

Gift Thomson is being baptised and confirmed this Sunday at St John's. He has been here for 4 months and has been an important part of the St John's Music Group and the joint parishes' RCIA group in that time. Because his visa runs out at the end of this month, and he has to return to Malawi, he is being baptised today rather than at the Easter Vigil. We hope and pray he will be granted a visa so he can return in September for a 4 year degree at Queen Margaret University and to continue as a valued member of the community of our two parishes. The article below appeared in this week's 'Scotsman' – and was written by Emma Wood, of QMU, with whose family he has been living since he arrived in Scotland.

Partnership has led to profound 'real-life' learning and development

STEKA is a Malawian charity that creates sustainable futures for homeless and vulnerable children and young people. It is led by grassroots activist and social entrepreneur, Godknows Maseko – an ex-'street kid' – and his wife Helen, who campaign for children's rights and gender equality. For over 10 years, STEKA have developed an innovative model for creating sustainable futures for street children, establishing a family home for 65 vulnerable young people and supporting many more to live safely and sustainably in their own homes.

My connection began when visiting my daughter who was living and volunteering at STEKA for 18 months. The inspiring young people I met there told me of their ambitions, which were fantastically high despite only 1 per cent of the population in Malawi having the opportunity to go to college or university.

With the population growing fast, the Malawian government and the United Nations both recognise that young people need training in vocational skills to set up their own small enterprises in areas such as tailoring, woodwork and agriculture. Godknows has a plan for establishing a vocational skills and enterprise centre in Malawi to reach marginalised young people. He also hopes to develop a new model of "voluntourism" which will secure quality employment for their young people for years to come.

As part of QMU and STEKA's part-



Students from Malawi and Scotland are contributing towards positive change in both countries, says **Emma Wood**

nership, students have worked with the residents to develop a website, film and other campaign materials, whilst engaging Rotary clubs to support building the vocational skills centre. QMU has also hosted two STEKA residents on scholarships. Sandra Ndale (23) studied for six months and developed film-making and photography skills she is now using back in Malawi to give a voice to young people like her.

Gift Thompson (20) is at QMU for six months studying sociology. Our degree in Public Sociology is about creating change at community level – something which Godknows Maseko is already achieving in Malawi. By studying here with us, we believe that Gift will forge connections and relationships which will help STEKA thrive into the future. And we also know, from experience, that he will enrich our students' experience and learning.

Our partnership has led to profound 'real-life' learning and personal development of staff and students. During reflections, students have talked about the importance of family, the meaning of community and resilience, what a privilege edu-

cation is and how to recognise and value their powerful position in the world.

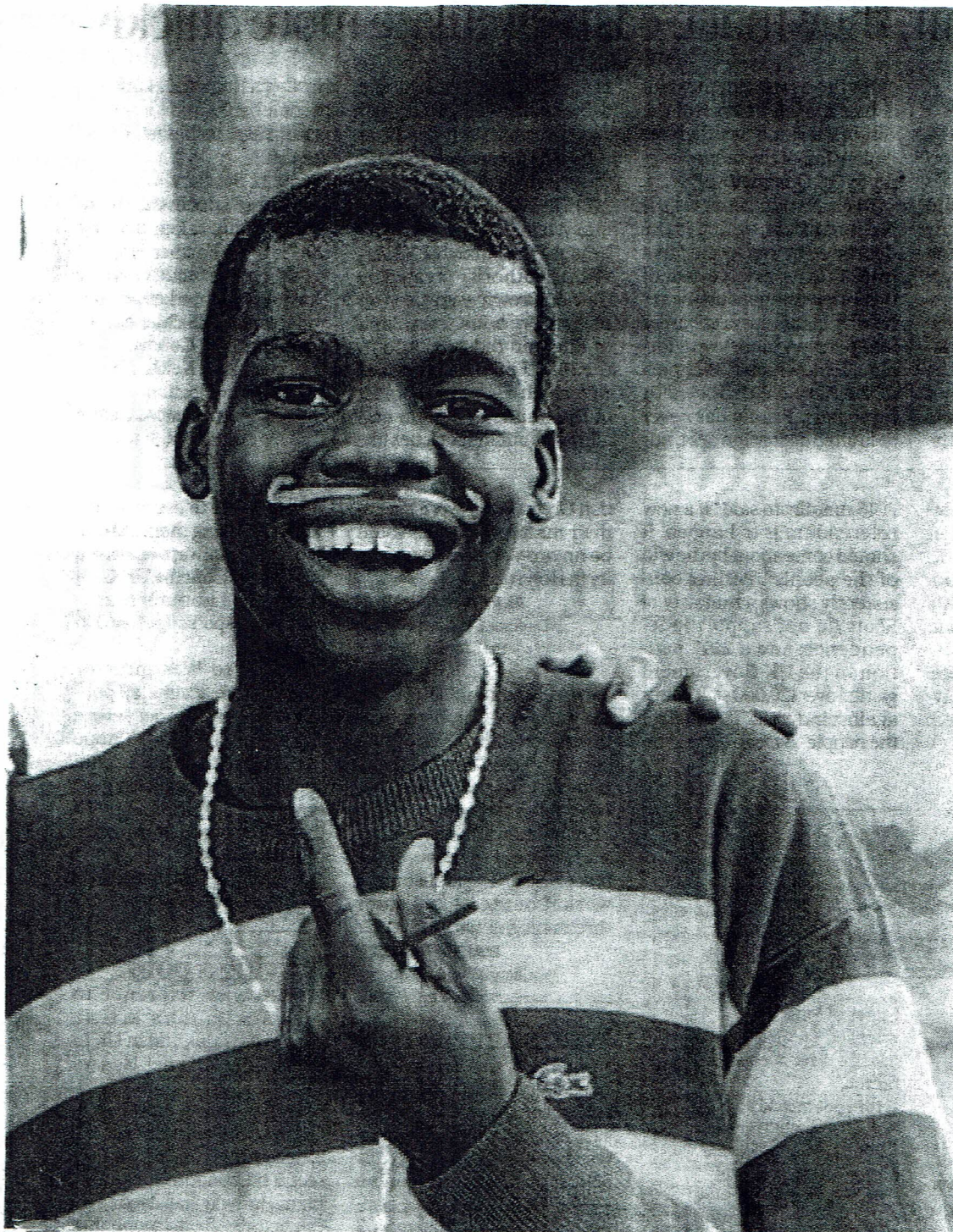
It has inspired QMU staff and students to come together to support STEKA and it's great for morale to know that our QMU community can make a difference like this.

However, I would love to see more young Scots who visit Malawi move beyond posting selfies on social media and start instead to use their voice to talk about the profound learning they've experienced.

For example, seeing the impact of climate change first-hand, the way in which things are reused and recycled in Malawi, and the different levels of consumerism in both countries.

In Scotland, most young people have access to social media, curating their own identity and telling their stories.

However, many young Scots feel pressured about how and what they present to the world. Some of our students reflect on how they represented their visits to the Global South as teenagers – the 'savior' complex implied in their writing and the dehumanising photographs. Looking back they feel they could have



Gift Thompson, who is at QMU studying sociology, where his connections and relationships will help STEKA thrive

been reiterating an almost colonial mindset.

I've seen real change happen as a result of Scottish teenagers learning to use dialogue and a 'photo-voice' approach to represent important issues respectfully and with real impact.

I know that STEKA can inspire many more young people and can affect real change in understanding their place in the world and the importance of things like the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Perhaps what's so special about the friendship between Scotland and Malawi is the fact that it's not about charity but rather a genuinely dignified two-way partnership. Youth voice in their partnership is key.

The Year of Young People 2018 will allow students like Gift, Sandra and those at QMU to tell the world why they care about their partnerships and how they are contributing to positive change in both countries.

The positive impact on the lives of all those involved in these partnerships will last far beyond 2018, and create a generation of reflective and empowered Scots and Malawians making real change in the world. For more information visit www.stekaskills.com