

Project Number #MW96654

Project Name AIDS Prevention Program – Malawi

Vision of the project

To reach the youth of the Africa Evangelical Church (AEC) in Malawi, and the wider community, with AIDS prevention messages in a way which is relevant and will lead to a broader understanding and an increased personalization of HIV/AIDS issues. This will then result in genuine behaviour change related to HIV/AIDS through an increased desire to live a godly lifestyle. These changes will lead to less pre-marital sex amongst the youth, increased faithfulness in marriage and stronger family relationships.

Project background

In Malawi, the rate of new HIV infections is the highest amongst the youth (15-25 years old), with over 83,000 new infections per year in total. AIDS prevention amongst the youth is therefore vital in stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 2002, SIM Malawi and their partner church, Africa Evangelical Church (AEC), prepared a country specific strategy for their HOPE for AIDS projects to undertake home-based care, orphan care, prevention activities and leadership training. Following the success of the Songs & Drama Competition (Project #MW96350), completed in 2007 as part of the prevention activities, the strategy was reviewed and it was agreed to scale up the prevention activities over the next 3 year period. This follow-on project will continue with more AIDS awareness events but also link them into a youth peer education program using appropriate literature in Chichewa in order to provide the conditions conducive to real behaviour change. These activities will be supplemented with some special seminars on Family Life & AIDS Education aiming at the parents of the youth.

Activities of the last 6 months

Christian Marriage & Family Life (CMFL)

Over the last 6 months the AEC National Children's Co-ordinator has made follow up trips to each of the 3 clusters of churches that were trained in 2019 to assess their progress.

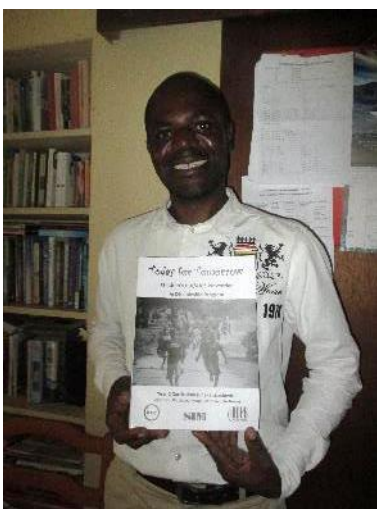
It has been particularly encouraging to hear how the concept of discipleship has been integrated into their ministries and how the ASDM bible studies materials related to relationships and family life have been used to bring a very positive impact (see story below).

Youth HIV/AIDS Peer Education

In November the AEC Youth Co-ordinator held various meetings at Lilongwe, Salima, Sani, Ntchisi and Mzuzu to begin the process of empowering the newly selected peer educators through more of a 'discipling/mentoring/visiting approach' rather than holding a combined training event as was done for the different cluster of churches in southern region of Malawi last year. The AEC National Discipleship co-ordinator joined him as he met the peer educators in smaller groups and spent time looking at the "Maphunziro Khumi" bible studies and also explaining more about how to develop long term relationships and disciple others which is so important in bringing about behaviour change. The peer educators were also encouraged to be intentional about identifying, discipling and mentoring another person who has a shared passion for HIV/AIDS prevention.

This project has also been able to support other HIV/AIDS prevention activities in the AEC through:

- Some funding support for the AEC Girls Camp held at Chilomoni AEC in December which included a number of sessions related to HIV prevention and sexual purity
- Distribution of 20 subsidised bibles to key youth peer educators



Today for Tomorrow

HIV/AIDS prevention amongst the primary aged children is continuing strongly through the 'Today for Tomorrow' programs running in 131 churches and 138 primary schools. In December the Year 2 lesson

book translation was completed and 1000 copies printed. Some distribution has started particularly to the AEC Area Council Children's Co-ordinators during their annual Prayer & Planning meeting held in January. A few copies of the Year 2 curriculum in Portuguese were also photocopied and distributed to the AEC churches in Mozambique who are also running Today for Tomorrow in their communities. The AEC National Children's Co-ordinator made follow up trips to East Bank, Chikwawa, Bangula and Lulwe areas in December to encourage and mentor the T4T trainers. (Today for Tomorrow costs are shared between this project, HOPE for AIDS Master project and the Children's Ministry capacity building project.)

Future Plans for next 6 months

As the COVID-19 pandemic begins to take hold in Malawi (all schools were closed as from 23 March) we will be working with the church to disseminate accurate information relating to prevention and care, address the various myths that are circulating, give a solid biblical response to the pandemic, and help empower church members to consider what ministry will 'look like' in the context of COVID-19. Although we are not sure of the timescale due to travel and meeting restrictions, the next ministry actions we are planning will be as below (using phone/whatsapp if travel is not possible):

- Continued discipleship & mentoring of key leaders in Today for Tomorrow program and CMFL peer education program
- Continue discipleship of the youth HIV/AIDS peer educators as they try and reintroduce use of the "Maphunziro Khumi" bible studies

Prayer requests

- Pray that God will have mercy on Malawi, especially the poor and vulnerable, and give them the strength to fight off the corona virus.
- Pray for the AEC National Youth & Children's Co-ordinators that they can do good phone follow up of peer educators to help them in thinking through how they can continue ministry but in a different way during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Pray that God will continue changing people's hearts and behaviours as they remember and act on what they have already been taught!

Stories –

Church capacity growing to help families

Strong families who live out godly lifestyles and promote sexual abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within marriage are powerful agents in preventing the spread of HIV. So, listening

to recent feedback from our Christian Marriage & Family life peer educators after their trainings last year we were thrilled to hear how the churches capacity and commitment to this ministry was growing from strength to strength and that it was bringing positive change in many lives. Let me share a few examples ...

- One church had done some local research so they could design a teaching day to meet the 'real needs' – this was an encouraging sign of growth in strategic thinking & planning in a very rural church
- There have been all kinds of differing impacts on families & church – after peer educators had carried out some teachings for their church and community (pictured is a session in Nsanje) more husbands are now attending church with their wives, some families being reconciled & other couples are desiring

Family Peer Educator training in Nsanje



to show their mutual commitment by having a Christian wedding in church (most have only a village 'chinkoswe' with the families)

- Peer educators commitment is taking them beyond their original ministry remit in wanting to reach youth as well as families - one church saw the importance of teaching this material to the youth BEFORE getting married and so have planned a 2 day camp to help their young people prepare well for future family life
- We are hearing of increased capacity as new leaders are rising up - God raised up a strong woman leader in one area and then she moved to another – she is now transforming ministry in the new area whilst another woman who had been in her shadow has now blossomed as she has stepped up to fill the leadership gap
- There has been a growth in discipling and mentoring with multiple stories of how 'role model' families are now meeting/mentoring other families in one-on-one relationships over extended periods rather than just relying on training events
- Influence in communities - Our peer educators being asked to train other denominations in their villages to be able to do similar ministries in their churches.

We are grateful to God for this increase in capacity, vision and commitment and pray the program will continue to go from strength to strength and transform many families and communities and prevent the spread of HIV!

Youth HIV Prevention at Girl's Camp



During December the AEC national youth co-ordinator ran a girl's camp for the Blantyre Area Council churches with some funding support from HOPE for AIDS. 29 girls attended the 2 days program which had a heavy emphasis on sexual purity, resisting peer pressure and making godly life choices. For many it was the first time they'd used our HIV/AIDS related bible studies and it is our heartfelt desire that they will take the teachings to heart! Girls are still very vulnerable to dropping out of school, early marriage, pre-marital pregnancy, using sex as a way of finding money in a context of poverty, and sexual abuse and so attending camps like this are a way of not only teaching but also giving the moral support and encouragement to not just give up and accept 'the way things are' but have the courage to stand strong in their faith and desire to live differently.