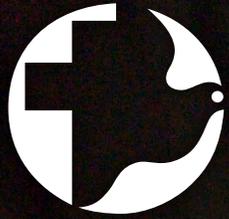


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A Common Place



A Common Place

Volume 29 Number 1 Winter 2023

In the image of God

ANN GRABER HERSHBERGER
MCC U.S. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

(Genesis 1:27, 31 NRSV)

A child, whether a boy or a girl, is a gift from God, declares Caroline Pugeni in a story in these pages. We all agree with these simple words, right? But I was shocked when I led women’s Bible studies in Nicaragua in the 1980s and learned that many women had never realized

that Jesus repeatedly reached out to unnoticed women or that many women were co-laborers with him.

I realized then that I was privileged to have adoptive parents who fully valued me as a daughter, though that didn’t preclude different roles for my brother and me.

On our farm I was not allowed to plow or plant but could disk or bale hay. Though frustrated then, I now realize Dad’s response was related to skill, not assigned gender roles. I still can’t plant a straight row in the garden. Later, when I joined the pastoral team at church and started preaching, my parents were uneasy but supported me.

This issue is full of stories of how offering love, support, a safe place and believing in someone can empower women to meet their families’ needs, strengthen their communities, reach their dreams and do more than they ever thought possible.

Offering cups of tea and a safe haven, teaching farming and supplying technologies such as fuel-efficient stoves all contribute to women seeing themselves as made in the image of God and capable of being overcomers.

God saw all that was made and called it good. These stories affirm that goodness. And calling out this goodness is woven into what we do together. I think of Crystal Conklin (read about her MCC role on p. 18) saying, “Whenever we visit partners, we see their passion to transform Cambodia toward God’s biblical vision of shalom.”

This is what you are joining with us to do. Thanks be to God.

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Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. mcc.org

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MCC news

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Cover story

4 The powerful change that technology can bring

In Zimbabwe, eco-friendly technology helps empower women.

10 First person

Caroline Pugeni talks about her experience as a woman starting a grassroots organization in rural Zimbabwe.

Features

12 Love for all who enter

An MCC partner in Zimbabwe reaches out to young women in need of a new start.

16 New hope and a chance to heal

In Nepal, an MCC partner offers an oasis and tangible help to women struggling with mental health.

Departments

3 MCC news

18 On assignment

MCC representatives

19 Hello Zimbabwe

(for children)

Ukraine Help amid suffering

With millions of people displaced since the Russian military invaded last February and food, water and health care in short supply, MCC canned meat is a welcome relief for families like this one (names not used for security reasons) in Ukraine’s Kharkiv region. “We can’t afford meat,” shared this father of five who lost his job. “But owing to you, we have a supply of stew and can feed the children. This is a great support for our family. Thank you for your help.”



Find the Reusable Pad System sewing instructions at the bottom of this webpage: mcc.org/dignity-kits

Find instructions to sew your own MCC kit bag (11 3/4 x 16 3/4 in) here: mcc.org/kit-bag

Comforters and blankets A gift of warmth and hope

Take the sting out of winter’s chill by sewing or knotting handmade comforters for families around the world. Each year, MCC sends thousands of comforters to places from Haiti to Ukraine to Syria. It’s one way that you can share warmth, comfort and a tangible message of God’s love with those in need. Go to mcc.org/comforters to learn more.

Uganda Making reusable pads

Through a health club that’s part of an MCC-supported project in Kasese, Uganda, girls and boys like 15-year-old Tembo Jobert (pictured below left) learned to make reusable menstrual pads. Like MCC-provided dignity kits, these efforts increase school attendance for girls and reduce stigma. “In the past, sometimes boys would tease girls and they would be embarrassed. But we all know that menstruation is normal. I make pads and share them with others,” Jobert says. “I make them for my mother and sister and

keep one with me in case a friend at school needs one (and) I can help. It is normal now.”



Haiti Group by group

“My life has changed because I have been able to borrow money,” says Fanilia Gluade. Through an MCC-supported project in Haiti, she and other women are joining their savings and providing loans. She can borrow for school fees or medical care for a child. And the group offers space to learn about topics like women’s health and discuss the challenges women face.

Provide sustainable support for vulnerable women and girls!

The dignity kit contains hygiene and sanitary items, including eco-friendly, washable menstrual pads. Thousands of dignity kits have been requested by MCC’s partners around the world, and you can be part of the solution for fulfilling this need.

Contents (NEW items only)

1 Reusable Pad System packed into 1 MCC kit bag, includes:

- 3 waterproof base units, which hold the pad inserts in place
- 8 absorbent fleece pad inserts (4 large/4 small)
- 1 small transport bag
- 3 pair of briefs (cotton; women sizes small, medium or large – one size per kit; no red)
- Instructional care and use sheets

1 hand towel (medium weight, dark or bright colors)

1 washcloth (medium weight, dark or bright colors)

2 large bars of bath soap (leave in wrapper)

1 large bar laundry soap (such as Fels Naptha®, Sunlight® or Zote® brands)

1 wide-toothed comb (6–8 in)

1 nail clipper (good quality)

4 plastic or wooden clothespins (4 in)

4 heavy-duty safety pins (2–1 in; 2–2 in)

Place contents in a box or bag and deliver to your nearest MCC drop-off location.

Go to mcc.org/kits to find drop-off locations, or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

Cover photo: Engineer Tairro Cynthia Mutsindikwa looks at lighting she installed as part of a solar power system at a clinic in Zimbabwe. (MCC photo/Christy Kauffman)

The powerful change that technology can bring

In Zimbabwe, simple, eco-friendly technology opens opportunities for more time, income and empowerment for women.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MAST

The fuel-efficient stove in Ntombizodwa Mapfacha's dirt courtyard in Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe, doesn't look like a life-changing piece of technology. It looks like a 2-foot high, round metal can.

Nevertheless, this sturdy stove not only cooks a traditional, family-size meal of *sadza* (thick cornmeal) and beans. It also is empowering Mapfacha and other women in Mwenezi District.

No longer does Mapfacha have to walk six miles every other day to find firewood in the mountain, where she is wary of poisonous snakes and men who could take advantage of her in the remote area. The new stove cooks with just a few pic-

es of wood and dried corn cobs, which she can gather close to home.

No longer does she need to stay by an open fire, her lungs and eyes burning from smoke, tending and feeding it for the two to three hours it takes to cook a meal. She only needs to peek into the stove periodically to make sure the fire's direct heat is keeping the beans simmering in the pot.

And the stove is portable, giving her freedom and time to pursue work that generates income for her family.

She grinds groundnuts into nut butter to sell and collects fruit to sell or eat. And she spends more time working with her husband in the field, increasing the amount of produce they sell.

In 2021, MCC's partner, Score Against Poverty (SCORE), introduced a clean energy pilot project designed to empower women while addressing climate change.

Ntombizodwa Mapfacha stirs a pot of beans as she cooks on her fuel-efficient stove. The fire was just lit. The flames will soon subside, leaving the heat of the fire focused on the pot. With the fire contained, the stove cooks more efficiently and requires less firewood.





The project provided 50 fuel-efficient stoves to women, as well as solar power systems and biogas digesters that process manure into gas for cooking and other uses.

In this rural area of southern Zimbabwe, SCORE staff see the impact of climate change—inconsistent rain, high heat, unpredictable growing seasons, heavy flooding—as one of the biggest threats to life in their community.

In response, they are helping farmers learn more about the threats, change the way they farm and plant more trees.

And, at the same time, they are addressing gender inequities

which cause women to bear the brunt of the impact.

Women are expected to grow the food they cook for their families and collect increasingly scarce firewood and water. They are fully responsible to care for children and the homestead.

If their husbands migrate to look for work, women’s responsibilities grow, but culturally they are not allowed to make decisions without their husbands, says Caroline Pugini, project coordinator for SCORE. They lack resources and money to help them care for the family.

So SCORE decided to focus its clean energy project on women. The technology gives them



As engineer Tariro Cynthia Mutsindikwa, above, installs and customizes clean energy technology, she’s also showing the community that women too can be engineers. Above left, solar panels like these on the rooftop of Juliana Hahlani’s home provide light and power.

opportunities to earn money, gain respect from their husbands and share what they learn about clean energy with their neighbors.

“When we have empowered them, they can be able to stand on their own, and also they can be able to have a voice in the house,” says Tariro Cynthia Mutsindikwa, SCORE’s project officer for the clean energy project.

As an engineer, she has customized the stoves using women’s feedback. She also adapted three biodigesters to their locations and installed solar power systems for 12 women, a school and a clinic. And her work on these projects, as a woman, helps mothers to think more widely about what their daughters can

“When we have empowered them, they can be able to stand on their own.”

become, Pugini notes.

At Juliana Hahlani’s house, solar power allows her son to do homework after dark. The power helps her operate a television, where she learns of happenings in the world she never

knew about before and watches weather forecasts she uses in her farming.

When she and her husband can save enough to purchase a freezer, she plans to store popsoles to sell at a nearby school and freeze chicken parts to sell in the community.

The solar lights that illuminate her courtyard help discourage thieves when her husband is working in South Africa. It also allows her to avoid snakes that could be deadly.

At Nehanda Clinic, a woman who was wait-

Because of lights powered by solar panels, Anesu Hahlani, shown with his mother Juliana Hahlani, can do homework in the evenings even after daylight fades.



ing to deliver a baby was bitten by a Black Mamba as she walked to the bathroom in the dark. After being rushed to a hospital, she and her baby survived.

But now, with solar power, women who are waiting in the clinic's dormitory to deliver can see where they are going. The lights illuminate delivery rooms, addressing the challenges of working by candlelight to respond to complications like a breech baby or a mother's hemorrhaging.

SCORE will help more women get stoves and solar power systems over the next two years, and Mutsindikwa hopes that more women will purchase their own technology as they see its effectiveness. They can do it, she says, if they take turns borrowing from community savings and loan groups SCORE has helped establish.

The stoves can cost as little as \$22. Solar power systems and biodigesters cost more but can be scaled to meet budgets and essential uses, Mutsindikwa says. Solar systems also are built so that they can be expanded.

Each gain multiplies opportunities for farmers like Rebecca Murereki, a widow who uses manure from 18 cows on her son's farm to power a biodigester.

She collects three 5-gallon buckets of dried cow dung a day, mixes it with an equivalent amount of water and feeds it to the underground biodigester. The biodigester creates

At right, Rebecca Murereki starts dancing after hoisting a pail of cow dung onto her head. Then, she pours the manure into her biodigester, where it will create gas for cooking. Below, at the dormitory at Nehanda clinic, solar-powered lights help patients avoid poisonous snakes.



Empowerment is giving voice, giving opportunities for people to choose what they want to do.”

gas that is piped into her kitchen

and to her two-burner gas stove. She, too, no longer needs to make a long trek to find firewood.

And the biodigesting process also creates a slurry that is a potent fertilizer that can be watered down three parts to one and spread on her fields.

“I feel very happy,” Murereki says, as she demonstrates how quickly she can cook greens on her stove. “Cooking is easier for me. I can cook any time of day. My grandkids (seven live with her) can cook on their own. And I’m always clean instead of smelling like smoke.”

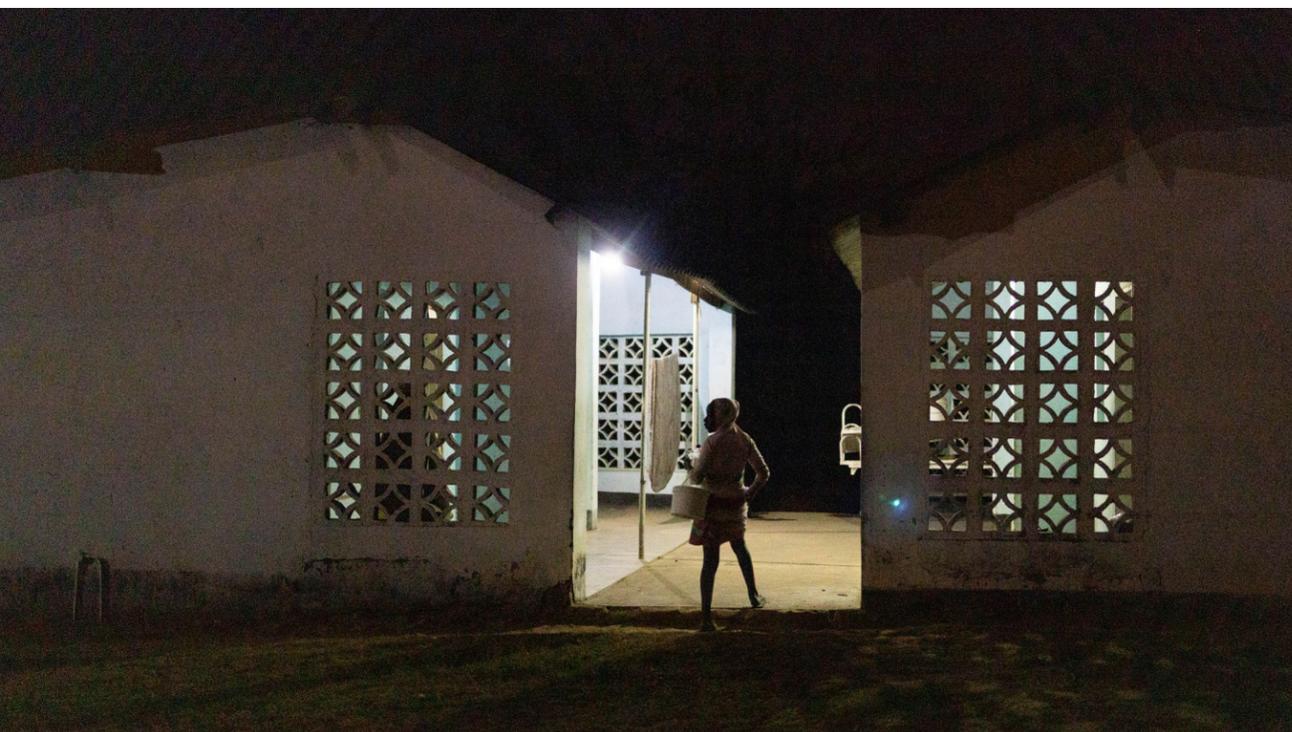
The biodigester also gives Murereki enough power to add lighting, refrigeration and irrigation and even sell the gas eventually.

With the extra time she saves with this new stove, she is making grass mats to sell. She is able to fulfill her role as one of the first women on village council. And she also is helping to lead a SCORE-initiated community savings and loan group and taking part in SCORE’s Women’s Coalition on Climate Change.

These gains—in income, in leadership and in community engagement—are exactly the kinds of opportunities that SCORE is hoping to bring to women in Mwenezi.

“Empowerment is giving voice, giving opportunities for people to choose what they want to do,” Pugenzi says. “Even to speak out for themselves confidently, access information. Explore the talents that they have.” ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Meghan Mast is MCC Canada’s multimedia storyteller.



Give a gift – Where needed most

When you give to MCC, you’re not only helping to meet urgent needs and build peace. You are investing in efforts to build the skills and opportunities of women like these in Zimbabwe and helping women, families and their whole communities have more healthy and abundant lives. Donate in the enclosed envelope, give online at donate.mcc.org or contact your nearest MCC office (see page 2).

First person

Caroline Pugen

Overcoming traditional stereotypes, a young Zimbabwean woman helps start a grassroots organization empowering women and men.

AS TOLD TO LINDA ESPENSHADE



was scared when my oldest brother Vurayayi Pugen asked me to help him carry out his vision to start Score Against Poverty (SCORE), an organization that would inspire and help our home community in Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe. I didn't know how I, as a woman, would be accepted in this role.

I was 26 and had my university degree, but I grew up in Mwenezi District, and I knew the norms and values and the way girls and women were treated. As a girl child and the youngest in the family, I was powerless. I was not supposed to talk, and I was not considered or valued.

In our culture, it was very unusual for an older brother to ask his younger sister to help in this way. But I think he wanted to transform the community by impossible means so that people could see it can be done. And he wasn't living here then. (At that point, Vurayayi Pugen was in Winnipeg, Manitoba, working as MCC's humanitarian relief and disaster recovery coordinator; he's now MCC's area director for Southern and Central Africa and Nigeria and based in Kigali, Rwanda.)

The work was difficult when we began in 2014. It was hard to express the idea and talk to leaders in the community to gain their support for SCORE. When I got to their offices, trying to convince them, they would be shaking their heads, saying, "Really? You want to do this? Are you serious?"

One of the leaders I spoke with in the beginning said recently that he had instructed his junior staff members to sign our memorandum of understanding when I came into the office. He told them, "If she comes here, please make sure you sign the papers and then she goes because she always comes and bothers us. We know nothing is going to happen; nothing is going to be yielded out of that organization or out of that vision."

But my brother was helpful in getting one traditional leader, who became SCORE's board chairperson, to agree to support the organization. Then that leader encouraged another, more powerful leader to support the idea.

They, along with MCC, were opening up lots of opportunities for me as we were moving forward. Through MCC, I engaged in different trainings and capacity building, and I've been able to connect to other partners of MCC, whom I can rely on whenever I'm doing my work.

A lot of people are surprised when they see what SCORE has accomplished. Besides conservation agriculture, now we are working with youth programs; disaster recovery; emergency food assistance; water, sanitation and hygiene efforts; savings and loan projects; clean energy; and gender programming. Most of the people who are leading, managing, implementing and supporting SCORE are from this community.

People say, "OK, so *this* was your vision." They are seeing that the organization is growing. They are now coming in through those programs that we are implementing. There is a lot of change. They're now appreciating what SCORE is doing.

I'm very happy to be within the leadership circles of this organization and inspiring other women in my community. We can also be leaders. We can also develop our communities. We can also empower others.

My role model was my mother. I was 5 years old when my father died. According to our culture, my mother was expected to remarry into her husband's family. She decided instead to raise us on her own.

Many people humiliated and stigmatized her for that decision. As a woman I now understand how painful it was for my mother.

I felt like an outcast, too, and I did not feel safe. Other children would harass me because they would pick up on their parents' opinion of our family.

But my mother didn't give up. She didn't accept defeat. She kept moving. She worked in the fields. She sold some produce and roasted ground nuts. But sometimes we still didn't know when we would eat again.

When things got really rough, my mother would wake us kids at 3 in the morning, saying we were going to the mountain to pray. We would climb the mountain to a cave where we would pray for our situation, praying that it would pass. She was teaching us how to pray.

I am trying to inspire my three daughters, too. I don't want to raise them according to our culture that says a girl child is responsible for this and a boy child is responsible for that. I make sure that they can explore and see what they are able to do.

In our culture and my community, that boy child is respected more than a girl. If a woman keeps giving birth to a girl, the people will say, "Go back to labor because we need a boy child. You still have to give us more children."

I really want to see these communities appreciating both genders when it comes to children. Because it is not one's wish or decision to be a female or a girl child or to be a boy child or a male. A child, whether a boy or girl, is a gift from God.

Children are just children. Let's just treat them equally. ■

"I'm very happy to be within the leadership circles of this organization and inspiring other women in my community."

Caroline Pugen serves as project coordinator for Score Against Poverty (SCORE), an MCC partner in Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe.



Feature story

Love for all who enter

An MCC partner offers care and training, helping young women gain a stronger sense of their own worth and new possibilities for the future.

STORY BY LINDA ESPENSHADE
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MAST

Patricia Nyandoro and her son, Taropafadzwa Blessing Shumba, have found refuge and new opportunities at the Sandra Jones Centre in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

The mural painted on the wall near the entrance of the Sandra Jones Centre in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, reads, “All who enter here find love.”

Patricia Nyandoro, 25, is finding out what that means.

She came to the facility in April with her 3-year-old son, Taropafadzwa Blessing Shumba. They had both been rejected by their village and their family because Taropafadzwa had been born with spinal problems.

“In our family we do not have disabled people, so he cannot be part of the family,” Nyandoro recalls her family telling her. Taropafadzwa’s father and his family also rejected the child.

Nyandoro moved from relative to relative, looking for a place to live, but always they shunned her. Eventually she left the village, carrying her baby on her back and finding places to spend the night in various shops and, for a month, in a shelter.

“I lost all hope,” Nyandoro says. “I felt so bad and useless. Even if I could find a job, there was no one who would be able to look after the baby.”

When Taropafadzwa developed sores on his feet, Nyandoro convinced bus drivers to transport them to Bulawayo for medical care. The hospital, which specializes in helping children with disabilities, kept them for three months for free while her son had surgery.

When the hospital staff discharged them, Nyandoro admitted she had nowhere to stay, and she couldn’t afford ongoing medical care.

That’s when the hospital connected Nyandoro with Sandra Jones Centre, an MCC partner.

And Nyandoro, with her son, walked through the doors into the loving care of the staff and a life of new possibilities. They were given a place to live and nutritious food three times a day, plus medical care for Taropafadzwa.

At the center, they live with other young women or teens who also came with wounded hearts. Some were forced into marriage as preteens. Others experienced a lifetime of food shortages, insufficient education and often sexual abuse.

“We are here to help them, be a refuge for them, to help them... find themselves; see how they can pick themselves up and be able to move on with their lives,” says Tina Dube, co-director of the organization with Debby Brennocks, whose friend Sandra Jones started the center.

Part of moving on means teaching the women skills in farming and chicken rearing. These skills prepare them to become self-sufficient when they return to their rural homes or move out on their own.

The women spend early mornings and late afternoons in the fields and greenhouses, tending to tomatoes,

“We are here to help them, be a refuge for them, to help them... find themselves; see how they can pick themselves up...”





Primrose Nyoni wants to use the gardening skills she's honed at the Sandra Jones Centre to grow tomatoes and cabbages to sell.

corn, cabbage, peppers and other vegetables. It's a large operation. The pepper greenhouse, for example, has 1,000 red pepper plants and 1,000 yellow peppers. Extras not used to feed the young women are sold to help defray the costs of running the organization.

"From the time I came, I didn't even know how a tomato is planted up to maturity," says Primrose Nyoni, 22. "I now know from day one. This is how we do it: We plant the tomato plant and then after some time it starts having flowers. We know it's about to mature, so I add fertilizer, some manure that is needed for it to grow. After two weeks, I come again and top off the fertilizer."

MCC provides seedlings, fertilizer and tools in addition to gumboots, gloves, hats and work overalls.

Nyoni, a second-year participant, is being paid a small amount to teach new

participants how to grow the vegetables. Before coming to Sandra Jones, she had to quit secondary school to support her younger sibling and her mother, who is ill. Her father had deserted the family.

She cleaned houses, where she says she experienced a lot of physical and verbal abuse. She used the money from cleaning to start a small business selling tomatoes that others grew, but she couldn't make enough money.

After she finishes this second year at Sandra Jones, Nyoni plans to return home and plant her own tomatoes and cabbages to sell. She says she also feels better equipped emotionally and spiritually to take care of herself because of what she has learned through other teaching at the center.

"Studying the Bible has really helped me. I don't just open the Bible because it's time for church. I open the Bible



for my day-to-day living. In the morning before I start anything, I open the Bible and I read the Bible, which has helped me with the anger issues that I had."

Whether through agricultural training, Bible study, life skills classes, counseling or listening, the staff and volunteers constantly reinforce the message that each woman has value and is worthy of respect.

Many of the girls come believing that being mistreated is normal, Dube says. Others come believing that they are nothing and men are everything. They often come with a sense of dependency on men.

But when the staff begins to treat them well, she says, the women start to realize that, "I am something, I am somebody. I can do something."

"Once they're here," Dube says, "they know that they can stand on their own."

Nyandoro feels the love promised on the mural by the door through the care she and her son have experienced.

"I feel a lot better, but sometimes when I think about the future, there is still fear," she says. "But I can see that one day, I'll be able to look after my own child, and even if I leave here, I know I will not give up on my child."

Nyandoro's situation is particularly complicated, Dube notes, because of the layers of difficulty in being the sole caregiver for a young child with disabilities.

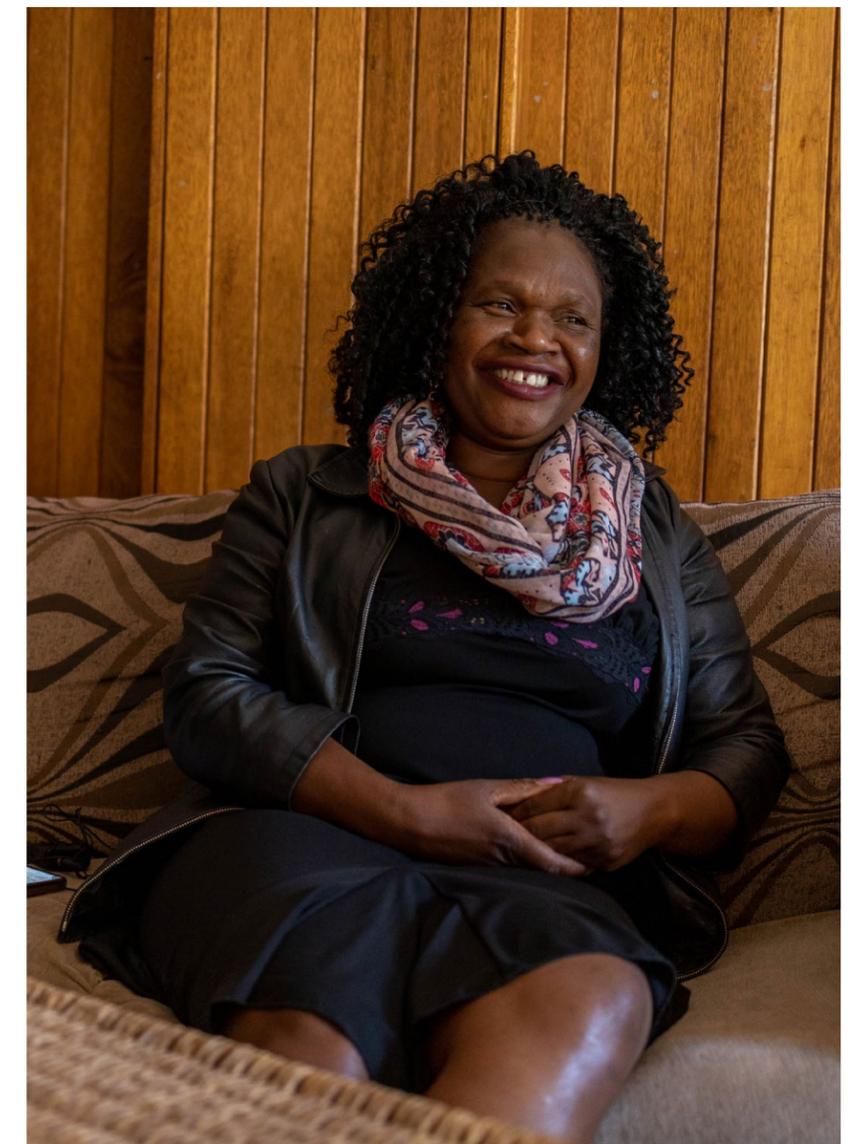
No matter the situation, though, she's seen two things come true in case after case. Changes take time. But they do come.

"What motivates me is the results," Dube says. When the women arrive, they sense that they've come to a safe place, and they begin to hope that things might change. And eventually, slowly, as the staff walks with them through the journey, the women begin to change.

"You know that this girl is going to come out of this and be a conqueror and an overcomer," Dube says. "And I think the fulfillment is really what carries us all." ■

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S. Meghan Mast is MCC Canada's multimedia storyteller.

“You know that this girl is going to come out of this and be a conqueror and an overcomer.”



“We are here to help them, be a refuge for them,” says Tina Dube, co-director of the Sandra Jones Centre.



Feature story

New hope and a chance to heal

In Nepal, an MCC partner offers an oasis and tangible help to women struggling with mental health.

BY KAITLYN JANTZI
PHOTOS BY LUKE JANTZI

Through MCC partner KOSHISH in Lalitpur, Nepal, a woman (name withheld for confidentiality) participates in art therapy, learning traditional beading techniques. Below is KOSHISH project officer Kamala Poudel.

It's a hot day. The sun hangs above a concrete courtyard where several women sit reclined under an awning. Even the birds are quiet. The air is heavy, humid, holding its monsoon rains for a little while longer.

The women, clothed in bright reds, pinks and greens, are relaxing, talking quietly among themselves, enjoying the slow call of the afternoon. They are vibrant against the gray concrete and the gray skies. They are vibrant too because of their journeys.

These women are gathered in the courtyard outside of a short-term residential home of MCC partner KOSHISH (National Mental Health Self-Help Organization) in Lalitpur, Nepal. They have come because of acute struggles with mental health, because there was a time when they were not able to care for themselves. There was a time when a quiet afternoon, relaxing with others after a hot meal, was unthinkable.

I'm greeted by Kamala Poudel, welcoming me with her warm smile. We walk through the courtyard and up the stairs. She introduces me to one of their psychologists, Sangita Laudari, who tells me about clinical interventions and assessments. We connect more generally about the challenges and gifts of clinical counseling work. I could stay longer, but Poudel has more to show me, more for me to learn.

There are rooms upstairs filled with beds, a small room for art therapy, a space for dancing and community time. In a new transit home currently under construction, there will be outside areas where women can learn animal husbandry and other agricultural techniques. For women who mostly come from agrarian backgrounds, getting hands into the dirt can be therapeutic and builds skills to support

women as they reintegrate into their home societies.

We make our way into the dining room and sit for a cup of tea. Poudel tells me story after story of women whose lives have been changed by KOSHISH, which receives financial and technical support from MCC. One woman who survived horrific domestic violence resulting in a late-term miscarriage found meaning and healing in working alongside the kitchen staff at

KOSHISH. Another young woman after a suicide attempt was able to successfully regain her sense of hope and purpose and return to her family with increased capacity and support.

As we sip our tea and I hear these accounts of impact, change and hope, it is the story of Poudel herself which lands with the most resonance for me on this day.

This woman before me, sharing tea and laughter, is the embodiment of KOSHISH's mission and vision to promote mental health and psychosocial well-being in Nepal. Always working to de-stigmatize mental health issues, many of the staff themselves are survivors of systems set up to destroy them.

Poudel, broad smiling and quick witted, was sold by her stepfather to child traffickers in India. At 5 years old she lost her innocence, her citizenship, her family and her future. She escaped and eventually returned to Nepal but was undocumented as her traffickers had stolen her identification. She landed on the streets, struggling with her mental health.

With a chuckle of self-awareness, she tells me of her initial skepticism when she was brought to KOSHISH. She was angry. She was wounded and unwilling to receive care. But the skilled clinical and nursing staff at KOSHISH slowly won her trust.

Their careful attention; a schedule allowing for art therapy, rest and play;

medical and clinical supports including medication and individual and group therapy—coupled with safety—for the first time in her life allowed Poudel to heal.

She is now an integral part of the team at KOSHISH. She tells her story without shame or hubris, naming her hurts and resilience with a confidence that inspires. She is a disability advocate and project officer. She wins over everyone who meets her—myself included.

KOSHISH's impact on individual women is undeniable but the vision is larger.

KOSHISH wants the government of Nepal to see these care services and replicate them. They hope their advocacy can push the government to more fully step into a role of caring for those who are most marginalized in society. The KOSHISH model is both micro and macro, holding the importance of individual work and the larger perspective of pushing for social change.

Our teacups are empty, and we sit a little longer. This place, a haven in Nepal and the only one of its kind, pulses with a sort of energy and hope—of the women past, present and future and of the staff who support them. Of a community holding its own and pushing for change.

It is with gratitude for this shared time that I stand to leave. As raindrops begin to fall and the women move to come inside, I can feel them moving toward the next thing, toward the day ahead of this one, and the one beyond that, and even the one beyond that. This possibility of days ahead is in itself a gift—a candle inside each woman, a cautious hope that these days beyond will be lighter than the ones they leave behind. ■

Kaitlyn Jantzi, who lives in Kathmandu, Nepal, serves as a mental health resource person for MCC's international programs. Her husband Luke is representative for MCC's work in Nepal.



Photo provided by the Conklins

“Whenever we visit MCC partner organizations, we see their passion to transform Cambodia toward the biblical vision of shalom . . .”

CRYSTAL CONKLIN

Crystal and Charles Conklin, middle, and their children Charlotte and Catherine take part in a fruit walk ceremony during a traditional Khmer wedding in January 2022 in Battambang, Cambodia.

MCC representatives

Names: Charles and Crystal Conklin

Hometown: Red Hill, Pennsylvania (Plains Mennonite Church in Hatfield); Charles also remains a member of Fairfield (Pennsylvania) Mennonite Church, his childhood church home.

Assignment: As representatives for MCC’s work in Cambodia, we provide leadership and ensure ongoing meaningful programming and legal compliance. We live in Phnom Penh with our children Charlotte, 8, and Catherine, 5.

Typical day: Charles navigates Phnom Penh traffic to drop the girls off at school. Crystal walks to the office. We check in about the day’s priorities and connect through email and Teams, responding to anything that has come in overnight (day in the U.S. and Canada). Other days we’re out visiting partners.

Inspirations: Whenever we visit MCC partner organizations, we see their passion to transform Cambodia toward the biblical vision of shalom—to continue moving this beautiful country toward a time when everyone will have enough to eat, everyone will be included and the earth will be cared for in sustainable ways. We are so honored to support and be part of the vision God has given them for Cambodia.

Joys: Relationships. Life here can be really hard, and people are quick to support one another when someone’s house floods (happens to someone on the MCC team at least once a year), there is a medical need (more like once a month!) or infrastructure has collapsed (roads washing out, electricity failing or water supply being cut). Our team is ready with sympathy, advice and practi-

cal assistance—usually in the form of food!

Challenge: So many since we started, yet we see God’s grace through it all. Many times, we feel like the Jack Dawson painting, “Peace in the Midst of the Storm.” Pandemic lockdowns led to quality family time, and health issues allowed us to receive support from our teammates and neighbors. We are grateful for God’s care.

FIND YOUR PLACE

MCC is always looking for people to join our work of serving others in the name of Christ. Go to mcc.org/serve or linkedin.com/company/mccpeace or contact your nearest MCC office to learn about current MCC service opportunities.

for children

hello ZIMBABWE

How do you greet someone in Shona?



makadii (Say mah cah DEE)



My name is Anesu Hahlani.

Age: 9

Lives in: Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe

I live with my mother, my two sisters and brother. My dad works in South Africa. Every day I fetch water and clean the dishes at my house. Sometimes I help Mom sell chickens. We use the money to grind our maize (dried corn) into flour.

Last year we got solar panels at my house (through an MCC-supported project). Now I have lights to do my homework at night instead of using candles. We use the power to charge phones, watch TV and read.

Once a week, I take a piece of firewood to school. Other students do, too, so the cooks can build a fire to make lunch for us. I like studying English and math. I want to be brilliant. But really, my favorite part of school is playing soccer.

My favorite food: chicken and *sadza* (thick cornmeal)

My favorite subject: recess

What I want to be: a truck driver

From candles to solar

In rural areas like Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe, most homes do not have electricity, so students would use candles to study at night. But candles don’t put out much light and need to be replaced regularly.

Today, MCC is helping families to have solar panels that light up rooms and courtyards and make tasks like studying at night easier for Anesu and other students.

Can you try doing a few minutes of homework at night without using electricity? Did you use a flashlight or a candle? (Ask your parent or another adult to help if you’re lighting a candle.) How hard is it to study by flashlight or candlelight?



Anesu Hahlani (left) does his homework with his mom Juliana Hahlani. He is able to do his homework as daylight fades thanks to light from the solar panel outside his home.





Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
21 South 12th Street, PO Box 500
Akron, PA 17501 U.S.A.



I am grateful to the women who founded our shop in 1978.
Their legacy inspires me.
I am proud to carry on the mission they started,
to build a compassionate community dedicated to MCC.

I build today for the leaders who will follow me.”

Christine Maust Beachy, volunteer coordinator, shown with founder and volunteer Marlene Leichy
Crowded Closet MCC Thrift Shop, Iowa City, Iowa



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Find your nearest MCC Thrift shop at thrift.mcc.org.