

JULY 2010

“YOUR EYES WILL ADJUST”

HEALTHED CONNECT NEWS



More good news from Africa! Our latest trip, June 7-27, 2010, once again surpassed expectations. Accompanied by two World Service Corps volunteers, Lauren Ballinger and Colleen Brian, we made a stop in Nairobi, Kenya, on the way to Zambia. We had the opportunity to stop by a Masai village and visit a little home made of woven sticks, mud and dung. The one small air vent which allows the smoke from the cooking fire to escape was also the only source of light in the room.

Having become accustomed to the bright Sub Sahara sunlight, the first glimpse into the little home appeared pitch black. As I hesitated at the doorway, our host said, “Come in. Your eyes will adjust.” I thought about his words many times on our trip as my eyes adjusted not just to dark rooms but also to the sobering needs we encountered wherever we went as well as the heroic actions being taken by innumerable people to meet those needs.

The Community Health Worker (CHW) training in Kasompe was a huge success! With CHW’s forming the foundation of our programs, we are especially glad to strengthen and expand their programs. We had exactly 50 in attendance – 43 women and 7 men. Just getting there was a major accomplishment for the women from The Congo. Ngondo walked two hours from her village of Mfuta to join Chama in Chiba. Together they walked another hour to Chibambo where they met Kipili and Kasongo. The four then walked another hour to the nearest dirt road to catch a bus. They traveled several hours to Lubumbashi where they met the final two ladies and traveled the last several hours going through passport control to finally arrive at the training in Zambia. And then they had to reverse the trip to go home...



The Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) from Congo had heart-warming stories of their recent successes. Ngondo said she was walking down the dirt trail near her home recently when someone came running to tell her to come quick to see a woman who had just delivered a baby and was bleeding. When Ngondo arrived at the little hut, she diagnosed the mother’s problem as retained placenta. She believes she was able to save the woman’s life because she had learned what to do in the TBA training. Kipili, who delivered dozens of babies last year, told of recently being called to the home of a mother in labor who was bleeding. Kipili thought it was probably a case of placenta previa which meant she needed to get the woman to the hospital immediately. A bicycle was found in the village; the woman propped on the seat and wheeled several miles over dusty trails to the hospital where she successfully delivered a healthy baby.



Chama Chola, one of the stalwart TBAs for many years, recently had a big new challenge. A woman in her village was pregnant with triplets. She was supposed to deliver in the hospital but was still at home in the village when she went into labor. With no incubators, no pediatricians standing by, no trained assistants, no medical equipment, Chola said “I prayed!” She delivered all three babies safely and they and their mother are doing fine.

Ireen, one of our new friends at Kasompe, shared a touching story. Her husband died recently leaving her with two young children. Her sister died about the same time leaving an infant behind that Ireen took in to raise. Ireen moved her little brood to her father’s house but within weeks he also died. She thought of moving back to the village where she grew up but knew most of her relatives there had died from AIDS. Where to go? What to do? As she was wrestling with the possibility of becoming homeless with three small children, a person she knew contacted her and offered her a house to live in. Ireen was one of the volunteers who attended the CHW training so she could become qualified to give back to the community that had reached out and helped her.



Rita, the training officer from the Zambian District Ministry of Health led the 5-day health worker training. She came well prepared with lesson plans, charts, and a variety of activities. The kick-off activity was community social mapping. The health workers were divided into teams and sent outside to ‘draw’ a ‘picture’ of their community in the dirt. With a stick they drew paths, roads, streams, clinics, homes where children under five had died the previous year, and other community landmarks on their dirt canvas. When finished, one member of each group replicated the map on a piece of paper to take back to the classroom for discussion. Another helpful activity was the identification of major health issues in each village. After making a long list, each group chose the top three problems. Three circles were then drawn in the dirt and the names of the problems written in each one. The health workers took a small rock found on the ground and “voted” by placing it in the circle representing the health issue they considered the most serious. Malaria was voted number one with diarrhea and pneumonia close behind.



On the final day of training each of the 5 geographical groups met separately to select a coordinator and develop a plan of action. Without exception, their plans of action called for starting health programs immediately with the new information they had learned. The week ended with a festive graduation. The room was decorated with balloons and the supplies displayed that were to be distributed. The new health workers were especially appreciative of the supplies handmade by supporters in the U.S.



They were touched by the little wooden bookmarks and measuring spoons for the oral rehydration sugar and salt measurements that were made by 92-year-old Mr. Savage. And they absolutely loved the colorful aprons made by the women from Spokane Valley! They immediately tried them on and posed for pictures. Each group also received a heavy cloth bag supplied with scales and baby-seats for weighing the babies, triple antibiotic ointment and aspirin. Interestingly, they dumped the aspirin out on a clean cloth and counted them tablet by tablet to be



sure each group received an equal amount. It's hard to comprehend the value of a simple aspirin to many in the world. The most treasured item they received, however, was the all-important official certificate of attendance from the Zambian Ministry of Health.

While the CHW training was being conducted, nearly 200 children gathered each day for school. They were especially interested in the science lesson that demonstrated the difference between solids, liquids, and gases. It was good to see Eddison, our resident artist, again. He obligingly drew us another bicycle picture so we could make more note cards.

In spite of the disruptions, the teachers didn't miss a beat with their lessons. Friday was a special day since that was the school lunch day. No one was absent! Our volunteer cooks did an absolutely heroic job of cooking food for 50 health workers and 150+ children – all on 2 little wood fires. Everyone had nshima (a corn-meal mush) while the adults had a side of cooked greens and piece of fish and the children had a side of beans. Everything got quiet in a hurry when the food was passed out! Obviously it was a big treat! Many of the children only have 1 or 2 meals each day.

Periodically throughout the week we were treated to the masterful drumming of a budding musician. Mpasoo, was an absolutely delightful, gentle-spirited, seven-



year-old who always had a smile. Any handy can or table became an instant drum for his nimble little fingers.

When I knelt down to greet him he held out his soft little hand and in perfect English said, "I love you." Mpasoo has an extra challenge in life – he's totally blind. His mother said he was born with sight but gradually lost it. He certainly has not let that dampen his enthusiasm for life. As long as his older brother-guide is nearby, Mpasoo is one of the happiest children around.





At the end of the training in Kasompe, Catherine drove us in her truck to Chipulukusu. We soon discovered one good piece of news after another. Two weeks before we arrived an NGO, Seeds of Hope, that specializes in water brought a big drilling rig to the school and – viola! – they now have a 50 meter deep borehole. The pump has not yet been installed but it is also in the works. The two teachers just completed a 6-week teacher training course provided by a group called Jubilee. And most importantly, the school feeding program has been launched. Talk about something needed and appreciated! They're providing a porridge made from soy flour, corn meal and sugar. The kids lick their little bowls clean. As a matter of fact, they take their spoons and scrape

every bit of caramelized porridge stuck to the bottom of the cooking pot too. It became more obvious why the feeding program when we began the interviews.

Lauren and Colleen, World Service Corps volunteers, did a masterful job of organizing the CHWs to conduct research interviews of the children and their caregivers. Very sobering experience. One of the questions was, "How many meals do you usually have a day?" The typical answer was 1 or 2. When asked what kind of food they ate the day before, most responded "nshima" (cornmeal mush). When asked what else they had to eat, they said "nothing." Another question was "What makes you happy?" One of the little girls who is being raised with 4 siblings by her single father said, "When the whole family is together and we all have food." When we asked the father "What makes your children sad?" he said, "When they see their friends with food and we have none." And this was a father with a job! As soon as we completed the interview, he hopped on his bicycle and went to work for amazingly low pay.



We didn't get to see Boss Mirriam this trip but we did receive a report which was a little concerning. We were told she's lost weight and has a rash on her arms and scalp. We're not sure what that means but it's always of concern when an HIV positive 3-year-old has health problems. We all voted to send the Boss a little bonus to be sure she receives adequate medical treatment.

Once again our eyes adjusted as the Masai told us they would. We just had to be patient. From the super-successful CHW training to the eagerly embraced feeding programs and new borehole, we are greatly encouraged. We just need to learn patience, let our eyes adjust and quit being surprised by results that exceed our expectations.

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