

Summer Visit 2013

There was a slight air of apprehension as the plane approached Lilongwe airport as the 'maidens' wondered what it would be like to meet up with everyone after an absence of 2 years. However on spotting Mr Lupia amongst the waiting crowd, apprehension turned to emotion - what a reunion! A stop at the market for supplies and we were soon on the road to Mzuzu. Were we really back? Yes - and it felt so good - as if we had never been away. The sights were as familiar as if we had travelled the road every day and the excitement mounted as we received first hand information on all the groups from Mr Lupia. The 6 hour journey flew by. Our accommodation for 2013 was a purpose built house funded by a legacy given to the congregation at Killlearnan in Perthshire from the estate of the Jamieson sisters. All utilities plus internet - a far cry from Habitat in 2009 !

In June a substantial grant had been approved to Thandazga Nursery by the Trust to improve conditions at the Nursery. This project was being jointly funded by the Trust and Ungwerro a non-governmental organisation based in Mzuzu. They were building a large two roomed block for use as a nursery classroom and also as community meeting rooms.

The Trust were to fund another building which would provide sleeping accommodation for the widows, a storeroom for maize and also a small admin block. It was not a project without hiccups and we did run out of cash just before completion, but with a few willing helpers we painted it ourselves and just two days before leaving for home, we were privileged to see our very first 'Funded by Highland Malawi Trust, Scotland' sign being attached to a building. We also did repairs on the pig corral that we had built in 2011 and we felt quite happy leaving the widows and children looking forward to starting their new term in September. A lot of time and effort has been invested in bringing Thandazga Nursery to the stage it is at now but every minute has been worthwhile.

At Chitatata Orphan Care Centre, we again found our amazing widows going from strength to strength. Their pigs which we had given them in 2011 had outgrown their sty so they asked if they could get a bigger one. We agreed and alongside that we repaired the old one to ensure plenty room for the new litters. They had extended their garden since we had last been and having been given a water pump by Ungwerro, they were making and selling chapattis - showing a resourcefulness that has to be admired.

Bright the gardener/watchman was still there helping out with the pigs and the land - he may not have had formal education but his knowledge of the animals he tends and the land he tills is second to none. Always with a smile on his face, grateful for a tin roof over his head and a floor to sleep on, he is a joy to be around. We left them with the promise of food for the rainy season and they are happy with that.

Chamalaza -our most disadvantaged pre-school group of all - out in the bush, no water nearby and a high ratio of HIV adults and children is, however, a prime example of community spirit. In 2009 when we first encountered the widows carrying the bricks

they had made, to build a nursery for 10 children, the poverty and sickness was heartbreaking. Literally scratching a living in order to feed the ever-growing number of orphans in their community, the widows had pulled together and under the leadership of Elfrida, they had set out to help themselves because they knew no one else would. By their own dogged determination and the help of the Trust through buildings, banana boxes and feeding programmes they now have a thriving community where fun and laughter is very much to the fore. Seven villages have come together under the name Tiwirane C.B.O. and young and old now pitch in to do what they can to improve their lot. We built a pig sty for them this Summer and got Ungwerro involved in looking into a water supply for them. There is a lot still to be done here but with their own resourcefulness and Trust support we have no doubt that the best is yet to come.

Every child deserves the right to be educated in decent surroundings and the children at Thandzga Junior School are no different. The school roll is growing every year and a lot of that again is due to the work of the Trust. We send clothes and resources in banana boxes, but in 2011 we built a kitchen and we have been supplying them with porridge: a big commitment from a small Trust, but a plate of porridge is a huge incentive to come to school if staying at home means going hungry. One of the highlights of this last trip was when we were informed that Mary's Meals were taking over the feeding at the school. This releases funds for us for building improvement. The biggest project we could see happening for us as we left in July was raising money to finish off a substantial classroom block that was in the process of being built by the community. That now is about to happen, the new block will be finished to a high standard and hopefully the originals repaired and made wind and water tight.

As well as our Trust projects we personally like to help and this year we were able to pay for a child to get hospital treatment, we helped a couple of widows who had fallen on really hard times and we helped a young girl who had just got out of hospital with her new baby. Just a couple of pounds to put her on a bus home after she had been abandoned by her husband, - it makes such a difference.

Alongside working on our own projects, we visited a women's co-operative group run by a pastor's wife where women are encouraged to learn new skills in order to be able to earn a living. We enjoyed visiting the project being worked on by the Irish lads with whom we shared our house and had a night down by the lakeshore. We treated Mr Lupia and his family to a meal in a restaurant, a very humbling experience indeed.

Without Mr Lupia the Trust would find it very hard to function: he works tirelessly for us at no cost to the Trust. He sees it as a privilege to be able, through us, to help his fellow man. He is a devoted family man and sets a great store on getting a good education for his children. The Trust made the decision to support his eldest son in his Secondary education and news is - he is doing well.

Every day we are in Malawi is an adventure -a mix of laughter and tears and this year there was plenty of laughter!

We, 'the maidens' feel truly privileged to be sharing part of our lives with the wonderful people who dwell in the country aptly named 'The Warm Heart of Africa'