

A Newsletter offering an Overview of STEKAskills and STEKA's partnership with St John's and St Mary Magdalene's

Who are We? And What is the 'STEKA Effect'?

STEKA is an inspirational grassroots Malawian charity run by Godknows and Helen Maseko. Godknows is a former 'street kid' and a survivor of human trafficking who has managed to cope



The STEKA family

with this extreme trauma and work his way out of poverty - with the firm and courageous support of his wife Helen. Together they have created a loving home – the STEKA Home - in the city of Blantyre for more than 100 young people, some of whom have also experienced deep trauma and abuse, and some who have only avoided it by becoming part of the Home. What makes STEKA so special is the way Helen and Godknows run it as a family. They live the role of loving parents, and the children are brought up to value their rights and themselves – with a special focus on girls' rights to equality and to resist early marriage. Boys share the chores, everyone is given access to education and given parental love; so, the children develop into ambitious young adults with high self-esteem. We call this the 'STEKA effect'.

STEKAskills is a grassroots Scottish charity, run only by volunteers, which seeks to help Godknows and Helen spread the 'STEKA effect', in order to touch and support other Malawians who have also experienced poverty and trauma. The intention is that that they, too, develop the self-esteem and ambition to create positive and independent futures for themselves. As Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, only 1% of its inhabitants can access a college education.

Therefore, STEKAskills supports the STEKA Centre for Vocational Skills and Community

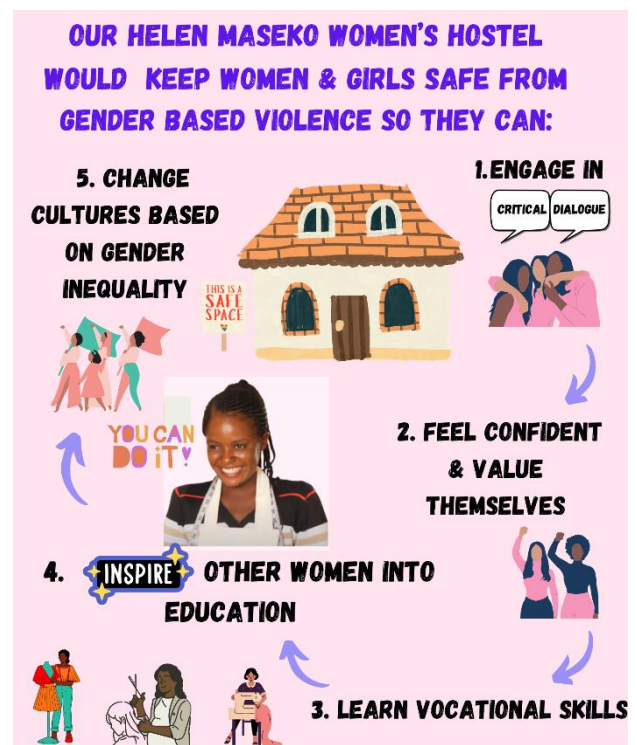


Enterprise – based in the countryside outside Blantyre - where people can learn skills such as tailoring or hairdressing and set up their own small businesses. The loving and nurturing approach developed at STEKA extends to the Vocational Skills Centre where Godknows and Helen also act as role models, helping students experience the Centre as an extended family and also cope with trauma.

Why the STEKA/STEKAskills Partnership is so Distinctive.

Creating an equal partnership between people from powerful countries in the Global North and people living in poverty in the Global South is often difficult if not impossible. Not only do we have a history of oppression and slavery to overcome, but we have been fed a narrative, nurtured by events like Band Aid and old-style Comic Relief, that *developed* countries like Scotland need to show *undeveloped* countries like Malawi what to do. And this has often led to a culture of donor dependency where people living in poverty feel they have to please their more privileged partners rather than using their own skills and knowledge. STEKAskills firmly believes that we don't need to instruct our Malawian partners; rather, we should try to help remove the structural barriers which prevent local people making change happen themselves. So, we are totally Malawian led. And, we have used a unique model of critical dialogue developed by STEKAskills chair, Emma Wood, and her colleagues at Queen Margaret University, to erode the power imbalance and create a 'brave' space where people experiencing poverty can speak for themselves in solidarity with global partners to bring about change *TOGETHER*. Critical dialogue not easy to summarise – but our model is described as '**world leading**' by the UK Government's Audit of the Quality of Academic Research (*you can read about it [here](#) - or type <https://bit.ly/3VDXOlj>*). Our critical dialogue approach has transformed life in the STEKA home and will be used at our Vocational Skills Centre to create a space in which young men and women can come together to challenge issues like ritualised gender-based violence and create locally led cultural change. (*Read a longer report on our model of critical dialogue [here](#) - or type <https://bit.ly/43HPG5k>*).

In our STEKA dialogue groups, the topic the girls most wanted to talk about was '*Kusasa Fumbi*' (removal of the dust). This is a practice in parts of Malawi where girls reaching puberty are made to have sex as part of their training in how to look after men and make 'good wives'. Often marriage is seen as the only route out of poverty as 'initiated' girls are believed to be more marriageable. The practice is illegal, but young girls in some areas are still expected to have sex with a paid sex worker at so-called initiation camps. Many girls living at the STEKA home are there to take refuge from this practice, or from early marriage. Young women at the vocational skills Centre have also had their lives blighted by these practices and find it difficult to see how they can build independent lives for themselves. Moreover, many girls find it difficult regularly to attend classes at the Centre and gain a qualification. This is often due to families physically preventing them from completing the skills training courses, while sometimes a lack of self-worth impedes their progress. But we've seen that changes do occur when, with the support of amazing role models, teachers and leaders such as Godknows and Helen Maseko, girls have an opportunity to enter a 'brave' space and take part in critical dialogue with other aspirational young men and women. Our ambition is that women can live at the Centre, safely, for the time it takes them to qualify in a



vocational skill. This is why STEKAskills is delighted to make this possible by working again with St John's and St Mary Magdalene's to raise money to build a Women's Hostel.

A message from the St J's and St MM's Fundraising Team...

The Fundraising Team hope to organise one event a month rather than make constant calls for donations. Some events will be very small (for example a workshop for 10 people) but all will add value to the community of the two parishes. We aim to have fun and make fun for others! The jewel in the crown promises a local pilgrimage (perhaps a walk to Rosslyn Chapel) which will be open to all. This idea is being developed by two of our team, Rowena Diggle and Colette Dempsey, and will be a thought provoking and reflective spiritual experience as well as a way for the community to come together.

Please get in touch if you'd like to help with any of the following ideas, suggest other possible initiatives, or join our fundraising team.

1. Sign up for STEKA Super Prize Draw (see this week's newsletter)

2. Share your skills for STEKAskills Can you craft or cook? We'd love people to contribute to a series of gentle workshops designed to bring people together to learn a new skill and have fun (whilst also raising money for STEKAskills). You don't need to be a professional, just willing to step up and show us something you're good at...maybe you can make fantastic scones? An authentic pasta dish? A wonderful curry? A lovely Christmas wreath? A macrame plant holder? The possibilities are endless. Or can you alter/mend clothes or curtains? Perhaps we could have an afternoon where people bring along items which need mending or adjusting and pay for the service!

Some parishioners might love to be taught how to use their laptops or ipads more effectively – could you host an afternoon's technology drop-in? Please let us know if you have a skill, you'd be happy to share and we'll organise an event around it.

3. Auction of promises Do you have anything to offer in an auction? From ironing, to gardening or baking or offering a weekend stay in a holiday house?

4. Walk in Godknows footsteps to raise awareness of children's rights. Before setting up the STEKA home Godknows walked 500km from Blantyre to Mzuzu. Could groups of friends or parishioners get together and walk a fraction of the same distance each? Sponsorship could focus on 'We're walking in Godknows' footsteps so women in Malawi can have a safe space to learn'.

This could be a stand-alone event for individuals or tied into the pilgrimage mentioned above.

5. We'd also like to host some larger events - Bingo or a beetle drive and afternoon tea for example. Do you have any ideas of something you'd like to do or attend? Contact anyone on the fundraising team Gerry Power, Aga M, Collette, Diane Devlin, Gillian Ramage, Rowena Diggle or Chris Vinestock – or email stekaskills@gmail.com

How a Deep Relationship with the Community of the Two Parishes Developed

Sandra Ndale wanted to raise awareness of street kids' problems by making short films for social media. In 2017, she became the first resident from STEKA to take up the offer of living with STEKAskills' chair, Emma Wood (a senior lecturer at Queen Margaret University), and studying on a free **place at QMU (which has a special relationship with STEKA and STEKAskills)**. Sandra learned filmmaking skills at QMU and turned to St John's to meet her spiritual needs (STEKA is a Catholic home) and spent 6 happy months singing in the 9.30am Music Group before returning home to Malawi where she has built a successful business.



Gift Thompson, another STEKA resident, followed in Sandra's footsteps and stayed in Portobello between 2017 and 2023 (returning home for holidays). Gift gained a BA (Hons) in Public Sociology and an MSc in International Business and Leadership at QMU. He joined the RCIA group and was baptised at St John's where he sang in the Music Group and became a much-loved figure in both parishes. In October 2023, he returned to Blantyre where he is now working as an intern at the Beehive social enterprise, while also continuing to work for STEKA and STEKAskills.

Abigail Maseko spent 6 months at QMU in 2019 learning filmmaking skills to help get survivors of human trafficking voices heard. She was also baptised at St John's and is now studying journalism in Malawi.

Motivated by connections with STEKAskills, **parishes worked tirelessly in 2018/9 to raise funds to build 2 teaching blocks at the STEKA Centre for Vocational Skills and Community Enterprise**. As a result of this amazing achievement, 100 men and 159 women from one of the world's most impoverished countries have realised a life they couldn't even have imagined before. And this impact will continue to grow as more benefit from the free training is provided.



In January 2020, 11 members from the two parishes, including Gift, made a **pilgrimage to STEKA and the Centre for Vocational Skills and Community Enterprise in Malawi**. This special pilgrimage established strong links with the STEKA family – find out more in the film about this relationship on the **STEKAskills Youtube channel** (or type <https://bit.ly/3PNN3cc>)