

Interviewee: Ann Hale

Duration: 18:47

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Dunblane Likhubula Partnership, School Links, Malawi Visits

00:00

I was teaching at Dunblane High School in 2008. And the year before that in 2007 a group from Malawi had come over to Dunblane as part of the Dunblane Likhubula partnership to visit Dunblane, and had come up to the high school to visit the high school. I was not involved at all in that. I happened to see them and say hello in passing, but I had no involvement in that visit. And I didn't meet them personally or be introduced to them or anything. The following year, the head teacher, then Dr. White, and another teacher, Moira McIntosh, were to go and visit the partnership in Malawi and Likhubula. However, when it came nearer the time, Dr. White found that she was unable to go herself because there were too many school commitments. And she asked Moira McIntosh to recommend somebody within the staff who might be interested to go in her place. And Moira recommended me because she knew that I was well travelled. I've been to Africa and South America and many other places abroad and to developing countries. And she knew that I would be able to cope with anything that came along. And I was delighted to go, because the previous year, I had been on holiday in Tanzania, which was my first trip to Africa. And I had really enjoyed the experience. So having another opportunity to go to Africa was very exciting for me. And I had recently lost my husband, he had died very unexpectedly about six months before. So to have an adventure on my own, but with the support of a group was great for me, a great opportunity, and I certainly wasn't going to turn it down. So that was how I got involved. And of course, then I started to go to meetings of the partnership committee in Dunblane to get to know everybody and find out what was involved.

The main purpose of my visit, and Moira, was to form a school partnership, because the Dunblane sorry, the Scotland Malawi partnership at that time, were really pushing for school partnerships. And quite a few secondary schools in Scotland had already set up partnership arrangements with communities in Malawi. And they were keen to set up something similar. So, Chambe secondary school had been identified as a possible school to have a school partnership. So that was why Moira and I were going. To set up a school partnership within the Dunblane Likhubula community partnership. Now, in 2008, the group that went was made up of Jenni Barr, Dr. Jenni Barr, who led that particular group and set it all up. And now I'll have to remember who was going. There were four women. It was myself and Moira McIntosh teachers at the high school. There was Verianne Farr who was on the committee and just, I think, interested in the partnership and how it could work. And Ruth Asbury who was a medical practitioner on the nursing side, nurse and midwife, and she was obviously very interested to make contact with medical organisations and see how that all worked. So those were the four women. Then there was Ivor Butchart, who is, I think, of an engineering background and was interested to see the various water projects, mainly the water projects. And who else was there? Oh, and of course, the young people. So there was Ian Brown, who's now on our committee, but he was a pupil at school at that time. And Jonathan Smith, two Pattersons Adam and Sarah Patterson, and Jenni Butchart, Ivor's daughter, and they were ranging from six Well, fifth year, fifth year, sixth year. Sarah was the youngest, and she was only in second year. And the rest were in between. And it was lovely going with a group of friends and people who I was involved with here. And we were all there for the same reason. And it was just really exciting.

05:34

And then, when we arrived in Likhubula, the ladies from the Mvano were there all in their uniforms, and they sang for us, a welcome song. And so as we got off the bus, they were all there to welcome us and singing this lovely song. So it was really, really nice. And then we had a meeting in the evening with the committee. And, you know, it was all very full on really, right from the start. We had meetings we had visits. Well, my time was mainly spent in the school, teaching and meeting staff and taking an assembly. I mean, we did all sorts of jobs in the school, while we were there, we didn't just go along and wait to be entertained and shown everything, you know, we made ourselves as useful as we could. And we were there for two weeks, well we were there for three weeks altogether, but two weeks actually working. And it was during school term time, our school term time, so I felt duty bound to work. You know, it wasn't a holiday, I was there for a purpose. And I wanted to make the most of the time that I had there to make myself useful. So as I say, we taught classes we helped assess exams, make up exam papers, we addressed the assembly. We also went down to the primary school and taught in the primary school as well, and just got a feel for how education works on a day-to-day basis. And the staff were very, very welcoming. And they were a bit reserved to start, I think I said that in my diary entrance. They were uncertain about why we were there and what they were going to do with us while we were there. But once we'd had a chat about it and explained what we were there for. And also, I suppose they realised that we could actually, you know, provide for them things that they needed through the through the partnership. So, by the end of the two weeks, we had very good relationships with them. And they had this great big tree out in the yard of the school in the garden of the school. So you were

sitting under this tree in the shade, chatting in a sort of circle round. And the cliffs of Mount Chambe behind, you know, it's just so dramatic. I just loved all that. It was like going back to my very first experience of teaching, because I'm quite old now. So when I first started teaching, it was 1973 and we had blackboards and chalk. And they have blackboards and chalk. So, actually, it was quite easy for me, because that's how I started out. You stood at the front of the class with your blackboard and your chalk. I mean, I did a lot of interaction with them. And it was quite interesting because they weren't used to that. I mean, I taught as I taught up in Scotland, I would ask them to respond constantly, you know, it was partly telling them things, but it was also investigating how much they knew. And you're getting responses back from them. And they weren't really used to that. But they responded very well. But, you know, I'm talking about a class of between 50 and 100 pupils. So it doesn't work in the same way as it would in a class of 24 or 30. You can't individualise in the same way. And they're very keen on taking notes. So you know lots went on the blackboard and was copied down religiously, in their jotters in tiny writing because they only have one jotter for all their lessons. And, you know, in some ways it was very similar in that, you know, children are children, so you know, they're children and we teach children here and they react the way children react.

10:02

Because we were new and different, they were probably better behaved than they might have been with our own teachers, I don't know. But their own teachers are very strict. And also, they're all jammed together in this room, so they haven't got much space. One of the things where if I were there all the time, I would find difficulty in ensuring they were all connected with what was going on, because there are so many of them, and you can't get around easily. So you can't see whether what they're writing, whether they're writing down, what they're writing down, or how much they're listening, and how much they're able to take in. And they don't tell you if they haven't understood anything or if they want you to repeat something. So it's hard to establish how successful you are in teaching them and how successful they are in learning from you. But just because of the numbers.

11:03

When you came back from Malawi, how was that link kept going? How did you keep going with that school link?

11:09

Well, where it was very good at the start? While Moira and I were still in the school, because we talked to the school about it all, showed them pictures, explained about everything, the staff were very much on board, the pupils were very much on board. We sent out batches of books and equipment and things that we knew they needed. And we did that through Mary's Meals, because they sent out regular consignments. And so we just, you know, they did it for us for a fee, of course. And so that went well for the time that Moira and I were still in school. But Moira retired a year before me. And then I retired. And we had asked another teacher to take over from us as coordinator. And she was also very connected and enthusiastic and involved. But when she then retired, nobody took it on in school, and it sort of lapsed. But the other problem was in 2008, and for several years after, communication was a huge issue, because the phones were usually down. The landline, which was all they had, was usually down. They didn't have computer connection, you know, there was nothing, you couldn't communicate online. The only way you could get an email was to send it to Likhubula House. So you didn't have an ongoing conversation with the school, ongoing communication. It was really, really difficult. And that proved hard to keep the connection going. Also, they had I think three or four changes of head teacher. So the head teacher who we met left the year after our visit, and the head teachers who then followed on didn't seem to be particularly interested in the partnership. So it was it was okay for a few years and then it's died since. Except the school still fundraises and provides us with money for bursaries.

13:38

Was the bursars programme in place at that stage, or was that something that came later?

13:42

That came later. Yeah, initially, I think it was within a year, because after we got back, you know, we met with the rest of the committee to look at what our priorities would be in the partnership. And it was decided that education should be the primary priority. And within that, that we would set up this bursary scheme. So pretty soon after we came back, that was set up.

14:10

I'm quite interested to hear from your perspective in taking the children out from here, how they reacted to that situation?

14:19

Well, Jonathan had been there before he'd gone the previous visit, the year before, I think, was it the year before or the year before that? I'm not sure. He went out with his parents, his mom, I think. So he was familiar with at all, and he had good technical skills. So he, because they had they had some laptops that didn't work, he got them up and working again in the school. So he was a useful chap. The children all participated in school as well. They were paired with pupils from the secondary school.

The things I enjoyed most I was sitting under the tree talking to colleagues, you know, because they became colleagues, the teachers there. Sharing experiences talking about how their, you know, their experience of teaching what it's like, they're so poorly paid, it's terrible. But so committed, you know, and what they have to go through to get to that position, you know, in terms of paying for their university tuition, getting the qualifications and all that. It's a struggle for them. And, you know, I just admire them so much. And they were so interested in hearing about our experiences as well.

Then we didn't have a particularly effective group of people in Likhubula, who were given responsibility to implement our initiatives, you know, we basically told them what to do. Now, we've got a very effective committee out there, who are able to take responsibility for identifying needs, communicating the needs to us, having a conversation about what or if we can do anything to support it, and what they can do at their end. There's a similar conversation between the guild and Mvano. So it's a much more balanced relationship, I feel, between the two committees. And that's a change that's taken place since 2008.

One of the issues that I'm very aware of is the whole issue of tertiary education, because it became clear to me that our bursars, we get them through secondary school, but what next, what next? And for some of them, they seem to find a pathway to earning money to keep themselves alive and their families. But for many of them, particularly the more able ones, how do they afford the more substantial fees for going to college and university, which then could give them a good career in teaching or medicine or whatever it is, engineering, whatever they might want to go into where they would need a college or university qualification. And we've been discussing this issue over the last couple of years. To what extent can we afford tertiary support? And we can to a very limited extent. But we're now getting requests that we just don't have the funds for. And that's difficult. And I feel we should maybe look at ways of providing, alternative ways for providing funding to allow talented bursars to pursue a qualification that will then enable them to earn a living. And we have been discussing it and Green Malata College obviously is a good one because it's not expensive. We can afford to support that. But university degrees that take three or four years, it's just not something we can fund more than one or two at the very most.