

# CONNECTING LIVES

Eagles Relief & Development Programme  
[www.eaglesmalawi.org](http://www.eaglesmalawi.org)



People living with disabilities are amongst the most marginalised and vulnerable in Malawi, facing severe stigma, abuse and blocked from community life. Together, we celebrate pastors and churches standing against the stigma and valuing each individual as made in the image of God.

## Finding their future

Following Eagles' training, Thete Living Waters Church saw their love for God and for the most vulnerable as inseparable. They determined to ensure children with disabilities were included in family life and able to access education. Now they work with parents and schools while church volunteers offer personal tuition to the children. They also consulted an NGO with expertise in disability to ensure the children get the full care they need.

Yankho, 15, and his sister Chimwemwe, 11, were stuck in a class of 5-year-olds. Their mother, Ellen, had given up on their future. Then the church came alongside with holistic support. Both returned to school, helped by the volunteers, and passed their first exams. The NGO helped Ellen to understand her children better and to know how best to care for them. The church also helped her to begin a small business so she could create a stable home life.

## Rethinking abandonment

Families often hide away children born with disabilities in Malawi. Fathers frequently abandon their children, causing further stress to the mother and increasing their poverty. While official data records disability prevalence in Malawi at 3% among children, our work reveals it as much higher. The disparity in data demonstrates the extent of the stigma.

Research shows that these children are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience violence than their peers. 80% of them live in poverty, causing developmental delays because of poor nutrition, healthcare, and parental mental health. A national survey in 2016-17 also identified that those with disabilities experience higher levels of discrimination, abuse and poverty, and lower access to education, paid work, healthcare and other services.

Eagles' mobilisation process directly challenges perceptions of disability through Bible studies and participatory activities. One of the most helpful is 'Take a Step', where people from the community each take on a character. They respond to a series of statements and take a step where their character would answer "yes" - such as, "you have completed primary school". As some move forwards and those with a disability are left behind, a clear visual picture appears and builds empathy. People realise how much those with a disability are left out of community life. As a result, when they create their community action plan, they tackle this exclusion. Eagles also encourage people living with a disability to create their own 'Scale of Participation.' This helps to identify where the church and community are now and how improvements could be made. For example, one community set up a rota of volunteers to ensure that a child who cannot walk is carried to and from school every day.



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**I had given up about Yankho and his sister but since the church started helping us, I have hope again that they will have a future.**

**ELLEN**

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## Alone no more

Instead of ignoring or abusing those living with disabilities, Ntunthama church goes out of their way to show them love, include them in community life and give them hope for their future. Emilia has a disability in her legs which makes it very hard to accomplish daily tasks and she was having to care for her children alone. Before meeting members of this church, life was very difficult for Emilia. Almost destitute, she lived in a disintegrating hut that would not survive the rainy season.

As soon as they met her, Ntunthama church took action. Although living in poverty themselves, church members generously gave their time and a little money to build her a better house of bricks, as well as providing some bedding for the winter.



Emelia was so overwhelmed with joy she could hardly speak for smiling: **“Life has not been easy for us. I’m so thankful to the church for helping us through a huge challenge that I had in front of me. It is not easy to find people that will just build you a house like that. May God alone bless them.”**

## Justice for survivors of abuse

A group of churches in northern Malawi prioritised caring for children under-5 in their community plan. They started seven childcare centres and persuaded local government experts to train the volunteer teachers. Eagles then trained the teachers, pastors, community leaders and others in safeguarding to ensure the children were protected - especially those living with a disability who were most at risk.

Since this child-protection training, the communities have reported 12 cases of abuse to the appropriate government authorities and successfully helped 50 more children. These cases included an eight-month old baby abandoned by her family on the road; a single mother who left two young children alone in her house for days while searching for food; a man in his sixties who raped and impregnated a girl of 13; and 38 children who had stopped going to school due to abuse and lack of basic needs. They have now safely returned.

## Fighting for an education



At 21, Memory lives alone with three younger sisters, wholly responsible for them as their father died and their mother works far away as a cleaner. Memory is determined that they will all attend school, desperate to build a better future. However, her sister Jamila, 18, lives with a serious physical and mental disability and struggles to pass exams. Memory feels overwhelmed: **“Sometimes I really feel like the burden is too much. I have to provide for my sisters, make sure they go to school, and that they eat. They need books and pens and this is not always easy.”**

Motivated by Eagles’ training in God’s heart for the most vulnerable, Living Waters Church visited the family to see how they could help. A woman volunteered to help Jamila with her school work and, with her gentle coaching, Jamila passed her exams and moved up a year. The church also rents space in the market for Memory to sell the vegetables she grows and pay school fees. It is an ongoing struggle as church members are also in deep poverty. Yet they continue to journey alongside these girls and are helping Memory to find a more sustainable way to earn money. Memory no longer feels overwhelmed – however far away her mother is, she knows she has family in the village.

**“Since the church started helping us, my burden is lighter,”** says Memory. **“We are now able to eat, wash our clothes and look neat.”**

## Meet Carol

EAGLES CCM FACILITATOR



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**I love Church & Community Mobilisation (CCM) because I have a passion to work with vulnerable communities. These people have great potential, but they have not yet discovered it. Working together with them as they discover their skills and resources through mindset change using the word of God gives me satisfaction.**

**I am married to Franklin, a wonderful partner, for 10 years. We've been blessed with three boys, Barnabas, Ezekiel and Franklin.**