



# Friends of Sick Children in Malawi



('FOSCiM' and 'FOSC')

[FOSCiM registered charity number 1140578]

[FOSC registered charity number (Malawi) C647/2013]



## AUTUMN 2020



Malawi is one of the very poorest nations of the World.

**In 2019 \*99.2p of every £1\* received by FOSCiM from donors was applied for the frontline needs in Malawi. Very few charities can claim that sort of outcome.**

Dear Supporters,

Inevitably, this newsletter has a lot about Covid-19 and the impact on the continued delivery of quality paediatric healthcare in Malawi but I have also included other features so this edition is a bit longer than usual. I hope you find it interesting!



**The Covid-19 pandemic** has dictated life and work at Paeds in Malawi for the last 6 months and looks like being an influencing factor for the foreseeable future. Understandably it dominates our Autumn newsletter.

In the absence of **any** PPE in Malawi, an emergency appeal was launched at the end of March. My sense at the time was that potential donors would probably be looking inward because of lockdown but I was proved totally wrong and we were humbled and overwhelmed by the response from various corners of the globe. In short order, 3 months PPE was secured for colleagues.

In all, 950 cash donations were received, every one of which was greatly appreciated and valued. A special mention must go to Luitgard and Bernd Olgemoeller, Samuel Martin, Arthur & Sheila Dolby, the Luton Sixth Form College Malawi Project and primary schools Stoke Bishop and Fairlawn, both of Bristol (more later) for the size and speed and, in the case of the schools, ingenuity of their support.



**On site everyone joined in to help with unloading PPE as it arrived, including little Iris (pictured).**

Probably **the most difficult and emotional consequence** of the arrival of Covid-19 in Malawi was the need to protect so many of the FOSC Ward Staff by releasing them, many of whom have given numerous years of faithful service and commitment. Readers may remember that these nurses, mature in years, were progressively hired and developed in paediatrics to augment the limited numbers of available State paid staff. Their maturity of years put them at an unacceptably high level of risk if exposed to Covid-19, with potentially fatal consequences. So it was with a very heavy heart that we had to say goodbye to them.

On a practical front this created a huge challenge at a very difficult time, adding to the existing problem we reported in our Spring newsletter being that because of Covid-19 many of the volunteer doctors, nurses and NGO staff were pulled out of Malawi to support the healthcare efforts in their home countries. This was understandable, but it left Malawi in difficulty as these volunteers and aid workers were fundamentally important in supporting the Malawi healthcare system. The remaining healthcare team at QECH...each and every one of the doctors, nurses, allied healthcare professionals and administrative staff ..... have been doing a fantastic but exhausting job delivering high quality care with resources limited even more than usual. What a team!

On a more positive point, the Malawi Ministry of Health, prior to the recent General Election, recognised the need to employ healthcare personnel due to COVID and did so. Also, currently the hospital management is very actively engaged with their staff and responsive to the needs of the hospital so colleagues on site are optimistic in this era of a new Government that the need for human resources will be a priority.

Consequently, decisions about Paeds ward staffing are on hold to allow for the longer term effects of the pandemic to come into focus and to allow the new Government to reveal its strategy for the health sector. The virus arrived in sub-Saharan Africa somewhat later than on the other continents and the impact in numbers has been lower, but of late the numbers have been steadily growing. There are various theories why countries such as Malawi appear (and I stress 'appear') to have been affected less than other nations and only time and research will confirm the numbers and reveal the reasons.

As I write, the *official* figures show since 22 May: **5,690 confirmed cases/ 177 deaths**



Out of adversity has come not only the generosity of so many of our supporters but some surprising and ingenious stories such as the following ones.

UK schools were shut down but **Stoke Bishop Primary School** and **Fairlawn Primary School**, both of Bristol, decided they wanted to help us with a not so obvious problem arising from the pandemic. The problem was that because of rules on social distancing the usually overcrowded mini-buses in Malawi increased their charges



from 20p to £2 per journey. This charge was way beyond the reach of our staff that relies upon these buses to get to and from the hospital, so the two schools decided to raise money to help them.

The children undertook their version of the global mountaineering Seven Summits Challenge but in their own homes, gardens or parks. A lot of stair carpets got quite a pasting, plus step-ups in parks and gardens.

*Left: a budding mountaineer, complete with rope and suitable clothing, doing their share of scaling the equivalent of Mt. Everest! The stairs carpet gave up its pile in a good cause!*

Between the two schools the children raised an astonishing £9,000 .....outstanding!

Thank you kids (and teachers) for an amazing initiative and result.

Sue Pascoe and her business partner Diane Plummer donated some much-needed PPE. Says Sue: "When lockdown hit I was placed in shielding and I decided to repurpose my inclusivity consultancy business to take up the PPE challenge. Our simple mission is to 'Protect'. One of our core values is of 'giving back' so we established Soaring Donations CIC, our Community Interest Company with the purpose of carrying on activities which benefit communities in the UK and impoverished countries overseas. Through donations of PPE we aim to help protect both health workers and individuals from the COVID-19 virus. We have donated to care homes in the UK and to FOSC in Malawi."



*One of their masks in action*

Sue and Diane have also recently launched an own-brand hand sanitiser gel and face visors.

Go to: <https://www.soaringprotection.co.uk>

~~~~~

## VERY SAD NEWS

Everyone involved has been devastated by the recent, **non-Covid-19 related**, deaths of nursing sister Florence Cheppe and Medical Officer Elizabeth Mlombwa.

Their passing is greatly mourned by colleagues and their respective contributions to the quality of Paeds healthcare in Malawi will be greatly missed.

**Florence Cheppe** was one of the very first FOSC Nurses and had only recently retired. She was one of the Department's longest serving nurses and witnessed most of the current paediatric consultants pass through their medical school and paediatric training. Florence was well known and loved by everyone. She was a quiet, hard working, extremely caring nurse who dedicated her whole life to looking after sick Malawian children and no matter how bad the shift she always carried on with a smile. Her commitment and desire to help sick children was truly inspirational, whilst her work ethic proved her to be a role model for more junior staff.



She was undoubtedly one of the human foundations upon which so much has been achieved in the establishment and development of paediatrics in Malawi.



**Elizabeth Pemphero Mlombwa** was a 24 year old Medical Officer who had been working within Paediatrics since May 2019. She was a passionate, caring and highly intelligent young doctor who touched the hearts of the whole Department. Whilst only at the beginning of her career it was obvious that she was destined for great things. Her ambition was to become a paediatric emergency medicine consultant, an ambition she would no doubt have achieved. She worked hard, was holistic in her approach, was dedicated to delivering high quality care, was willing to question/challenge and was determined to make a difference. Having said all that, she was, however, exceedingly humble and she simply did not appreciate how good a doctor, teacher and colleague she really was.

~~~~~

## REFLECTIONS by Dr Lucy Hoskyns on a first ever visit to Paeds. Malawi

[I thought supporters would be interested in this first hand perspective - Gordon]



"My name is Lucy Hoskyns and I am a doctor from the UK. I worked in the Paediatric Department at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital in Blantyre between March and July 2020 after completing a diploma in Tropical Medicine from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

Interested in global health, I was keen to experience medicine in a setting different from the one to which I had become used.

I was expecting the Malawi challenges to be very different to the ones I had faced in the NHS; the patient group, the culture, the availability of medicines and diagnostics, the conditions seen, and so it turned out to be!!

For the first month I experienced the 'normal' running of the Department. The patient group was very different, most children being exceedingly sick compared to those in children's departments in the UK, some having travelled a very long way before arriving at the Children's A&E, the entry point for the Paediatric Department and medical treatment and care as a whole.

I quickly learned a lot about the culture and healthcare-seeking behaviours. Use of local medicine was very common - usually in combination with 'western' medicine, parents were very diligent in following doctor's recommendations and extremely grateful for the care their children received. The supply of equipment and medicines was intermittent and the resources available were in constant flux. The biggest difference in terms of resources was the available interventions for neonates as there was no neonatal intensive care unit, meaning that sadly many babies died who would not have died had they been treated in the UK.

I was in awe of the clinicians' ability to make diagnoses based on clinical assessment alone, which brought into focus the reliance we have in the UK on tests and scans. As expected, there were many more infectious diseases and complications and I grew very familiar with diagnosing and treating conditions such as malaria, rheumatic heart disease and TB.

What nobody was expecting when I was there was a global pandemic! This meant that I ended up working with challenges experienced by healthcare workers all around the world, on top of those that were Malawi-specific. We struggled as many volunteers and NGO people returned to their home countries leaving us working with a depleted workforce and even further depleted resources. Thanks to generous donations through FOSCiM, we were able to purchase vital PPE.

My short visit to Malawi has confirmed for me that I want to pursue a career in Global Health and I now understand more about the challenges facing healthcare in low-income and poorly resourced settings. I have also witnessed the incredible determination and commitment of the clinicians and other staff to improve the quality of care for all children in Malawi."

~~~~~

### **Medical School learning in a Pandemic**

Another impact of Covid-19 has been on the medical students and their continuing education. Just like in the UK, universities were closed and remain so, however....

**- from Dr Emma Thomson in Malawi**

"In March 2020 the College of Medicine (CoM), the only Medical School in Malawi, alongside many Universities around the world, closed its campus in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the College of Medicine was determined that their





students' learning should continue, knowing that the country relies on CoM to graduate the next generation of health care workers including doctors each year. As such, CoM launched Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), tailored to teach students including medical students, remotely using a smart phone or tablet.

CoM is very grateful to Dr Neil Kennedy (Queens University, Belfast) and UK charity 'Friends of Sick Children in Malawi' for helping us make remote teaching a reality by providing the 'CAPSULE' Application to our medical and clinical officer students. CAPSULE is a medical quiz-based learning resource app under license from The University of Sussex and Ocasta Studios Limited. It works well on a phone and does not require a lot of memory. It is also available offline, which is essential for our students who have intermittent internet reception. CAPSULE was used extensively in the UK during the COVID-19 crisis. Malawian students were the first students outside of the UK to use this amazing resource. Our students have really appreciated using this great learning resource and have had nothing but positive feedback."

Quotes below from Malawi medical students:

*'It's fun to use.... most of the cases give you more details than you would get here in Malawi so you are forced to look up things and at the end of the day you learn more.'*

*'The app has been helpful indeed...it has kept us busy during this Corona pandemic and it's a good app for someone to revise their medical knowledge.....'*

*.....long live 'Capsule'.....and Bravo to Dr Thomson for trying her best for us to access this wonderful Application'*

~~~~~

## So, what else has been happening?

### Sea Containers to Malawi : Medical consumables and 'craft work'

Our small army of knitters, crocheters and sewers throughout the UK has carried on undaunted by Covid-19. Unfortunately, the sea container scheduled to be loaded in June was cancelled due to 'you know what', and it is uncertain when the next one will be possible through our usual channels.

**HOWEVER**, I am pleased to say that we have had positive discussions with fellow charity **Cycle of Good** and we are working on a collaboration whereby we can 'buy' available space in their containers. One of their activity bases is in Malawi and near to ours so that is an added bonus. As they say, "watch this space".

~7~

In the meantime, pictured here is some of the outstanding work of members of **The Redditch Inner Wheel** which will be boxed ready for Malawi. Thanks to **Monica Clarke** for yet again organising the collection of these items for us as well as making some of them.

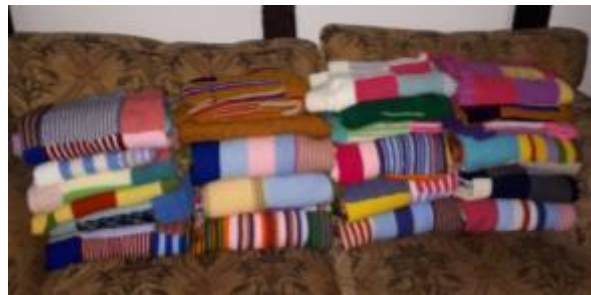


Thanks also to **Norma** and **"The Happy Crafters"** of Blackwell for their work (below).



.....and to

**Anne** and **"The Kingfisher Knits"** of Droitwich



**and** all the other members of our small 'army', many if not all of whom have been featured in previous newsletters and who continue to send us their amazing work.

### Medical consumables

A huge thank you to **Dolby Vivisol** for their generosity and to DV's **Margaret Church** (left) and her colleagues, **Brian Harding** and **Simon Chapman** all pictured here in the DV Bedford warehouse whilst packing and labelling over 50 boxes (4.5 cu. mtrs.) of medical consumables and first aid supplies they have donated to us.



~~~~~

## News from the Workshop mobilising Malawi's children

Inevitably, Workshop activity has been affected by the pandemic with families not coming to the hospital in the same numbers as in more normal times and with one of our main funders temporarily suspending their support.

At the time of writing, 905 wheelchairs have been made and delivered since 2013 when this collaborative project started, there are 44 in progress at the Workshop, and we have funds in the UK for another 30. That brings the total to 979 which is tantalisingly close to the magic 1,000 mark. Also, this year so far, 41 home chairs for tots and a number of orthotics devices have been made and delivered.

Despite the impact of the pandemic on charitable giving, **Kitchen Table Charities Trust** has maintained their support for our efforts and we are *hugely* grateful to them. Thanks also to members of the congregation of **The First Limavady Presbyterian Church** in Northern Ireland for their support for home chairs for tots.

Meet the members of the Workshop 'Gang' who double as "Elves" nearer Christmas!

The 'Boss'



Wilson

Prosthetists/Orthotists

Wheelchair technologists



Gilbert



Lameck



George and Patrick

Wheelchair and home chair technologist



John



Alex



~9~

A few of the Workshop's recent 'customers'



Christopher



Millium



Favour



Angel



Marita



As previously reported, the 2019 Christmas Appeal smashed all previous records by a factor of 3, with 80 wheelchairs and 63 home chairs for tots ordered and delivered before the Big Day as Christmas presents for friends, relatives and even just as personal seasonal goodwill gestures.

So many of you tell me that either as a present for those people for whom you never know what to get, or simply to celebrate Christmas yourselves, the idea of mobilising a child with severe mobility issues or taking a tot off the floor/ground and into a little home chair, captures the too often lost but true meaning of Christmas.

**I will send out a separate note soon BUT please feel free to place your 2020 Christmas orders with me as soon as possible. My order book is now open!**

Costs remain unchanged :

Wheelchairs £100 (if Gift Aid is applicable) or £125 if not.

Home chairs for tots £ 15 (if Gift Aid is applicable) or £ 18.75 if not.

Orthotic devices a donation of £25 will secure at least one case story.

**Please** make payments direct to our bank account (details at the end of this newsletter) and put your name as reference.

**Please** email me with your dedications and if you want a Gift Aid form (if you have not given us one previously).

~10~

## What now?

If you would like to discuss how you might help us with **any** of our funding or other needs, challenges and issues, please simply email me or Joe for a 'chat' at:

[gordon@friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org](mailto:gordon@friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org)  
[joelangton@doctors.org.uk](mailto:joelangton@doctors.org.uk)

**To make a donation**.....you can do this online or directly by bank to bank payment or by cheque if in the UK.

Bank to bank donations or donating by cheque are **free** of charge, but only in the UK.

Please **be aware** that if you donate online, intermediaries like PayPal, Virgin Money Giving, Just Giving etc. all deduct charges from your donations but you can now opt to cover some of their charges so that more of your donation comes to the charity.

**IMPORTANT** ~ Donors who are also UK taxpayers should donate through FOSCiM (rather than direct to FOSC) so that 25% Gift Aid can be added to their donations courtesy of HM Government.

### UK FOSCiM bank details: at HSBC

Account name: Friends of Sick Children in Malawi  
Bank sort code: 40 – 11 – 04  
Bank account: 2 1 6 1 2 0 6 9

### Malawi FOSC bank details:

|                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Bank : National Bank of Malawi | Swift Code (BIC) : NBMAMWMWXXX |
| IBAN / Account : 358328        | Bank code: 002                 |
| Branch name: Chichiri branch   | Reference : FOSC GBP AC        |

**Finally**, on behalf of everyone involved in 'the project' in Malawi and those tens of thousands of children and families who benefit every day from your generosity, a very big thank you and please keep supporting us to whatever extent you can.

Sincerely,

*Gordon*

Gordon Cowie MBE  
Founder and Chair of Trustees  
Friends of Sick Children in Malawi  
[www.friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org](http://www.friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org)  
[gordon@friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org](mailto:gordon@friendsofsickchildreninmalawi.org)



### Social media addresses

Instagram: @foscmalawi  
Twitter: @of\_fosc  
Facebook:  
Friends of sick children Malawi

If in future you would prefer not to receive our newsletter please advise us at the email address above. The same applies for any other communications that we may send from time to time.