

We are focusing on Margaret Lewis in Malawi

Chris Knott, CEO and Founder Starfish, writes;

"There was something very special when I visited Weald Primary School in the middle of last year. I sensed that God had something in store for me and it proved to be the case. Margaret, who had been working as a teacher in the UK for many years, had a calling to go to Malawi to serve in the area of education. She has now completed her first hundred days & this is her report: joys and sorrows, achievements and frustrations."

Margaret Lewis - The first 100 days in Malawi.

I arrived in Malawi on the 15th October 2016. As expected, the temperature was in the high thirties and humidity levels were energy sapping. I spent the first week accompanying two teachers on their visit to their partner school, funded by a British Council grant. It was the first time the teachers had visited Malawi; they coped with the heat, mosquitoes, unfamiliar food and many long, dusty miles traveling with admirable fortitude and forged a real partnership with their link school.



Some of the SportsReach team

The next week was spent in the delightful company of SportsReach, a group of people who use sport to spread the good news of Jesus. Despite the sweltering heat, they never faltered, playing netball and football at the hottest time of the day and preaching the gospel in entertaining and moving ways.

Being with both teams at the beginning of my time in Malawi proved to be a real blessing. Being a chauffeur, photographer and drinks dispenser allowed me the opportunity to observe from a distance and helped absorb me slowly into the Malawian culture and prepare me for my new role with Starfish.

With six weeks to go before Christmas, my goal was to visit every school in the schools linking programme, a total of 35, by the end of the year. We almost made it, with only two left to visit after Christmas. In hindsight, I was driven more by the target than achieving quality time getting to know the school, staff and pupils. Visits could only take place in the mornings when pupils were at school. Added to this were the long distances to reach some of these schools, plus the extra impediment of exam week extending to three weeks because of printing problems - leading to pupils not being at school much and teachers busy marking - meant some of these visits were rushed and time was not spent building relationships. However, the newsletters and films produced from these visits have been well received in the U.K. and, hopefully, will help make their partnerships more meaningful to staff and pupils.

I really enjoyed visiting the schools in Kasungu and seeing friends at Kanthenga, the school I had visited many times when I was a teacher and link coordinator. Again, I felt some of the visits were rushed and am determined to allocate more time next time I visit. A few of the schools are very remote, many of the children will have not even visited the nearest town let alone seen television or read many books and so will have little understanding of the world outside of their village. It seems to me that school linking is vital to these schools; that through communication, reciprocal visits and global citizenship awareness these children are given the opportunity to have their eyes opened to a different world and different possibilities for their lives which at the moment they have no understanding or knowledge of.



Spending time with some of the children

Just before Christmas, we met with the sponsored secondary school pupils from around Salima. Almost a hundred were able to attend and it was delightful

to be given the chance to meet them. Seeing so many of these young adults together, most of whom would not be attending secondary school were it not for the many kind and generous people from the U.K. who have given them this chance, was very moving. Facilitated by Starfish, a difference has been made to everyone of these young people's lives.



Sponsored secondary school pupils enjoying a drink and a snack

One of my main briefs for coming to Malawi was to improve communication and this has indeed been my biggest challenge both professionally and personally. Before the rains began in earnest at the beginning of January, we had very limited power. We could go a week without any power at all in the Starfish office and when we did have it there was no guarantee that the internet would work. Things have improved recently. We usually have power for at least a couple of days so, hopefully, communication will start to flow more easily and frustrations will be eased.

To sum up my first one hundred days is quite difficult. I haven't blazed a trail of global citizenship throughout schools, Starfish staff in the U.K. have probably still been weeping over the lack of communication with the Malawi office and it's hard to say how much difference I have made so far; however, the Lord has certainly made a difference to me. There have been challenges, but on every occasion He has been there giving me strength, guidance and encouragement.

I could not have made it this far without Him. I look forward to the work He has prepared for me here in Malawi in the next year. It may not be as groundbreaking, dynamic and as instant and easy as I think I secretly imagined it would be, but I trust in our Lord that He has sent me here to do His will and that, in however big or small a way, what I do will make a difference.