

MALAWI ORPHAN AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

A year by year review of achievements made

Malawi Orphan and Community Project

*Working with **Joshua Orphan & Community Care**, Quest helps provide a safe and secure living environment for orphans, vulnerable children and their families in the **Pen Sulo** district of **Malawi**.*

2011

This year, our twelve-strong team was warmly received by the villagers of Kumwandika, a new site for Joshua and Quest. The team spent five weeks grafting, and the end result was a new feeding centre for the orphans of the village.

They not only built the centre, but managed to decorate it inside and out as well! Whilst not working on the construction, our UK volunteers, who stayed in the nearby village of Malilo, also helped out at feeding centres in Manyowe and Pensulo, where they provided millet porridge and basic pre-school education and care to the children. The team gained a valuable insight into the wider societal problems of everyday life for Malawians, through their experience, and it was both emotional and rewarding.

2010

This year saw the summer team back in Pensulo, where Joshua first began and can call home.

Without one main construction, the team was free to get involved in a number of useful projects. These included the construction of the waiting area and guardian shelter for the Pensulo Clinic. Both of these structures are vital in order for the clinic building to be successful in serving the 40,000+ population it is placed to do. The waiting shelter gives cover from the sun and rain to, unsurprisingly, sick people and their relatives – very important when the clinic staff can't deal with many patients at once. The team also renovated an existing disused building in Manyowe, to be used as a feeding centre there. The team this year also got involved with the local Scout group, newly set up and keen to spend time with Quest volunteers. With the scouts, volunteers were involved in teaching first aid, sign language, dance and theatre, as well as fixing some local people's roofs. As ever, volunteers and locals alike were pleased to have the chance to play hard-fought, if friendly, football matches. The team also got stuck in to organizing a whole sports day for the local primary school.

And how could we fail to mention the grand opening in July of the **Pensulo Maternity, HIV and Health Centre**, Quest's largest (and possibly proudest) achievement to date in Malawi. Many thanks are due to all who have donated money to the clinic appeal to buy the equipment needed so urgently for the opening and beyond, as well as all volunteers who have donated their time and money to the actual building.

2009

Once again, two teams of Quest volunteers provided vital inputs of energy, hard work, enthusiasm, and of course money donated to Joshua.

Congratulations to the **Malawi Gap Team** who worked incredibly hard to complete a clinic house for the Pensulo Clinic, providing accommodation which will attract good quality doctors and nurses to this rural area providing essential health care for locals. They also worked in an orphan feeding centre (two volunteers were there every day) and as teaching assistants in the local school helping with the special needs class. They worked with a local youth group on their play and they helped train the local sports teams and put on both football and netball tournaments.

The **Summer Team** of volunteers in Malawi has built a classroom in Chitakale village which will be used as classrooms for years 3 and 4 who currently have no classroom. Working with Mary's Meals two volunteers a day helped out at a local feeding centre, where orphaned and underprivileged children can go to get a decent meal and basic education. The feeding centre also leaves elder siblings free to attend school or work. The team also helped create lesson plans for the new school term and organized a sports day in the children's summer holiday.

2008

This year saw an influx of many volunteers and Joshua with Quest's help, was able to branch out into new areas – both in terms of geography, moving into a new region called Malanga, and in terms of project-work, with the construction of a new large clinic building in Pensulo. Very nice.

The **Malawi Gap Team** worked incredibly hard building an orphan care centre in Kachumbe. Aside from this main project they also organised teaching and sports training at two local primary schools, helped out at the local feeding centre and spent time working with a local youth group. The aim of this project was the building of an orphan care centre in Kachumbe village. Joshua had never worked in this area before and some of the chiefs had apparently been unsure about a bunch of 'azungu' coming into the village and had thought that the project would never succeed. Their minds were definitely changed with the completion of the feeding centre. The project had been significantly increased in size since the original plans were drawn up, which did cause some problems in terms of supplies, particularly in that we didn't have enough bricks from the community and therefore had to buy them to make up the shortfall.

RBS Project Africa

In June 2008 Royal Bank of Scotland staff raised nearly £20,000 to help build a maternity clinic for the Pen Sulo community. Two teams of 22 and 23 volunteers travelled out to Malawi to spend four weeks working with locals to build the 24m x 18m single-storey clinic. Unfortunately, the project was considerably behind schedule when the volunteers arrived. The problems began when Joshua chose to work with Government, and the subsequent delays caused: the District Health Officer (DHO) agreed to provide plans for the building, and a cost analysis. Neither of these had been done prior to the Quest staff's arrival. But, fortunately Joshua had decided to press ahead, and a start had been made on setting out, and digging of foundations. 'Team A' slogged hard to complete the foundations in one week, and put down the floor slab took another week. 'Team B' took over for the following fortnight and completed the outside shell of the construction to roof. Due to the large number of volunteers, little productivity was lost by sending one group of 5-6 volunteers to assist in the community each day:

in pairs, they visited either the Primary or Secondary schools, or helped in the Feeding Centre in the morning, and returned to the site in the afternoons.

The project was a resounding success in terms of safety, client satisfaction and project completion.

Malawi Summer Project

The main project was a rather unusual one for Joshua and Quest, as it involved taking over the work from the RBS team, who worked over four weeks in June. This meant that when the very small team (2 volunteers) arrived, the main building looked to be almost finished – the internal and external walls were up, many of the doors and windows fitted, and the roof on. Both Sarah and Maria seemed (tactfully!) concerned that there wasn't really any work for them to do, but were quickly reassured that this was far from the case! Daily project work on-site kept them busy with a great deal of excavating dirt around the building, plastering and liming interior walls, pointing the brickwork, and cement mixing. Having such a small (and personally flexible) team also meant that they were both happy to slightly vary the times of breaks to fit the work or weather better. The side project which was undertaken by the two volunteers was to help at Mbinda Junior School (Standards 1 and 2). In the first two weeks, they went for two mornings' lessons, between 8am and 10am, before returning to site. Despite warnings about the standard of (untrained) teaching at Mbinda, both were shocked at just how poor it was. They were both glad that they had seen the state of education and discipline. Nevertheless, in the second week, the girls taught a lesson together, which did seem to have some positive impact on the pupils. At the end of the third week, when the children were on holiday, RT and the volunteers took down some materials to renovate the classrooms – white emulsion and some coloured paints to decorate the walls with useful alphabets and numbers.

2007

2007 was a successful year, seeing the completion of a two classroom school, renovation of two small businesses (a sewing centre and bakery) and provision of business training for the local community in Malawi.

Gap team- The first project undertaken was the completion of a pit latrine at Mbinda primary school. This was the primary school built by a previous Quest group and whilst the building was complete the outside needed some cleaning up as well as the completion of the toilet block. The team arrived in high spirits and quickly got to work shifting bricks, mixing cement and clearing the area. During our time in Mbinda we also planted some trees with the children and local villagers.

The next challenge was to transform the resource centre from an empty shell to somewhere bright clean and welcoming to all those that use it. This involved all-hands-on deck for cleaning, filling holes and repainting the walls a new white colour. Once complete, with help from Alexander from Blantyre Library the team then set about deciding how the inside should be set up, and it was agreed to have four distinct corners- one for fiction, one for nonfiction/ education, an AIDs awareness corner and a children's corner. The room was decorated accordingly, with some great murals from the team as well as arranging the new furniture built by the local carpenters. Additional help was given by Young, a local artist who gave up a week of his time for free to help out. When the team stepped back and looked at what was done, there was a great sense of achievement.

Next was a new idea introduced by Joshua, as they are keen to branch into the AIDs area so we decided to hold an AIDs Awareness Day in Pen Sulo village, raising awareness in the rural areas about AIDS and HIV. In order to make this successful, much time was spent on the preparations: posters, flyers, tables,

tents, entertainment, special guest speakers, and promotion throughout Blantyre (including a live TV appearance by Mairead and David, as well as radio interviews). When the day came there wasn't really much for the team to do as this was for the benefit of the local villagers, so we took a back seat and hoped that the day was successful, which I think everyone believed it to be. Representatives from the President's Office came to open the new resource centre, and local singer Ben Michael kept everyone entertained. There were testimonies from people living with HIV as well as dramas from local youth groups. The final two weeks or so were spent in Chimwemwe, where the task in hand was to gut an existing pre primary school, and then renovate it inside and out, as well as replace the roof. This was a massive final job, and everyone was keen to get involved in. Everyone tried plastering, painting, sanding, sawing and hammering and all seemed to thoroughly enjoy it!!

Summer Team

The main team project involved building a large, government regulation, two classroom school in Chitakale, Blantyre district. A Welcome Ceremony with local dancing and singing, speeches and the compulsory formalities welcomed the Quest group to Chitakale and set the scene at the building site and also illustrated to the Quest team the importance of their contribution. The project was a huge undertaking, but due to the majority of materials being sourced early, the bricks being ready and perhaps most significantly the hard work of the excellent Malawian builders led by Bwana Joffat, completing the foundations prior to arrival of the Quest team, the project was 95% finished for Handover Day. In three and a half weeks the building was transformed from foundation level to almost complete. Generously, the Quest team decided that they personally wanted to pay to furnish the classrooms. A quote was collected for desks and the team (and leaders) decided they would cover the costs at 7000MKw each (approximately £25). All team members were asked personally and discreetly and were in no way pushed into this.

The Handover Day was arranged and the district education officer invited, along with all local chiefs, headmen, chairmen of local committees and local VIPS, along with various media contacts from The Nation and Power FM. On opening the doors the children ran in and celebrated with a lot of excitement their happiness at their new school. One of the volunteers said 'For a month we have been constructing a building, only today did it fully become a school'. This was a very emotional and happy moment for everyone involved. The District Education Officer who had been unable to attend arrived the next day and was very impressed with the work having heard lots about it through the PEA. She was exceptionally thankful to Quest/Joshua for all the work done.

In the meantime, lessons continued in the present (and very small) school. Keen to integrate with the community the team arranged to cover some lessons in the school, to help the teachers with some English classes, art classes (materials supplied by Quest team and Sylvia) and assist where possible. One of the Quest team took the lead on this and in total about 20 lessons were taught over the project. The team were able to stand in when one of the teachers was absent. The nearby Marys Meal station feeds young nursery age children and provides play and learning opportunities. The Quest team arranged to send two volunteers there every morning to help with basic activities involving art, music, singing, dancing and generally playing with the kids. Despite initial fear of 'Mzungus' the children loved the interaction and it is believed that the help added value to the learning experience for the children.

Sabbaticals

In the autumn, Quest took away its first team of sabbatical volunteers, whose experience and commitment proved to be extremely beneficial in the reinvigoration of two community-owned businesses, whose cooperative owners received business and accountancy training funded by donations.

The sewing centre has proved to be a very important social as well as commercial business for the community, giving the ladies who mend and create new clothes a useful centre for chat and community solidarity. The bakery has been much appreciated, not least by any Quest volunteers who visit Pensulo!

2006

With much anticipation, and much hard work in preparation, Quest begins its work in Malawi!

On arrival in Malawi, and having met the Joshua project and its coordinators, it was clear there was a lot we could do on this project, including finishing off many half-completed projects. Our main effort in 2006 was the construction of a double classroom in the village of Mbinda, with side projects coordinated by Tiff, involving teaching and planting trees. After a week's work we could see that there was neither the time nor the money to finish the classroom completely, so I agreed a target with Sylvia and the builders, which we were to meet by completion. The community involvement was sporadic, and at times, nonexistent: this put a lot of pressure on the project, as time-scales were relying on the input. After countless meetings with the Chief in Mbinda, a new programme was drawn up, and now with the community also on-board, we managed to get back to schedule. After this, the community was very helpful, it just took some time for them to realise that we were on a time budget. Reconciling European Time with Africa Time has proved to be a recurrent theme on our projects. The building was left nearly completed and structurally sound; with a roof on and we left funds with the head of charity Sylvia for the completion of the interior - floor, plastering and black boards.