

Project #MW96850 - Children's Ministry Capacity Building – Malawi

Vision of the project

The objective of this project is to build the capacity of the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC) to minister effectively to children through strengthening Sunday schools, establishing mid-week children's ministries and teaching caregivers with biblical parenting skills & values. As a result children will hear the gospel, be discipled, and learn life skills to help them cope with living in an environment of high HIV prevalence and child abuse.

Project background

About half the population of Malawi is under 15 however culturally children have less status or importance in comparison to adults. This is reflected in the churches, there are many children in the churches but virtually no resources or programs aimed at their growth or discipleship. Sunday school in many places is merely child-minding in order to prevent children from disturbing the main church service and very few churches are involved in any mid-week children's outreach ministries.

Progress

Over the past 6 months we have continued to see good progress and growing momentum within the Africa Evangelical Church in support of Children's ministry. The main activities have been:

- **'Today for Tomorrow' (T4T) Discipleship & HIV prevention Program**
 - The first 'Trainer of Trainers (TOT)' workshop was held 18-23 April for 19 participants from 6 Area Councils of the Africa Evangelical Church. The training was facilitated by the SIM ROSA T4T Co-ordinator (Chris Maphosa from SIM Zimbabwe) and funded by the HOPE for AIDS Master project.
 - However, the subsequent follow up of the trainers has been done in parallel with the follow up of Sunday school teachers and mentoring of Area Council Children's co-ordinators so the cost of the follow up visits has been shared between HOPE for AIDS and this children's ministry project. We have been greatly encouraged at the enthusiasm shown for his program in the church and communities and the demand for support in training more teachers and providing training materials & lesson books is stretching our capacity and highlighting further the need to mentor and equip the Area Council co-ordinators to be able to take a greater role in follow up & mobilising local resources. At the time of writing this report the TOT's had trained another 97 volunteers to become Today for Tomorrow teachers. A second 'training of trainers' for the remaining 6 Area Councils is scheduled for around August 2018.
 - Feedback on the first year curriculum lessons has now been received and is being incorporated into the lesson book such that we can take it to the printers in October for a 1000 copy print run. Funds for this printing were raised by a special fundraising project at a church in Sydney, Australia in May.
- **Continued Mentoring of Area Council Children's Co-ordinators (ACCCs) & Follow up of 'Sunday School Teacher' Trainers**
 - This project has continued to provide funding for the National Co-ordinators follow up meetings (on average one trip per month) plus a low level of support to cover transport costs for local trainers to go to the most remote churches & provision of training handouts. During the follow up meetings there is often a day or half day 'built in' for a short Sunday school teacher refresher training and also opportunity to keep 'vision sharing' with local pastors & leaders. These discussions are helping mould the plans for 2018 in terms of having an identified vision to work with parents and hold suitable teaching relating to child abuse & protection.
 - Travels over the last 6 months have been:
 - May Lilongwe
 - June Lakeshore
 - July East Bank/Makhanga
 - August Chilumba/Bangula/Tengani
 - September Chikwawa/Chapananga/Phingo

- **Mid-week ministries**

The original intention of this project to promote starting perhaps 2 mid-week ministries in each of the 12 Area Council has been well exceeded with more than 95 ministries being reported, many being Today for Tomorrow ministries. This rapid growth has resulted fr

Teachers enjoying the groups more as there are more games & fun activities involved

More kids come in general – both church kids and those from the local community just join together with no comparisons of ‘Sunday best clothes’ or discrimination

More church kids come than usually attend Sunday school as often parents attend church and leave the kids at home for security

Having the Today for Tomorrow lessons which bring the Bible to bear on very relevant to day-to-day life issues being faced by the kids

Many parents coming to thank the teachers for the positive behaviour changes they’ve seen in their kids.

The teachers’ commitment is high and demonstrated by their willingness to even buy their own Children’s Ministry T-shirts rather than expect and wait for a free hand-out.



▪ T4T teachers

- **Capacity Building of AEC National Children’s Co-ordinator**

Although not requiring funding by this project, during the last 6 months the co-ordinator has had an opportunity to grow in his capacity through attending the 5 day SIM Malawi Youth Pastors Book Set conference whose focus on discipleship was equally applicable to children’s ministry, and also a Communications Day facilitated by SIM Malawi Communications Co-ordinator, Ian Farrimond, to help equip those involved in SIM projects to become better communicators and more aware of ways in which SIM Malawi can help promote projects.

The SIM Children’s Co-ordinator, Biulanty Thabah, has now been transferred to the South Sudan field and so will not be returning to Malawi.

Future Plans

We are planning the following main activities for the next 6 months:

- Extend the project end date so we can complete the second ‘Today for Tomorrow’ Training of Trainers in the remaining 6 Area councils in mid 2018.
- Print 1000 copies of Today for Tomorrow Year I Lesson book
- Continue with monthly mentoring & follow up visits which allow for all Area Councils to be visited once every 6 months.
- Continue working with the HOPE for AIDS Orphan Care co-ordinator on developing trainings/curriculum in support of new preschool mid-week ministries
- Begin discussions with the AEC Projects Officer (who is scheduled to start work in October) and OVC Co-ordinator about transitioning the HOPE for AIDS day care centres to be operated in a self sustaining way under the AEC Children’s Ministry Dept once HOPE for AIDS projects finish.
- Fundraising for this project by the Hammonds during the home assignment in Australia Nov 2017-Jul 2018.

Stories: **Changing lives, changing culture.**

One of the teachers at the Today for Tomorrow pilot program in Dande has been moved to live and work at another very remote village in Malawi called Matiwi. Having been trained by one of the T4T TOTs (Sangalatsso

Njazi was trained as a trainer in April), he is now not only teaching himself but even training others (below left – he is in white shirt on R) and has started a Today for Tomorrow mid-week program at Matiwi. Even though it has only been going for 6 weeks it has already started to have an impact as the younger teenage girls have started to really change their behaviour and thinking and to question their parents (pictured below right) about cultural initiations which some have even refused to take part. They had the courage to do this because of the support of the Today for Tomorrow teacher who told them he would be willing to be an advocate on their behalf. As one might imagine, this led to some sizeable ripples being made in the church and community where it was discovered that even some church elders were holding to the need to do cultural practices. After subsequent meetings and bible teachings, the church elders (pictured bottom) agreed together that they need to overcome the fears associated with not doing the cultural practices and promote biblical principles. It is our prayer that as more and more people see that bad things don't happen as a result of not following these non-biblical practices then more and more parents & guardians will not force their young girls and boys to participate in these sexual initiation practices and will allow them to choose to live godly lifestyles trusting God for their protection & future. Keep praying that this program can go on changing both individual lives and even the culture where needed so that HIV/AIDS can become a thing of the past.

Sangalato Passing on T4T trainings



Parents involved in discussions about initiation practices



Church elders being encouraged to follow Biblical models

Beautiful Love



Caring for and carrying a disabled friend

This picture illustrates one of my favourite 'Today for Tomorrow' (T4T) stories ... it shows a young girl, herself an orphan living with her grandmother, carrying her disabled neighbour to the T4T club after attending the bible study explaining that everyone is special to God even if you are 'different' or sick or have a disability etc. Like many who are disabled, the girl had been neglected by her parents who didn't want her to be seen in public and so it was only after considerable persuasion that she was able to bring her to the club. Once there, the teachers clubbed together to buy her some new clothes & shoes to replace the tatty rags she was wearing. This girl now comes regularly, feels loved, included, smiles and can hear more of God for herself. Please pray many more kids will discover God's love for themselves through T4T.

Prayer requests

- Praise for God's directing & blessing of the roll out of the Today for Tomorrow program – pray for planning of the 2nd 'Training of Trainers' which we are hoping to run in mid-2018
- For the Hammond's to promote this project effectively during their home assignment and that God will continue to provide the needed project funding
- For continued genuine change in children and non-biblical cultural practices