



malawi project

The Malawi Education Project creates vital resource centres for the deprived schools of Malawi. Luke Bell speaks with founder, Lou Fitzpatrick.

Lou Fitzpatrick set up the Malawi Education Project 4 years ago in an attempt to provide educational resources to school children in Malawi. She travelled to Malawi back in 2001 and was inspired by the people she met, none more so than Brighten Ndawala. Here was a young man selling jewellery on the beach in an attempt to save up enough money to put himself through school. Lou remembers, "It was inspiring to meet someone who valued education so much. He worked his socks off just to try and go to school – and there are so many people like Brighten in Malawi."

Brighten now works in the school library set up by the project at Cape Maclear Primary School. A rural school of 1,750 pupils, who previously had no access to learning resources, now have their very own school library. Brighten is constantly surrounded by pupils and the parents have been really complimentary about the reading clubs set up by the project. It is Lou's aim to replicate this achievement elsewhere in Malawi.

"The attitude of the kids in the school has changed very much.. instead of running away from school at lunchtime, they are now staying to explore and discover a world within books at the library. Many times, you cannot see me for a cloud of children like a swarm of bees!," says Brighten Ndawala, who's life has been turned around by this project.

The project's initial aim was to encourage the donation of educational resources in Britain, that would otherwise go to waste, and to ship

them out to Malawi. The team go out to Malawi annually with the shipment of donated resources, ensuring that every single book and resource arrives at its intended destination. The team has now begun to realise just how many unused resources there are already out in Malawi. Their future plans now revolve more around utilising these resources to stock 80-85% of each library they set up, and using the donated resources from Britain for the remaining 20-25%.

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"We want to take on more of a facilitator role in order to make the project sustainable in Malawi," Lou insists. "Setting up local committees in the communities that want libraries, empowering the Malawian people to manage the projects themselves. We will obviously help where we are really needed and can provide training for those involved, but it's important to let the local people manage the projects at ground level."

Funding these plans, however, is not going to be easy. Lou believes they



are going to need to raise £100,000 by the end of 2009 in order to realise their plans. This is the main area where they now need support. Independent fundraisers can really help the project move forward, "Whether its baking cakes, running marathons, street performances, whatever people can do to raise money for this cause will be so gratefully received," urges Lou, with obvious passion for her work.

The team themselves (which comprises of 4 part-time staff plus Brighten out in Malawi) put a lot of time and energy into fundraising. They regularly put on social dinner parties and host silent auctions with all manner of prizes from gig tickets to dinners with Howard Marx. Head over to www.malawieducationproject.com for the latest news on up and coming events and ways you can get involved.

