50 poor children. Photo: Heckmann**



**Fearless squats this worker on a wall. Despite crippled hands he is the foreman on site. Photo: Heckmann**