

## Report on Nursery Project in Likhubula and Surrounding Area 2006

### Background.

Before we came to Malawi, we were uncertain of the best way to provide nursery care for the children of this area. There were several possibilities; we could build one large nursery school with two or more classrooms, or we could build a number of nurseries in different villages. In being here a month, visiting schools, villages and existing projects it has become very apparent that it would be better to build smaller nurseries at a number of sites.

We feel very strongly that it is pointless to set up this project if the children who attend don't get a good quality of teaching. In the infant sections of the schools in Malawi there are sometimes 200+ children in a class. Unfortunately, in this situation, it doesn't matter how skilled the teacher is, the quality of education the children are receiving cannot be high. For that number of children, to provide a standard of education we would be happy with, a three or four classroom nursery would need to be built. To build something like that would be quite insensitive to the culture as nothing like that exists. Also, depending on who we made the nursery available to, it would either only help children from a very small area or require young children to walk unrealistic distances to school. We feel any school we build needs to be on a small scale (most likely one classroom), in keeping with the existing schools and the culture. If this is the case, places will be limited, so we need to make sure the children attending the nursery are the ones who are in the greatest need.

The nursery schools we are planning to build would be only one classroom. Although in Britain you would have 20-30 children to a teacher this ratio is unrealistic for this culture. We would like to work with 50-60 children to a classroom. As there are potentially over 200 children aged 5 in each village we needed to think of a way of limiting the numbers. We want this project to help the children with the most need so we needed to look at a way of reaching those children. Unfortunately 25% of children in Malawi are orphans. We believe that in each village we build a nursery, we could help all the orphaned children of nursery school age in the area. To make the nurseries only available to orphaned children means we can be sure we are giving help to children that need it most, and we can also provide a good quality of teaching to those children.

The Nansato Nursery Trust was established because Paula wanted to give something back to Nansato, as they had given her so much in her time there as a volunteer teacher in Nansato Primary School. Therefore we knew we wanted to build a nursery school at Nansato. From that, it made sense to build any other nurseries alongside other surrounding schools. We met with Mr Chiromo (Headmaster at Nansato School) to discuss surrounding schools and possibilities for our project. During the meeting it was found that Nansato is part of a 4-school cluster, the cluster includes all the primary schools in the area with the furthest being around 5km. We have looked at building and labour charges and have estimated the figure for one nursery to be £4,000. We believe that with the money raised to date we can commit to building nurseries in each of these four schools and help the orphans in a much wider area.

### **Existing Programmes**

Another one of our priorities was that our nurseries did not conflict with anything that was already running in the community. During our meetings with the four chosen schools we asked about local orphan projects and nursery care. There was very little being provided and the head teachers and village heads assured us that none would conflict with the nurseries we are planning. We chose to visit the few nurseries and orphan care projects that had been mentioned to us to see for ourselves what the community was doing.

We visited a community based orphan care organisation called Timvane. They run a nursery for children between 3 and 5 years old as well as other projects for older children. On the day we visited the nursery was in session, there were 40 children and 2 volunteer teachers. Only 8 of the children were orphans the rest were local children. The classroom was small and the only resource was an old blackboard. We were impressed by the dedication of the volunteer teachers. The majority of the teaching was repetition and fairly basic. Timvane is run completely by local volunteers and an invaluable resource.

We also visited Madalitso orphan care program. It is also run by local volunteers and provides care for children under 5 years old. However it appears to lack structure, in the first day we visited the children had all left early and on the second day there was only 8 children. The children were all outside on a big rock and when we arrived they all ran into the

classroom. They sang a few songs very happily but there was very little teaching.

The two organisations we visited are so important as they show the community are taking steps to help themselves. We feel that we should support and enable these organisations so we will work in partnership with them. There are a number of ways we may do this:

- When training the teachers at our nurseries we can offer the volunteer teachers the chance to join us.
- Ensuring that together we provide for as many children in the village as possible rather than competing for the same children.
- Using any surplus resources to provide materials to help them to improve their facilities.
- Meeting regularly with them to inform them of our plans.

### Advice

As complete novices of building in Malawi we decided to seek as much advice from as many local and experienced people as possible. We visited Mr Evale, the Primary Education Adviser in Chambe to share our plans with him. He is the advisor for the Chambe area, which covers all the schools we are planning to work in. He was delighted with the idea and informed us that the government are hoping to introduce nursery care within the next ten years so this was a very positive step. He told us that having informed him of our plans was enough at this stage and we did not need to contact any other authorities. However, when the nurseries are finished we should contact the Social Welfare Office so they can check the buildings. He told us that our next step should be contacting the schools and meeting with village heads to ask if they will allow us to build on School property.

We visited Plan International, an organisation who support and work along side communities to enable them in development projects. They are working in the Mulanje area but have only been carrying out research so far and have not started and physical work yet. Their advice to us was to ensure that we involve the community as much as possible to ensure they have ownership of the nurseries.

We paid a visit to Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT) as they too are very involved in local communities and the director Carl Brusoe has lived in Mulanje for many years. Carl agreed that the setting up of

committees in each school was ideal as it encourages the community's involvement.

Our visits and discussions with people highlighted the need to involve the community at every level of the project. Some of the ways we plan to do this are:-

- We will set up a committee in each of the 4 schools to monitor the building and running of the nurseries.
- We hope to employ local builders and buy as many materials locally as we can.
- When the nursery is running we are planning to set up a bank of local volunteers who will be involved in the daily care of the children.
- We will ask each school if they have any bricks to donate to the project. This will give them a sense of ownership of the project.

### **Sustainability**

We hope that the community's involvement during the early stages will encourage the sustainability of the nursery. All of the people we spoke to mentioned sustainability as an area to consider, without it all our work will be in vain. A lot of projects are started with the best intentions and fail due to lack of community involvement and structure for their continuing operation. We will research an effective way to pay the teacher's wages, possibly a bank account with one trusted signatory.

Good communication between the committees and ourselves, while here and after our return to the UK, will keep us up to date on the nurseries. We hope to make regular visits to support the committees and help with any problems that may arise. By building the nurseries within school grounds they can be monitored by the head teachers and staff of the schools, with the government's plans to introduce nursery care it is in the school's best interest to have a well-established nursery program.

### **Conclusion**

By spending time in the community visiting schools and organisations we have enjoyed and valued the chance to meet with the people in the communities we are working in and observe their lives. Throughout this project we hope to refer back to our visits and the relationships we have

formed so we continue to work alongside the community during every stage of the project. During this research stage our focus has been to find out what is best for each community and that has to continue to be our priority at all times. Our time visiting nurseries and orphan care projects has been so insightful. We have decided that to help the highest number of children with the greatest need is to build four nurseries for orphans in the Mulanje district. Being here and carrying out this research has filled us with even more enthusiasm to now start building.