

A Church's Response to Children with Disabilities in Malawi

— By Jason Paltzer

On behalf of Kingdom Workers, I have been blessed with the opportunity to work with members of the Lutheran Church in Central Africa-Malawi in serving adults and children with disabilities. A church should be a place people feel welcomed and valued, yet we often become exclusive without realizing it. On this side of heaven, we will struggle with loving perfectly. However, with the Holy Spirit's help through the love of Christ, we can make progress each and every day.

In Malawi, the Jesus Cares Ministry (JCM) disability support providers are putting this love into practice. The JCM program connects people with disabilities and their families with a loving and caring church family through volunteer JCM disability support teams. These teams give of themselves to provide weekly adapted and simplified worship services, ongoing home-based education and therapy, and community awareness events.

The adapted mobile worship service accommodates individuals with intellectual disabilities by using picture boards and tactile objects to teach biblical stories and truths. It also accommodates people with mobility difficulties by traveling to different homes in the villages, bringing worship to people that otherwise cannot get to church. Home-based education and therapy serves families with children with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities. The disability support providers teach the parents basic communication techniques and mobility exercises. They also provide ideas about constructing assistive devices using local resources and materials. Educating parents is a central component to the program given the stigma around having a child with a disability. Kingsley, a JCM volunteer, writes about one child named Chisis:

"Most people in Malawi rely on agriculture, so every member of the family is supposed to [help in the field]. If there is a person with a disability, they just lock him or her up until the family returns from their work. As the volunteers are serving, they advise the family to take the child to the farm and look after him or her there. The family of Chisis took him to the farm and little by little he started to imitate how to farm. Now, he can dig some ridges on his own based on the advice of the volunteers. The family realizes that a person with a disability can do every thing we can do if given a chance."

This is a great example of how social stigma around disabilities can be slowly changed through acts of love following Christ's example of inclusion and compassion. Kingsley goes on to say:

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IN FOCUS



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All The Children

— By Amy Wilson, Editor

But Jesus called the children to Him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

Many of us are familiar with the above verse found in Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:16, and Mark 10:14. However, when we examine it further, is Jesus really referring to ALL children?

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"People in rural areas often believe that a family with a person with a disability is like a punishment to the family for a sin committed by parents a long time ago, which is not true. In the disability ministry, we teach people that this is not a punishment, but God wants to show his glory through that person and the family should not be worried of this, rather continue taking good care of their children."

This ministry in Malawi is not only transforming the lives of children with disabilities but also the disability support providers. One example is Ethel who said, "Not only people with disabilities benefit, but I myself as a volunteer also benefit. I have received training and now I know many things that I had never heard of or thought of. I am proud I have this knowledge that I can transform somebody's life."

It is a blessing to see how this ministry is transforming the lives of the children with disabilities and their families as well as the volunteers. The church family can and should be an advocate and example of inclusivity for people with disabilities. It takes a lot of patience and working together to see our own blind spots as we grow in the knowledge of Christ. We will be wise to lean on God's wisdom through His Word and trust in Him as Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Watching a child with a disability take her first steps down a dirt path in Malawi is sweet, but sweeter is knowing the child is also learning to lean on Jesus to make her spiritual path straight. ■

*Names of children have been changed for confidentiality.

About the Author

Jason Paltzer, PhD, MPH



Jason is the global health director for Kingdom Workers, a mission society supporting churches in developing and implementing community outreach and service programs. Prior to Kingdom Workers, Jason lived and worked in Zambia for six years as a director for the Lutheran Health and Development Program. He currently lives in Phoenix, AZ and serves church partners in central Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and the US.

IN FOCUS

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He does not specifically say that. However, He does not specifically say only some children either. Thankfully, when it comes to children with disabilities, people are finding ways to include these children. In many places where these children used to be hidden and seen as a disgrace or an evil curse, they are being made known, educated, loved, and most importantly, taught about God and His love for them!

As stated in the introduction to *Let All the Children Come* (edited by Dr. Phyllis Kilbourn), "We must never forget that all of us are shackled with some inability and limitation(s). Some are more obvious than others. A few are defined as disabilities in a clinical sense, while most may be defined as the "normal" deficiencies of life. In either case we must come to the discussions with realization that we are ALL in need. But we must also know that we are blessed because of a God who loves us. Therefore, we have a responsibility to assist others through both our acceptance and action. We then hope for the same in return."

There is still much work to be done towards inclusion in our schools and in our churches. However, it is wonderful to see how the world is beginning to respond to children with disabilities. We hope that this edition of our *Barnabas Letter* encourages your heart. May God also use it to prompt you to find ways to encourage inclusion in your own area of the world! ■

Serving Him to that end,
Amy Wilson
Editor

Inclusion for Children with Disabilities: A Pathway to Health

— *By Natalie Flickner*



About the Author

Natalie Flickner graduated with a masters in Pastoral Counseling from Columbia Biblical Seminary.

Currently she is serving as a curriculum writer and trainer for one of WEC's ministry's, Crisis Care Training International.

Her passion is to advocate on behalf of children around the world with disabilities.

Natalie and her husband, Kevin, have enjoyed thirteen years of marriage together.

My story includes mild cerebral palsy since birth, long years of childhood therapy, challenging school years in public education and many faithful people who showed God's love to me. I long to see the day when children with disabilities around the world are not seen as curses, or problems, or a waste of time or money, but rather seen as children brimming with life and endless potential.

All children in this world need to be resilient. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from difficulties. Children with disabilities in the developing world often have a deficiency in resiliency due to being born with a disability or by acquiring a disability in childhood. In other words, children who need the resilience due to greater life difficulties actually have less access to the very resources needed to strengthen their resilience throughout life.

Education strengthens resiliency in children with disabilities. First, education can reduce continual or potential poverty over a child's lifetime. The majority of children with disabilities in the developing world grow up in poverty. Other children growing up in poverty have the opportunity for education or physical labor jobs to propel them into a better future, but physical labor jobs are not an option for the vast majority of children with disabilities. That isn't changing, but what can be changed is their access to education where true learning and growth can occur alongside their peers. The UN Fact Sheet in 2011 says "In developing countries, 80% to 90% of persons with disabilities of working age are unemployed, whereas in industrialized countries the figure is between 50% and 70%." Around the world, educated children with disabilities grow up to be special education teachers, business owners, radio talk show hosts, clothing models, and strong advocates for others with disabilities.

The second reason education strengthens resiliency for children with disabilities is related to their health. It is widely known and accepted that health improves one's education and education improves one's health into adulthood. Even though children with disabilities have greater and more complex health needs, they are locked out of a pathway that would lead them to crucial health care access. Once children with disabilities are in schools, they are able to receive health care services like vaccines, nutritional support and health monitoring. Even if a school only provides one meal a day to students—that one meal a day is perhaps even more nutritionally crucial to children with disabilities who may otherwise have little to no food accessible.

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OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES



Dedicated to children who hear their Father's voice

Never Give Up!

Eli (age 9) and his brother Rick (age 13) live with their Mom and Dad in Casselberry Florida. They both love the Lord and are both happily involved with the Cub and Boy Scouts. Eli likes the crafts and such (he loved welding); Rick likes to help and serve others. At the age of three, Eli was diagnosed with Autism. At that time he could not speak or communicate with others. Today he is doing miraculously well due to the care and involvement of his loving parents, his brother Rick and the extravagant grace of God.

We asked both Eli and Rick questions about having a family member with, what many people call, "special needs." Here are their answers.

Eli:

1. What special gifts do you believe God has given you? *Well, my teacher is a special gift, my Mom and Dad, Nana, and Ricky and my friend Cory.* (It is amazing that Eli sees people as **his** special gifts from God!)

2. What do you find difficult to do in life? *Well, it is difficult for me to go on a roller coaster cause I'm afraid. I can't do magic tricks. Mostly, school work is hard.*

3. What is it easy to do in life? *I can jump really high, run real fast and I can swim really well. I can put a Lego thing together real fast. I can know when something is wrong with something.*

4. What special abilities do you think God gave you? *He gave me really good senses. I am a technology person-I understand how things work and are programmed. When something is making a tiny weird noise or a tiny blinking light, I can hear it and I can tell that something is wrong and what it is. Like when I knew there*

was something wrong with the air conditioner. I can hear and tell what's wrong, but other people can't, even grown-ups. Another thing is that you can take something apart with lots of pieces and I can put it back together real fast.

5. What would you like other people to know about you? *I want people to know that I really can understand how things work and when something is wrong and what it is.*

6. How do you see God working in your life? *I see Him keeping me safe. And I see Him ending and starting lives.* (He didn't say starting and ending - but ending and starting).

7. If you could have anything you wished for what would it be? *Well, I'd like to have a pet snake.* (After all, he is still just a little boy, just like other boys.)

The boys were asked the questions privately away from each other and their parents.

Rick:

1. How have you seen God use your brother? *I have seen God use Eli at a funeral - he really cried - it was like God showed him how people feel when there is a loss.*

2. What gifts do you think Eli has? *He is extremely intelligent. He understands that other people don't understand - even adults. He just knows how things work - like sirens, he understands how mechanical things work.*

3. Why do you think God gave Eli special gifts? *Because everybody has a special role in life. I think he gave these to Eli so He can use his gifts to do something great.*

4. How do you feel to have a brother who is sometimes looked at as different then others? *I haven't been in a situation where that happened. It feels like we have a big responsibility - it makes us happy and sometimes sad - but we are so glad that God gave Eli to us.*

5. How do you think God will use Eli in the future? *Eli will turn out to be someone who has something great to do. Maybe he will be an inventor or discover something for medicine. Maybe he will help to determine or understand storms-he is working on this now. God will use him to do something really important for all of us.* ■





Inclusion for Children with Disabilities: A Pathway to Health ...continued from page 3

Inclusive education, when children with and without disabilities engage in learning in the same classroom, can strengthen the resiliency of children with disabilities, specifically as related to lifelong poverty and health. Faith-based health organizations are involved in opening access to education for children with disabilities. Consider these examples. A little boy named Ethan* in the Middle East was born with a cyst in the left hemisphere of his brain. The cyst was removed when Ethan was 12 months old and he now has very limited vision, poor hand function and difficulties sitting and moving. CBM International partnered with BASR, a local rehabilitation center, to help Ethan receive an inclusive pre-school education. Staff, teachers and children were taught how to welcome Ethan in the class, and modifications were made to the classroom itself. Now Ethan is walking, liked by peers and learning age-appropriate skills. What a difference CBM International made in one child's life.

Another example is Rose, a child living in Zambia. She was born with limited use of her hands and feet, so she couldn't walk and couldn't go to school. Rose now attends school with a wheelchair of her own given by Wukwashi. She loves being independent and is known for her sharp mind. Wukwashi is connected to Bethany Children's Trust, and they both support numerous children with disabilities with a variety of services. Rose is an example of a child with disabilities receiving education because a faith-based organization became her bridge from a life of exclusion to a life of inclusion.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Faith-based organizations make powerful and lasting impact on the life of precious children with disabilities. ■

Sources:

<http://www.bethanychildrenstrust.org.uk/donate/give-to-wukwashi/>

Keogh, M. "Dialogues on Sustainable Development: a Disability-Inclusive Perspective", CBM. Available at http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/CBM_Inclusive_





Valerie Venetta works for a company called In Reach as a community coach for people with Developmental Disabilities. She earned a Bachelors degree in Psychology from Kent State University in Ohio and now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her family. She goes to Calvary Church and loves to read and spend time outdoors.

My name is Valerie

*Kathleen Walker
2013*

My name is Valerie and I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome (AS) when I was 19 years old. Nowadays children are diagnosed much earlier, but back when I was a kid, many people with Asperger's, especially girls, went undetected. As I grew older I realized more and more that I was not like the other kids. I tended to focus intensely on my own interests and they were usually different from those of other kids. I also fell further and further behind my peers socially and emotionally.

By the time I was a teenager it was very obvious that I was different. It was very difficult to know that I was different and not know why. I began to pray to God every night that He would help me know why I was so different.

It was in my late teen years when I first heard of Autism. It was through a family friend who had a son already diagnosed with AS, news articles that my mom and I read and later a psychologist, that finally I knew that Asperger's is the reason why I felt so different and why I struggled as I did. I was so elated to finally KNOW!!

Getting the diagnosis not only gave me peace, but it also made it possible for me to obtain disability services. An occupational therapist assisted me in learning how to drive, and the services helped me get my first job, eventually go to college and complete a major in psychology, and later find jobs in the disability field. Now I work as a Community Coach, taking people with developmental disabilities out into the community to do various activities. I found this job on my own and I greatly enjoy it.

When helping and relating to those of us on the autism spectrum, it is very important neither to underestimate nor overestimate us. Being overestimated can cause us pressure and stress if we are expected to be so-called "normal." Being underestimated can be degrading for us, as it is for anyone, as we may have more to offer than our appearance suggests. It helps to be unassuming toward the person with Autism and get to know them for both their strengths and struggles. No two people with Autism are alike.

I thank God that He not only helped me find out why I am different and struggled the way I did, but he also helped me grow and do things I thought I would never be able to accomplish. As I look back on my life and see what God has done, I think Psalm 40:1-3 reflects it well; "I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD." ■



The Value Of A Person

—By *Dr. Dick Stellway*

A single mom receives a report that she has feared; her little daughter has been diagnosed with Down's Syndrome. An only child gets news that his father, a widower, has had a debilitating stroke. These and countless other situations can result in our becoming a caregiver for a disabled person.

When people ask us what we do, we typically respond with an "I am" statement like, "I am a teacher," or "I am a banker." Our responses indicate the impact of the role we play on our identity. There is nothing wrong with identifying with "what we do." As stewards of the skills and talents God has given us, we want to do our best. And when we perform well, we feel good about ourselves. We feel valuable.

But the caregiver role is a demanding one. Taking it on generally requires

cutting back on a role that we identify with and that contributes to our feeling of value. In giving up a role from which we have derived a sense of worth, we may experience a certain "loss of value."

While transitioning through this "giving up" phase, it is important to reflect on our value in God's eyes. God's love for us affirms our value. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. once expressed it this way:

"God's love doesn't seek value; it creates it.
It's not because we have value that we are loved,
but because we're loved that we have value.
So you don't have to prove yourself—ever.
That's taken care of."

People who have a disability often hear others identify them more by their disability than by who they are and what they have to offer as persons. At other times they are simply ignored and treated as virtual "non-persons."

How different is God's view! In regard to choosing one of Jesse's sons to be king, God tells the prophet Samuel, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Through his death on the cross Jesus' declared that all of us—irrespective of our various "disabilities"—are worth dying for. With God's grace, being a caregiver allows us to recognize and to affirm the value of the disabled person in our charge—the one we care for.

Each morning as we prepare for caring it would be helpful to reflect on:

- Who we are in God's eyes and on how much He loves and values us.
- How much God loves and values "the least of these."
- How much God values our caregiver role.
- God's support for us as caregivers (see Matthew 11:28-30).
- What God is teaching us through those in our care. ■



About the Author

Dr. Stellway is a Mission Associate with Community Visions International, Inc. He earned an M.A. in sociology from the University of Hawaii, a M.S. in psychology from Illinois State University and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Illinois. He has been privileged to teach and conduct research at universities in the U.S. and Kenya and has worked with Viva (www.viva.org) to facilitate Christian outreach to 'children at risk.' Dick's wife, Janet Kibarabari, comes from a rural village in Kenya. They and their two teenage sons reside in Nampa, Idaho.

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NEWS
EVENTS
RESOURCES

Resources recommended by CCTI for
working with Children
with Disabilities

Books

***Let All the Children
Come:*** A Handbook for
Holistic Ministry to
Children with Disabilities
By Dr. Phyllis Kilbourn

Sale: \$5.00



***Let All The Children
Come To Me***
By Malesa Breeding,
Diana Hood and
Jerry Whitworth

***Children's
Ministry Pocket
to Special Needs***
By Group

***Leading a Special
Needs Ministry***
By Amy Fenton Lee

Videos

Ebenezer: A Story of Hope by Joni and Friends

<https://youtu.be/ROm-SuQDSs>

Aid to Africa: Bethany Kids

<https://youtu.be/dGbS2NRYTHU>

The Drop Box - Pastor Lee Jong

<https://youtu.be/WHj9ozt-ESI>

Website

www.CBM.org

www.Kidsalive.org

www.Joniandfriends.org



For Information On:

• **CCTI Curriculum—**

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