



### Mission co-worker reflects on impact Community Health Evangelism has made in Malawi

Luta Garbat-Welch often meets with the Community Health Evangelism (CHE) Trainers volunteering with the Nkhoma Synod Public Health Department in Malawi to listen to their joys and challenges as they facilitate CHE principles in their communities.



Through training and relationship-building, each of the villages implementing CHE in Nkhoma identified hunger as the number one issue facing their communities. The villages, with the support of Community Health Evangelists (CHEs) and CHE Trainers, have been working together to identify and implement solutions to address food insecurity.

Some of the solutions to improving food security in their communities have been using compost, planting crops that don't need fertilizers, creating a village silo to store the harvest, and encouraging people to start small businesses to gain an income rather than selling their harvest for lower prices. Some villages have started village savings and loans to be able to start small businesses. One village will be working with an agricultural extension agent on improving farm yields. While some of these solutions may seem small, the issues of growing food sustainably and effectively are huge in Malawi and addressing this need is urgent as the country faces continual cycles of hunger.

In addition to working together to address a common need within a community, CHE programs begin implementation through encouraging practices that create a healthy home environment. The CHE Trainers and CHEs implement these practices in their own homes, and teach the families around them how to implement these same practices—examples of a “healthy home” in a rural context include using a pit latrine rather than open defecation, basic hygiene practices like washing hands, and growing kitchen gardens (backyard gardens) where a variety of vegetables are planted in addition to the staple crops. Most families have started a kitchen garden and have built a pit latrine near their home. The CHE Trainers are working with each family to build an *mponda giya* (tippy tap) by their pit latrine. An *mponda giya* is a hand-washing station made by using plastic



bottles, sticks and string. Later this year the CHE Trainers are planning to hold a ceremony to distribute certificates to families with healthy homes and celebrate the changes that are happening in their communities.

Deforestation was also identified as a problem in one village. While this problem was not identified as the most pressing problem, the village realized it was a problem that could be easily addressed. Village woodlots were created and 75 trees were planted. This year the village hopes to plant even more trees. The village is using used sugar bags to grow seedlings rather than buying plastic tubes for seedlings—a great example of the creativity and flexibility that is encouraged in CHE—expanding our understanding of the term “resource.” Communities are engaged to address those issues that they are able to address immediately using local resources.

“I like CHE. There is a better approach with CHE than other programs,” Alifa Chigwenembe, a CHE Trainer, said. “In CHE we educate people to do things for themselves. The other programs that are in our villages—they just bring handouts; they bring relief, not development. When they go out (leave), the handouts go with them.”

“What an image this created for me,” Luta said, after speaking with Alifa. “I could picture the handouts literally walking out of the village. Education and use of local resources is key to CHE, so the handouts don’t walk out of the village.”

Another CHE Trainer commented: “CHE is good because it gathers people together to share knowledge and discuss together how they will deal with their problems.”

As Luta works with CHE, she has realized her focus tends to be on concrete physical and spiritual needs being met; this is a great example of social changes that at first glance seem simple, and in fact are the most profound. Part of what enables these social changes to take place is the spiritual component of CHE. When CHEs visit with their neighbors not only do they provide health education, they also provide spiritual education, teaching their neighbors who we are in Christ and how we are to live as Christians. Transformation happens when we begin to understand how great God’s love is for us.

The CHE Trainers are now working in 19 villages and it is growing as more and more villages want to take part. The CHE Trainers feel a sense of call to engage with each of these villages, but they struggle with balancing providing for the needs of their families, engaging with the surrounding villages, and continuing to deepen the education and training they are able to provide beyond the initial healthy homes initiative.

To support Luta and Jeremy Garbat Welch’s ministry in Africa individuals can give to E200515 and congregations can give to D507577.

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