Natalya's Fund News

September 2021

Training and Jobs for Youth in Malawi

Starting a sustainable business in soap manufacture to provide much-needed employment and training

We are raising funds for a project at Lilongwe Youth Organisation (LYO), Malawi, where some of our carpentry tools were sent (see p 4). As part of LYO's programme to tackle a problem of youth on the streets, they are planning to start a soap-making business, providing training and employment in a variety of disciplines. Offering hope to street children who are seeking a way out of the cycle of poverty and abuse, this is a project conceived by the youngsters themselves and owned by the community in which they live. It will be run as a self-sustaining business by the young people under the oversight of LYO. We aim to provide the starting capital of £1,734 (subject to exchange rates).

To donate, please see p 3.

Background

In the Kauma district of Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi, many of the youth are unemployed, uneducated, or both. Coupled with many opportunities of a

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The SOAPTEMBER Challenge

We can easily take soap for granted. It is a wonderful product, that cleanses us and has probably saved many lives during this pandemic. Thankfully, throughout these troubled times, there rarely seems to have been a shortage of soap in the UK. So we are suggesting that, during the month of September, as a token of our gratitude, we donate a small sum for each time we would use soap if we were in Malawi, i.e. for personal hygiene, washing-up and laundry. Our suggestions are as follows:

1p / hand-wash

10p / shower or bath

10p / dishwasher cycle

5p / washing-up session

10p / washing-machine cycle

5p / hand-laundry session

You may like to keep a tally, though many people will be happy just to give a donation on the basis of an estimate. We don't mind either way, but we do not wish to see people's calculations!

destructive kind, this situation is resulting in poverty, moral decay, environmental degradation, drug and substance abuse, begging, crimes, prostitution and victimisation. On 6/6/21, with the backing of the local community and chiefs from 17 villages, LYO held a meeting with the youth to determine a way to make progress and, after considering a number of possibilities, the youth themselves chose the idea of establishing a soap-making business.

In Malawi, soap is used for laundry and washing up as well as for personal hygiene. There are no soap factories within 300 miles of Lilongwe, so transport savings (added to occupancy savings – i.e. low or no rent) will enable the soap to be offered at a lower price. So SOMAYEEP (Soap Making for Youth Economic Empowerment Project) is born!

The SOMAYEEP Programme

Last year LYO completed its community and technical college building, which was provided by the people of Japan and opened by their ambassador. The college offers a number of courses, including carpentry and joinery, for which they will be using one of the carpentry kits we provided through Tools for Self Reliance. (See p 4.)

The young people will spend 2-3 days observing soap manufacture at other premises as part of their training. As with the courses that LYO offers, there will be a full week of occupational safety training provided by LYO staff.

All materials required in soap manufacture are locally available.

The new building at LYO that will house the soap factory

In the first year 100 young people will be involved; during that time they will gain experience both in the manufacturing and in running the business. Part of that is maintaining the strict safety culture. Not only will factory-workers be needed, but also security guards, and marketing & sales people, so a variety of skills will be employed. That first 100 will then move out and establish businesses elsewhere, while a new intake of 100 takes over at the college.

The group has agreed to set aside 5% of its profits for revolving loans to other young people who come up with good business plans. These loans have a fixed term, normally 6 months, but allow money to be drawn down and repaid as needed. They are not granted to individuals but to groups of typically three or four, with joint responsibility for repayment. Starting capital is typically $100-$200. Once the loan is repaid it becomes available for another group.

All business plans and loans are vetted, and the candidates interviewed, by a committee comprising local business leaders and LYO staff. This committee will also provide business training for the youth.

The project is being overseen by Mr Yamikani (AKA Mike) Chunga, Executive Director of LYO, who has lived in the community for over 20 years. A major strength of the project is that it's owned and planned by the community and will be operated by the youth who conceived it, under the oversight of experienced business and community leaders - and that it directly answers a clear and obvious need. These factors give rise to a high level of commitment throughout.

This project will benefit not only the youth but also their families, whom the youth will be able to support; also, the local community will enjoy a reduction of the disruption the youth has been causing. Furthermore, many of the youth have promised to attend evening classes once they start earning an income. They are determined to make it work and to become responsible citizens.

Gateway - Girls' Access to Education

An effective, sustainable and affordable answer to monthly periods for Malawian schoolgirls

July 2021

A grant of £300 has been provided to help increase girls' attendance at Kaputu School, Malawi, by supplying the girls with sanitary pads which are locally-made, reusable, and last about 2 years. The pads will go to all 100 of the girls of the appropriate age who have not yet received them.

Provision of the pads to schoolgirls in that country is the object of a programme called 'Gateway' – Girls' Access To Education – which is run by UK charity Starfish Malawi.

Attendance figures for the last 6 months show that girls' absences have reduced by two-thirds in the five schools where kits were distributed - down from 404 days to 128 days. We are expecting a similar effect at Kaputu.

Lahema, a pupil at Chitiwiri Primary School, comments, "Normally I don't go to school during my first 3 days of my period. Although I go to school for the remaining days, I don't concentrate in class and it is also difficult to interact with boys and male teachers. With the kit I have received, I believe I feel safe and will be in school always".

Bahati is a 13-year-old pupil at Chigombe Primary School. She explained that she started having periods at the age of 10. "My parents cannot afford to buy sanitary pads at the shop for me, so in the end I was forced to use pieces of cloth, which were not secure as they used to leak especially if I was travelling a long distance. Ever since I received the Gateway kit I am able to use these hygienic washable sanitary pads without having to stress my parents for money. Having the ability of going to school and enjoying my school days even in my period days is remarkable."

Bahati with her sanitary kit

Phales is a pupil at Msalura primary school. She has multiple disabilities due to cerebral palsy, including speech problems and difficulties in walking. Her mother explained that the sanitary kit is of great help to her daughter: "Before the kit it was very difficult for my daughter to go to school since I could not afford to buy disposable sanitary pads for my daughter to use at school. As a result, she was always absent from school when having her menses." She added that now her daughter is no longer absent from school, and she ensures her kit is packed whenever her daughter is having menses.

Prayer

We hold a prayer meeting on the first Monday of the month from 8 to 8:40 pm, by video-conference using Jitsi (similar to Zoom but easier). Please contact us if you would like to join.

To Donate

Please send a cheque payable to 'Natalya's Fund' to our address on the back page. Let us know if you would like a Gift Aid Declaration.

Or visit our website, where you can pay by card, PayPal or Direct Debit.

Iringa Street Children

August 2021

The Sewing Class and the Sewing Business

The daily sewing class continues to grow - now with nine students, a mix of boys and girls. They have been making and repairing uniforms, making face masks, and designing uniforms for the FISCH Choir.

Meanwhile the sewing business has been making great progress. Lucy and Adelina left and it was just Johari for a while, but now Adelina has returned, and Harriet, another girl who has completed her training at FISCH, has joined them. The business is growing and they are doing sufficiently well to cover their material costs and support themselves. Over the next 18 months they should become fully independent.

Great Progress of Street Children at School

The uniform and stationery provided for 193 street children, enabling them to take up their free school places, has had a fantastic impact. Many of these kids, once they get the chance to gain an education they grab it with both hands. That's why FISCH has seen so many coming through to higher education these last couple of years.

Riots and Covid in South Africa

August 2021

The riots were devastating to experience. Thankfully there has not been any rioting in Western Cape province, where Helderberg is, but there have been warnings that they could start imminently. However, Beth, previous director of Helderberg Academy, was in the thick of the rioting, although she and her family were unharmed. They have all been encouraged by our prayers.

The Covid situation has once again deteriorated, and they are currently experiencing a third wave with the Delta variant; schools closed early and gatherings were prohibited, although things have eased a little since. However, the Academy has been affected again and they were not able to see the children for several weeks. Some of them communicated with Rozanne and seemed to be OK, while others mentioned being scared of the riots. Rozanne encourages them to continue to pray for courage and strength. We trust that God will protect and provide for them as He has throughout the pandemic.

Tools for Self-Reliance – in Use

August 2021

Tools arrive at their Destination in Malawi

These trainees with their toolkits are existing tradespeople who have not had formal training and have been working with limited tools. This project upskills them, enabling them to increase their profits, train others and take on more work.

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