

# FACULTY AND RESEARCH UPDATE

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Maaïke Bruynooghe with orphan

# Midwifery in Malawi

How one Brookes alumna provides healthcare overseas

**Maaïke Bruynooghe**, an Oxford Brookes Midwifery alumna and socio-educational worker, set up the 'Kunyumba' project in 2008. This is a day care centre for vulnerable children in Malawi, which won an international award for best volunteer project in 2011. Malawi has the world's highest maternal and neonatal morbidity rate, and highest rate of preterm births, according to Save the Children.

Kunyumba, meaning "our home", has been running successfully and made a huge difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable children in the Senga Bay fishing village. This vulnerability can be due to a number of reasons: a disability, medical problems or coming from a difficult social background. Maaïke's work with the local community is a significant step to address these issues.

Ongoing support for Maaïke's project in Malawi is being given by Oxford Brookes University midwifery lecturers and graduating students, who donate their student hospital uniforms annually.



This year the uniforms will go to the newly built Pothawira maternity unit. Dr. Peter Maseko, the founder of the unit, has expressed how invaluable these will be. In a country where over the half the population live below the poverty line, such donations can make a great contribution.

"After setting up the day care centre in Malawi, I came to Oxford Brookes University to study midwifery. I wanted to really make the difference and start at the source of the problems. Rather than organising more care for more orphans and children with a disability, I hoped to have an impact on the reason behind these tragically high numbers. Through my Oxford Brookes University degree, the connections I have made here, the experience and skills I have gained and through setting up this new project, I truly believe it is possible to make that change." **Maaïke**

Valuable support is offered by the Kunyumba project, from providing health care, education, nutrition, hygiene and a safe haven where children can explore and develop at their own pace in a peaceful environment. The daily running of the centre is in the professional hands of a carefully selected local team of kind and devoted co-workers. The aim is not only to empower the children but also their family members, staff members and the local community, as they provide care for some of the children outside of day care hours.

Maaïke is now developing 'Kudimba', the follow on project of Kunyumba. The intention is to set up a day care centre for vulnerable teenagers and young adults in Salima, Malawi. The programme aims at offering a holistic care package to young people in the local area. They may be vulnerable due to their social background, their disability, a pregnancy at a young age, or any other

reasons which marginalises them in the community. One of the highlighted areas for this is HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, a key point of the project.

The focus for Kudimba is on young people who could flourish with some extra support, offering sexual health education and empowerment. There will be tailored maternity care to support the reduction in maternal and neonatal morbidity or mortality. A teaching area that will be emphasised is organic gardening and sustainable living; Kudimba means "our garden" in the local language. Nutrition is an essential aspect of a healthy life style. By teaching young people about organic gardening and at the same time growing healthy food for the project, people can develop indispensable skills, improve their health and at the same time learn about nutrition.

Another method of realising this change is by inviting midwives and other health care professionals from abroad to come and exchange experience and knowledge, and to assist in the Kudimba project, such as visiting the Pothawira maternity unit.

This intercultural exchange will mean that practitioners from all countries learn a great deal.

There are exciting times ahead, and Maaïke hopes to find out more about the funding of her Kudimba project this summer.

**Maaïke Bruynooghe and Megan James**