

## **Project Number #MW96850**

## **Project Name 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 disciplined, 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 the ministry has continued smoothly with the following main activities:

#### **❖ Renewal of Project**

The current project end date was 31 March 2020 (after already applying an extension) so a new project was written and approved to continue supporting the same ministry for an additional 3 years (to 31 Mar 2023). The project will continue to build the capacity of the church even further to cope with the tremendous growth in programs for both children and family strengthening over the past 3 years as well as on-going requests for help in responding to new opportunities. The main aims are to strengthen current ministries (Sunday school, Today for Tomorrow, preschools, Christian Marriage & Family Life), build leadership capacity (children's ministers, national & area council co-ordinators and pastors) and continue to develop suitable resources/curriculum in Chichewa.

#### **❖ Continued Mentoring/Follow Up Visits**

Over the last 6 months, the project continued to fund a number of follow up meetings combining day workshops at the following locations. The follow up has included meeting leaders for all ministries including Sunday school, Today for Tomorrow and Christian Marriage Family Life (CMFL) trainings.

Nov	Chikwawa/East Bank
Dec	Chilumba/Bangula/Ndamera/Lulwe
Mar	Lilongwe

(There have been a slightly reduced number of general follow up visits supported under this project in the last 6 months due to the ill health of the AEC National Children's Co-ordinator, extra activities such as the Prayer & Planning meeting & U-5 preschool teacher trainings and also because some visits he made were specifically focused on CMFL follow up and funded under HOPE for AIDS projects.)

Sadly the pastor who had been identified to help lead children's ministry in the central and northern regions has moved to work with another NGO for at least 12 months and so is not currently able to assist further with any follow up.

#### **❖ Annual Prayer and Planning Meeting**

In January, the 13 Area Council Children's Co-ordinators met for their 4 day annual prayer and planning meeting at Lunzu (outskirts of Blantyre). It was a time of mutual encouragement, with teaching sessions on leadership & stewardship (from Nehemiah), distribution & orientation on the newly available Today for Tomorrow Year 2 curriculum books, and time to think and plan for the next year. Interestingly, in the church elections in February there

were only a few changes in Area Council Children's Co-ordinators and those that did change were mostly people who had been mentored by their predecessor thus releasing the predecessor into other significant ministry. Eg The Chididi Children's Co-ordinator took over as Youth Co-ordinator in their area, the Muona Children's Co-ordinator has taken responsibility for the more remote areas at Sankhulani and into Mozambique leaving the new Co-ordinator that he had already been working with to manage the rest of the areas.

#### ❖ **Under-5 day care centre trainings**

As churches are encouraged to start mid-week children's ministries, a number have started small under-5 preschools with a desire to include provision of a meal where possible. Following on from the first trainings in August, teachers from 4 more churches were trained in Nov/Dec facilitated by AEC National Children's Co-ordinator together with the HOPE for AIDS OVC Co-ordinator with funding support from HOPE for AIDS.

#### ❖ **'Today for Tomorrow' (T4T) Discipleship & HIV prevention Program**

The Year 2 curriculum book was printed in Dec/January and distribution started through the network of Area Council co-ordinators.

#### ❖ **Annual Year End Evaluation**

In December the AEC National Children Co-ordinator undertook his annual phone survey to 158 people representing pastors, church leaders, Area council chairpersons, Children and Women's ministries co-ordinators, headmasters, and T4T leaders across all 13 Area Councils. A summary report has been written listing achievements, challenges and summarising the data collected. There has been a significant growth in primary schools with T4T programs (from 101 to 138) and churches with preschools (from 15 to 28) since last year. Most of the other ministries have remained at a similar level and has highlighted the need for more, well trained leaders.

#### ❖ **NIV Study Bibles**

In March there was the opportunity to procure 50 NIV Study Bibles at a very subsidised price. These were procured with the intention of giving the key children's ministry leaders the option to procure them to support their personal spiritual development as well as their ministry responsibilities.

#### ❖ **Phone Discipleship**

With the intention to make better use of the phone for discipleship of Area Council Co-ordinators the project procured a simple handset to enable this process with more accountability of airtime expenditure. This was timely as with the arrival of COVID-19 in Malawi we are likely to need to do much more follow-up and discipleship/encouragement by phone for the foreseeable future.

### **Future Plans**

As the COVID-19 pandemic takes hold in Malawi we will be working with the church to disseminate accurate information relating to prevention and care, address the various myths that are circulating, give a solid biblical response to the pandemic, and help empower the children's ministry leaders to think about how they can engage with children in a different way during this time. Although we are not sure of the timescale due to COVID-19 travel and meeting restrictions, the next ministry actions we are planning will be:

- ❖ When possible we will return to the monthly workshops/mentoring/follow up visits which allow the AEC National Children's Co-ordinator to visit all Area Councils once every 6 months. This will now include follow up of CMFL program as well as T4T/Sunday School activities. In the meantime we will continue discipleship & follow up by phone.
- ❖ Look at how we can better use social media for discipleship & distribution of teaching content both for now and the future.
- ❖ Start working on new resources – initially 'Basics of Faith' Sunday school style lessons

### **Prayer requests**

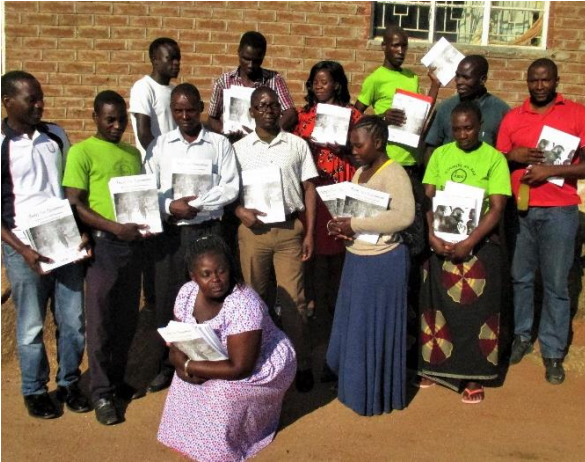
- Pray that God will have mercy on Malawi, especially the poor and vulnerable, and give them the strength to fight off the corona virus.

- Pray that our children's ministry leaders will have wisdom to know how the church can change how they do children's ministry during this time of corona virus
- Pray that the AEC National Children's Co-ordinator can stay connected and disciple the children's ministry leaders effectively by phone for the next few months at least
- Pray for wisdom and insight in developing some new lesson resources

## Stories:

### Growing leadership for Children's Ministry

Hot off the Press – distribution of T4T year 2 curriculum



The 13 area council children's ministry co-ordinators gathered at the end of January for their annual 'prayer & planning' meeting. Once again it was a joy to hear their stories of how the children's ministries including 'Today for Tomorrow' have been reaching more communities, more churches, more schools, more kids! There was special rejoicing as the co-ordinators received the long awaited Today for Tomorrow Year 2 books 'hot off the press' (pictured) which they can take back and start using as they continue to teach godly living that will lead kids towards an HIV free future. One of the big growth areas over the last 12 months has been the increase in the number of primary schools running the Today for Tomorrow program from 101 to 138. This continued growth in numbers of programs has highlighted the urgent need for more, well trained leaders and this will continue to be a focus for our project over the next year through on-going

mentorship and workshops. We are already seeing evidence of the impact of the mentoring & discipling, for example, Peter (pictured in the black shirt) has been mentoring someone who has stepped up to become co-ordinator so that he can give more attention to reaching and following up with the more remote communities and even over the border into Mozambique. Co-ordinators are now starting to think more in terms of being 'teams' of people rather than just individuals! Of course working in teams will bring new challenges but ones we embrace with open arms!

### Church ministry mobilises community to care for children

Bonface, the AEC National Children's Co-ordinator, has been extremely busy during December with more follow up meetings in the southern region, conducting his annual end of year evaluation by phone and a final 2 days U-5 preschool teacher training with Gerald, HOPE for AIDS OVC Co-ordinator, for the churches at Dande & Bwangu where the T4T program has been so impactful. Bonface described the training as 'the best so far' with the participants having been carefully hand picked with strong support from the AEC headmaster of the primary school who wants to see the preschool work closely with the primary school and be included in the existing feeding program supported by Mary's Meals & World Food Program. It is a thrill to see what can happen when the church can be part of mobilizing the whole community to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children. (Participants from Dande & Bwangu pictured)

