

Lifeline Malawi



"Bringing life transforming hope and healing to Africa"

I remember thinking, "I just saw something truly beautiful..."

Dear friends;

Spring 2009

I've just returned from a trip to Malawi to visit Lifeline's staff, check on construction projects and accompany Dr. Chris Brooks to work in a number of outreach clinics in remote areas that only get medical attention from Lifeline's medical outreach programs.



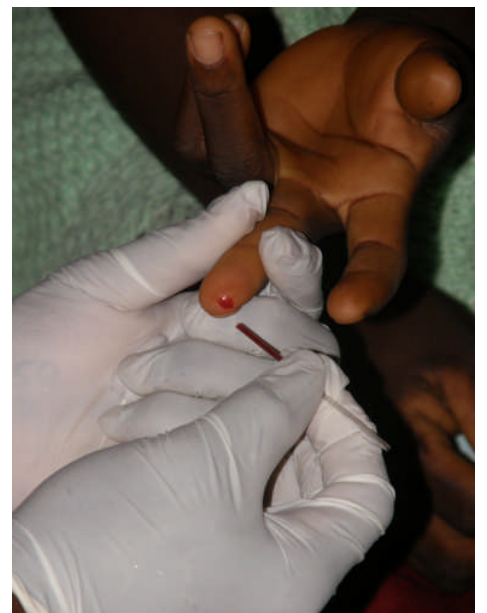
Faces in the Line-up at outreach clinic

Both of Lifeline's fixed clinics in Ngodzi and Kasese send out mobile clinics into back country areas several times a week. If you have never been to one of these outreach clinics – let me tell you they are busy places! People are made aware of the schedules and show up in the hundreds – and with all sorts of health care needs. These are long hard working days for clinic staff who buckle down to their work with a focus and resolve that is really impressive.

Staff at both Kasese and Ngodzi told me that the numbers of patients coming to receive care have almost doubled due to a lack of medicines in state clinics and hospitals. **One family traveled over 120 kilometres to get treatment for malaria because of a lack of medicines in their area.** This crisis has doubled the strain on Lifeline's resources at a time when fundraising has become a greater challenge.

As I moved around the "facility" – a rugged adobe hut with a poorly thatched roof provided by the community – I saw concerned mothers and fathers with their sick children, most of whom were struggling with the always common, always serious malaria, chest, and staff infections.

Another common affliction is HIV/AIDS. When Dr. Chris began his work in Malawi some 10 years ago the national rate of HIV/AIDS infection was 17%. Now, after years of teaching in behavioural change, treatment, and anti-retroviral medications the rate has dropped to 12%. In the regions where Lifeline works there are thousands of men and women receiving anti-retroviral medications every month. Special treatments to prevent mother to child infections are providing surprising results. Recently, eight babies were born to mothers with HIV and all the babies tested positive for the virus at birth. **But, after just three months of treatment seven out of those eight infants tested negative for the virus! Lifeline's Malawi operations VP Pat Laforet told me, "Kim, we can beat this disease!"**



A simple and quick blood test for HIV

Back at the mobile clinic I wanted to get some pictures of the testing process and asked permission to sit inside a small room where the tests and results were given privately to people wanting to get tested. Again, there was a steady stream of people coming in on their own accord or showing up having been advised to do so by a Lifeline staff member. I sat through quite a few sessions where the HIV Counsellor Diston Matchana took blood samples and explained the whole process to the nervous patient. And then, Rachael came through the door.

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Rachael is a young woman in her early twenties and pregnant for the first time. For whatever personal reasons she had she came to this mobile clinic and decided to get tested for HIV/AIDS. She looked healthy and was excited about her pregnancy. The medic got busy with his job of blood testing and I got busy fussing with my camera trying to get the angles and lighting working in my favour. I watched the blood get taken from Rachael's finger and saw it drop full and red onto the test strip – an ingenious device that bears accurate test results for the virus within minutes. We all watched – the medic, Rachael, and me as we saw the little “+” take form. I caught the moment when she looked up at the doctor and then I stopped taking pictures. As Rachael learned that she had tested positive for HIV she sank against the wall and began to cry.

After more than 25 years of working in clinics like these in many parts of the world I've seen a lot, but there is something so grave on a person's face when they learn they are HIV positive. It was all there on Rachael's face that day in that little room. In those years I have seen all kinds of medical officers, nurses and doctors too – some good some not so good. But on this day I saw a gem of a man give much more than bad news.

Diston took hold of Rachael's hand and began to speak to her gently, encouraging her about the ARV program and how he has seen so many do so well and live active, productive lives. He told her about the mother to child infection prevention treatments that Lifeline offers and how successful they are – **her infection did not mean that her baby would be born with the virus.**



Rachael learning she is HIV positive.

The transformation on Rachael's face was incredible. As she responded to Diston's compassion and listened to what he told her, she soon had hope in her eyes and courage appeared in her face. I remember thinking, “I just saw something truly beautiful.” It was a very moving experience.

I'll be frank with you - meeting people at their level of need and making them better isn't just about medicines and surgery - It's the warmth of a human hand, the concern of a caring heart, and the ability to bring hope again when it has been lost.

Rachael – and many like her – has a long road ahead of her, and yet that road is made so much easier because of people like Diston and organizations like Lifeline Malawi – and of course, because of people like you who support them financially. Donors made that clinic possible. Donors made the training for Diston possible, and donors make the ARV drugs and treatment possible so that Rachael can lead a more normal life and deliver a healthy baby. Would you please be one of those donors?

Donating to Lifeline Malawi is easy: you can donate online at www.lifelinemalawi.com; you can arrange automatic withdrawals from your bank account or credit card on a semi-monthly or monthly basis. One thing you can be certain of is that your donations make a huge difference in the lives of so many people – all of whom have names, families that love them, and hopes and dreams for the future. **You can make that future possible.**

Please give today.

Kim Veness

Director of Resource Development

“The Lifeline Malawi Association is planning to raise an estimated amount of \$2,000,000.00 this year through its fund-raising campaigns. According to our governance policies our administration and fund-raising costs will not exceed 10% of revenues raised. The money raised will be going to leading the way in bringing life transforming hope and healing to Africa. For further information, please contact Mr. Kim Veness, (403)-214-7780. Our address is 210-1289 Highfield Cres. SE Calgary, AB Canada T2G 5M2”

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