

# Malawi Children's Village

Fourth Vocational Training Summer *June 20 - July 27, 2005*



## Hello Everyone!

Michael is 16 years old, an orphan who lives with his two sisters (18 and 20) in a small hut with a thatched roof that will leak when the rainy season starts. It's Malawi winter in June and July, nice sunny days, but the nights are cool and Michael has no blanket. Michael goes to the lake in the morning to take his bath. He has washed his shirt in the lake so it is dry in the morning. He has a couple of shirts, a pair of shorts, but no shoes. Most mornings there is no maize flour for breakfast.

At eight o'clock in the morning Michael comes to Malawi Children's Village (MCV) where he is enrolled in the Sewing Project. He is an outstanding student and has the promise to become a good tailor making a living wage to support himself and his sisters,

and is a perfect example of how the sewing project is starting to see its first success stories.

Our Sewing Project, started in 2002 with your donations, is an exciting place. This was my fourth summer at MCV and my role continuously changes every year to keep the program viable and profitable. As some of you know, Fraction has been with the program since the beginning and is our general manager. He knows how to get things done and is always willing to do whatever it takes. He is my buddy, always open to guidance and advice, reliable and so willing to learn.

Lonjezo has joined our program this year and has business management training. She speaks and writes English, does all the paperwork and accounting and is in charge of daily operations with Fraction. We also have two tailors, Ayami and Saidi, who are in charge of training and sewing special order work. They are very skilled young men who learned the trade from their fathers. I now have the right people in place and they are learning to communicate, plan and organize together. When I first got there, each person was doing their own thing, and now they are organized, motivated and work as an effective business team.

The sewing room has enough equipment for 16 workers and two tailors to be working at the same time. I ordered extra lights to be installed and two fans on the walls - - - the temperature often rises above 100 degrees so this should give some relief. We installed extra shelves and closets that can be locked. The tailors requested a fitting room, so with some nice colored curtains on a rod (rather than on a string between two nails) we made the room a neat and happy place, inviting for both students and visitors.

When I arrived, the students were making boys shirts, learning set-in sleeves and shirt collars. The tailors were cleverly using leftover fabrics, and having the students choose the prints and color combinations. However, the fabric closet was almost empty so I suggested that it was time to make a shopping trip to Blantyre (about a three and one half hour drive) where all the wholesalers are. A new shipment of "Holland" or "American" wax print fabric (actually made in China!) had just arrived. The tailors had a great time picking out a large selection. We also purchased a big inventory of solid-colored fabric for the school uniforms, buttons, ribbons, bindings, cones of thread and a new heavy-duty iron. A nice surprise for me was walking into one of the stores and the owner recognized me and said, "I got your machine." Last year, I put out the word I was looking for another industrial overlocker. He found a used one and kept it for me. I had to do some real bargaining to get it for \$500. He started at \$950 and new they are at least \$1,800. It needs some work but Mr. Manyamba, our sewing machine repairman in Blantyre, can help us with that.

What a hit we were with all the new fabrics! The word went around fast and we sold lots of zitenjis. A zitenji is a two-yard piece of cloth worn by all women as a sarong wrapped around the waist. It has many uses; as a wrap when it is cold, an apron for cooking, a sling to carry the baby, a bundle to carry your purchases from the market on your head, and it is also your wallet with the money knotted in one of the corners. Also, waxprints are beautiful and not available in the area. "Where did you get that new zitenji?" was all the advertising we needed. Selling the fabric in two and four yard pieces can become an easy way of making a profit, another facet of our business.

This brought a lot of excitement to the sewing room and many orders for National Dress and men's shirts. Some really nice pieces were being produced. A resort on the lake ordered 8 security uniforms and we used the fabric we had just purchased for boys shorts. They paid for the whole order in advance, so off we went again to Blantyre to buy more fabric - -

- teaching my team that we need a fabric supply at all times (it is like money in the bank). We had made enough money to pay all the wages for the month, so I said to the team “let’s invest the profit in inventory” . The same resort asked if we could make rain ponchos. We found the perfect fabric and bought that to make some samples.

This year we made uniforms for 11 schools. Now the system is set up to encourage other schools to use our services. Lonjezo will be going around to explain that part of the program. Fraction will go out to villages and local markets to sell zitenjis, National Dress, men’s shirts and children’s clothes. Both will work with resorts to sell tourist items to the Azungu (white man.)

The program has trainees who make clothing for the orphans as they are learning. The more skilled students have a book in which each piece they finish and is ready to be sold is signed off in a book by the tailors. Every two weeks they are paid for pieces finished. Eventually, they will be on a salary and when they are skilled enough and feel they can make it on their own, they will be helped to buy a sewing machine (which they will pay off over a whole year) . This leads into the next phase of the program to make room for new students (orphans) to start their training. It is MCV policy to care for orphans until they are 18 years old. The students are 15 to 17 years old right now and the program is open to boys and girls.

I make many changes when teaching the team. We have regular meetings to learn what each of their responsibilities are, discuss problems and to plan for the weeks ahead.

The students are happy. They now come all day and get a bicycle to commute while in the program. We now serve lunch, a sandwich and tea with a lot of sugar. A kilo of sugar was used up in three days, so they had to be taught to make it last a little longer! You always have to realize you are working in a different culture. Planning ahead is not a Malawi thing. Sometimes I say, “Why do I have to come all the way from America to tell you this, if it is so obvious to do something about it, don’t wait until you are told or until someone else does it. It will not happen.” This always gets a good laugh. Malawi is called the “Warm Heart of Africa.” and I so enjoy working with them. The people are poor, but always ready for a joke and a laugh.

I leave the program in good shape with a very big inventory of fabrics, supplies and money in the bank. I will get regular updates from Lonjezo, (she sent the first one August 23, see below) but otherwise they are on their own. **It is a Malawi program, by Malawians, for Malawians.**

The last week I was there, Michael had reached the skill level where he was producing children’s clothes and school uniforms on his own and was eligible to start receiving a salary. He proudly showed me his handiwork as well as the first page of his book listing his completed work. In four days he had completed three articles of clothing each day and had earned 75 cents a day for his work. (The average income in Malawi is \$1.00 per day.) With his first pay of \$3.00, Michael would be able to buy enough maize flour to feed himself and his sisters for a week. That is what the Sewing Project is all about.

## LONJEZO’S REPORT

*Hie Nettie*

*Thanks that you had a nice journey back home. Everything in sewing is going on well.*

*We already delivered the security uniforms to Palm Beach and on Friday Ritta was here to see the sample of the raincoat (poncho) and she ordered 8 coats, she already paid for the 4 so that we can buy another material for the 4.*

*The last two weeks we were making the choir uniforms for MCV choir, it was a great one. For the fabric, we have sold almost half of which we had in stock and today Fraction has gone to Blantyre to buy some. The American Wax prints are just going like hot cakes.*

*For the overlocker machine, the time it was brought here it was not working, so we called Mr. Manyamba to come and fix it, he did but it only worked for a few days and the motor was making a lot of noise, then we called the mechanic to look at the motor. He found that something in side was broken so Fraction has taken the motor back to Mr. Manyamba to fix it because we already paid him.*

*For the boys they are making the children's clothes and we are selling them. They are all happy with the job, imagine instead of knocking off at 3 p.m. they go at 5 p.m. Some are even coming also on Fridays. The next class for the girls will start on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2005.*

*For the orders from the school, next week we will be out looking for the orders from new schools because school will start next week.*

*Thanks for everything the time you were here. Everybody is saying hie to you.*

*Regards, Lonjezo.*

I just wanted to thank those of you who gave donations this year, even though I did not ask for any because we had money left over from last year. That extra money allowed us to buy another overlocker machine and more bicycles for the students. Several of you also gave donations for "anything" I felt was needed at MCV. I knew there was a great need for blankets for the orphans and a washing machine for the staff in the nursery, who do laundry for 14 babies every day. We were able to hand out 200 blankets (and when you give a blanket to an orphan, you know at least three kids will sleep under it.) MCV cares for almost 3,000 orphans, so blankets are always needed. And you should have seen the faces of the nursery staff when we surprised them with the washing machine – they couldn't believe it. In Malawi, no one has a washing machine.

If you want to find out more about MCV, visit [www.malawichildrensillage.org](http://www.malawichildrensillage.org). Thank you all once again for your generosity.

Yours truly,

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