

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boys' Brigade



Learn to Build - Build to Learn

Case Study August 2021

Fraser Boyd – 25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy's Brigade, partnered with Likhubula province

- Why did you start a partnership?:

Dunblane already had a formalised partnership with Likhubula in Mulanje province. Youth involvement was very limited, although it had been key in the original setting up of the informal links between the two communities. Dunblane High School had a fun run each year and raised money to help support bursaries for secondary school kids and there was involvement by the Sunday school at Dunblane Cathedral, which was an original founder of the partnership, too. Boys' Brigade wanted to give opportunities to young men from Dunblane to experience a visit to Malawi but also to make the existing partnership more actively visible and personal in the community of Dunblane.

- What sort of activities have you carried out?:

Our fundraising for the two projects in 2016 and 2019 was very creative, not to mention the training we did to prepare the boys for their travelling to and work in Malawi. We made promotional videos highlighting what we valued about education and highlighting the importance and difference it makes in lives to help with raising funds to build and renovate classrooms over the two trips. To help fundraise, we planted gnomes and flamingos in people's gardens for special occasions (or pranks!) for a fee, washed cars, served soup/sweet lunches , afternoon teas and coffee mornings. The adults held whisky- and gin-tasting nights (with Malawian gin included)

We travelled to Malawi with a group of boys aged 15-18 in both 2016 and 2019. On the first visit, we had raised funds to help renovate two primary schools' classrooms in Likhubula. We did some of the work ourselves along with some of the bursars we met whilst there and the remainder (much of which we didn't have the skills to do) was done in advance or afterwards by local tradespeople. In 2019, we went back to work at one of the same schools, having raised a significant sum of money to

actually build two completely new classrooms that they were urgently in need of, as well as giving a further refurbishment to classrooms that still needed spruced up following the 2016 visit.

During both visits, we met with local young people who were being supported by the wider Dunblane-Likhubula Partnership, having lunch and sharing stories and experiences with them. Our boys attended some lessons with the oldest pupils in the primary classrooms, talking about homes and school, while we also visited a local technical college to see the skills being learned by older teenagers and young adults. We've attended lively local church services (as well as one very staid, upper-class one in Blantyre that shocked us!) and spent a couple of days travelling to national parks to experience some of the wildlife. Two quite different experiences were had visiting the morning school feeding programmes at Nansato (2016) and Pasani (2019) schools, one run by Mary's Meals, the other by WFP.

- Have you any highlights?:

A memory that the boys always highlight is the series of friendly football matches we have played against young people and, indeed, teachers from the schools. They have learned so much about the culture and social issues of Malawi just through this sport. In one match, the Malawian team turned up all wearing Motherwell away strips from a few years previous, which had obviously been donated or dumped through the clothing market that floods Malawi. We have memories of a left-winger and a right-winger sharing a pair of boots - each wearing the boot of the stronger side. The children watching would introduce us to their footballs made creatively from rubber bands and plastic bags. The friendliness and lack of any animosity (or even bad tackles) in the matches epitomised the warm heart of Africa we know Malawi as.

- What has been challenging?:

There's an endless moral debate about whether we should travel to Malawi and what the benefit of that is for us as Scots compared to what the money could do in Malawi. There's a strong case for both and we have to think about that carefully. In Malawi itself, often the hardest part is eating in public. Children would never ask for anything but our boys have always said it's really hard tucking into a packed lunch from our accommodation while mostly hungry children are playing round about you. Back home, it can be challenging to keep the young people involved and actively interested in the ongoing project after they have been to visit, though undoubtedly the effects on them as people are much longer-lasting.

- Has anything been particularly helpful?:

We've had great support from the Dunblane-Likhubula Partnership and there are lots of resources from the Scotland-Malawi Partnership as well. We've been encouraged by the awards and recognition that our projects have been given by SMP and local politicians. In addition, The Responsible Safari Company, with whom we've travelled each time, has been amazing. They are a sustainable, respectful organisation with so many years of experience and their local guides, as well as Dom and Kate in the UK, are simply brilliant at organising and keeping to a schedule with all the necessary arrangements.

- What do you hope the future of youth & school partnerships will look like?

I suspect that schools may be more and more wary about travelling abroad and with the debate about the worthiness of expensive travel, carbon footprint and ‘white saviour’ tourism, we all should do a lot of consideration of the bigger-picture stuff surrounding partnerships. There are many ways that groups here can support Malawian people in other ways, but the thought of a visit is often a ‘hook’ to get and keep young people involved. Youth groups are well positioned to facilitate travel and will often be less risk-averse (but still risk-observant) than formal education. It’s so important that while in Malawi there’s peer-to-peer interaction with young people of similar ages doing the majority of interaction. We know it can’t be an Instagram holiday/opportunity and we hope that partnerships will go out of their way to respect local people’s wishes and needs in partnerships.

- How has your scot/Malawi partnership benefitted you/ other teachers/youth leaders?
- How has your scot/Malawi partnership benefitted young people in your club?
- What would you say to teachers/ youth leaders who don't think they have the time?

We can’t lie: you DO need lots of time, but you also need lots of TEAM. Give the young people (in both countries) their voice and get their parents involved, too, especially with any kind of fundraising. Give adult leaders clear roles. Don’t try to do short-term things anyway; to be sustainable, you have to always think far into the future, and be continually recruiting people who are interested to help build leadership for years to come. This also helps to share the load.

- What do you think the future of ethical and equitable partnerships looks like?
- What would you say to someone considering a partnership?:

It is well worth it and when you start communicating with people in Malawi, or even meeting them in person, whether here or there, you’ll instantly realise the benefits. It’s a great chance for Scots to learn more about themselves and their outlook on life as well as to learn *from* Malawians and Malawi. When young people - young adults - still talk about their experience of the partnership five years later and the impact it had on them, that’s when you know it is all worth it, but then you see what difference it’s making in Malawi and it’s so much greater.