

Information for Teaching Volunteers

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Pre-schools

History

Pre-school education is relatively new in Malawi, and children attending the first pre-schools which were set up in the local area around Mwaya Beach in 2005 were taught by untrained, unpaid volunteers from the communities. At first, most of the pre-schools were held in vacant houses or church buildings, but over the past years funds have been found to construct purpose-built pre-school buildings for eight pre-schools. CPAR, a Canadian organisation, funded some initial training for the teachers in 2005, and Ripple Africa has also funded teacher training sessions via the Teacher Development Centre at Kachere.

Our Pre-schools Coordinator is Charles Domingo who is very enthusiastic and energetic, and loves volunteers becoming involved with the pre-schools. In the past, some of our volunteers have carried out teacher trainings with the staff from each of the pre-schools (see the section on Workshops).

The Pre-schools

Ripple Africa is responsible for eight pre-schools in the local area:

- Mwaya Pre-school (located on the other side of the football field from Mwaya Primary School)
- Matete 1 Pre-school (located in Matete just east of the tarmac road on the way to Mwaya from Matete)
- Matete 2 Pre-school (located quite far west of the tarmac road)
- Mazembe Pre-school (located slightly north of Mwaya, between the tarmac road and the lake)
- Kachere Pre-school (located 7km south of Matete on the tarmac road, near Kachere Primary School)
- Chiomba Pre-school (located about 3km south of Matete up the path signposted to Kapanda Farm)
- Katenthere Pre-school (located about 1km south of Mwaya)
- Chitungulu Pre-school (located about 3km north of Matete, just off the tarmac road)

Each school has three or four teachers who are both women and men. Enrolment is between 55-115 children, with 35-90 in attendance daily depending on the pre-school. The children range in age from two to six years old, and are taught in either one large group or two smaller ones. School is held from 7:30-10:30, Monday-Friday. The syllabus includes English (i.e. greetings, self-introduction, colours, numbers, shapes, prayer, calendar), math skills (i.e. counting, shapes), literacy (i.e. alphabet, stories), health/hygiene, and moral development/religion. Teachers take turns delivering short lessons on the above topics. Songs, dancing, games, outdoor play, free use of play materials (i.e. the toy box containing a variety of wooden toys, blocks, stuffed animals). At the end of each morning the children receive a meal of sweet potato and tea.

Although the teachers undergo the same training and use the same syllabus, each school is unique. All of the pre-schools have their own kitchens that are used for making tea and cooking sweet potatoes. The teachers grow the sweet potatoes for the children, and they are paid a small bonus for doing this which augments their salaries.

The needs of the schools change over the course of the year. There is always a need for training as it is not uncommon for new members of staff to join the pre-school team, mainly due to female teachers leaving to have a baby or because her husband is moving to another village or area.

Term Dates

There are no formal term dates for the pre-schools, and we try to ensure that their holiday periods are staggered so there are at least three pre-schools open at any given time. This means that volunteers will always be able to work at one or more of the pre-schools all year round.

Early Education in Malawi

Volunteers should note that the early education system in Malawi works differently to that in the UK and other countries such as the USA, Europe, and Australia. Malawian education is often a highly structured form of teaching with children sitting in rows learning letters and numbers by rote. However, the syllabus used in the primary schools is changing, and the emphasis will be more on group work. Volunteers should be aware that, because the culture of learning in Malawi is so different to what they are used to, any changes to the way the pre-school teachers teach may be a gradual process and take some time.

Volunteering in the Pre-schools

Experience of working with young children and an interest in early childhood education are helpful for volunteers wishing to work in the pre-schools. Pre-school teachers, play therapists, speech and language therapists, behaviour therapists, etc., will be ideally suited to working in the pre-schools, and they may find it useful to bring out textbooks and manuals in their field to help during their placement and with staff trainings as resources are not readily available and nor is the internet. Learning some phrases in ChiTonga is necessary (the pre-school teachers can help volunteers with this), as the children know only basic English. Volunteer teachers will have the opportunity to teach songs, games, nursery rhymes, and English words. Other duties may include setting up play materials, keeping the classroom tidy, preparing and/or serving tea to the children, and otherwise assisting the teachers during the course of the school day.

Previous volunteers have made an effort to emphasise the importance of play in early education. Even though a number of previous volunteers have undertaken some staff trainings on learning through play, future volunteers can continue to emphasise play as the main learning tool, if they see it as important.

Workshops

There are also opportunities for volunteers to become involved with teacher trainings. Previously, some volunteers have run workshops for the pre-school teachers including the following topics:

- Importance of Pre-school Education
- Weekly themes
- Routine
- Free play
- Group work, including example group activities
- Importance of play
- Behavioural management
- Introduction of timetables

Syllabus

Future volunteers should look through the notes about the previous workshops before undertaking any further training as possible repetition of points and methods would be useful. These notes are kept on the laptop in the office at Mwaya Beach.

Getting Involved

It is advisable to visit all eight pre-schools before deciding whether to remain with a particular school or whether to spend time at some or all of the pre-schools. Charles, the Pre-schools Coordinator, and Dan, the Volunteer Manager, can help place volunteers where they will be most needed.

Working with the pre-schools gives volunteers a chance to work alongside dedicated teachers, gain insight into Malawian early childhood education, and engage with the country's youngest learners. Above all, volunteers can expect to learn as much (if not more) than they teach, and have a great time and an enriching experience.

Primary Schools

This is an overview of what to expect while teaching at Mwaya Primary School. Although there are additional primary schools in the surrounding area, as well as pre-schools, the following details are specific to Mwaya Primary School.

General Information

Maurice Chunga is the Ripple Africa liaison for the Primary Schools. There are six primary schools that are in close proximity to Mwaya Beach, all offering classes from Standard 1 to 8:

- Mwaya Primary
- Matete Primary
- Mazembe Primary
- Chiomba Primary
- Kachere Primary
- Kazando Primary

These schools are located in the Kachere Zone. There is a Teacher Development Centre located at Kachere, and this is also where the Primary Education Advisor (PEA) can be found. Note: Meeting with the PEA is recommended if volunteers wish to learn more about how things can be improved/enhanced. However, their first point of contact should be Maurice, and any meetings with the PEA should include Maurice and Morton or Dan.

There are three school terms during the year. Roughly, these sessions fall into the following months:

- Term 1: September - December (Term Break is over Christmas and New Year)
- Term 2: January - March/April (Term Break is over Easter)
- Term 3: April - July (for Standards 1 to 7) (Term Break is August/September)

Primary School

Although this section has been written specifically about Mwaya Primary School, the other primary schools operate in a similar way.

School Set-up

School hours are from 7:00am to 1:10pm, Monday to Friday. Different age groups finish at different times. For example, Standard 1 pupils finish for the day at 10:00am while Standard 8 pupils finish at 1:10pm and return at around 2:30pm for afternoon school. (The precise start times for afternoon school change every day according to teachers' responsibilities, so if volunteers intend to help with afternoon school, they should speak to Maurice to find out at what time they should arrive.)

There are two breaks in the morning. Again, these are at different times for different classes. Younger pupils have their breaks earlier because their day is shorter.

The pupils are taught all subjects in ChiTonga (the local language) up to Standard 4, making it more difficult to assist in these classes than some of the others. However, assistance from volunteers may still be useful for marking English and maths work.

Standards 5 to 8 are supposed to be taught in English, but, in practice, many pupils do not speak English well enough for this to be possible. Most teachers speak first in English and then translate anything that has not been understood into ChiTonga. By Standard 8, most pupils can read English fluently and understand classroom instructions in English.

Standard 8

Standard 8 pupils only have two terms (Term 1 and Term 2). Therefore, as opposed to 36 to 39 weeks of instruction to cover the curriculum, the teachers are expected to cover the curriculum in just over 24 weeks.

Once the Standard 8 final examination (known as the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC)) has been written in late June/early July, the pupils have time off until the new school year starts in September (when they will hopefully be going to secondary school).

Evening classes are held from Monday to Thursday for Standard 8 pupils. Volunteers could think about helping with these classes, in co-operation with the relevant primary school teachers, if they are volunteering for a term or longer.

Classroom Visits

Volunteers will be asked to sit in on various classes to decide in which class(es) they wish to assist/teach. Maurice will speak with the teacher and introduce volunteers to the class prior to them sitting in.

Note: Volunteers can decide how much time they wish to spend observing each Standard. For example, Standard 6 on Monday, Standard 7 on Tuesday, Standard 8 on Wednesday. Alternatively, volunteers can visit different Standards over the course of one or more days, alternating among the morning periods.

Volunteer Teaching Experience

Participation and experience at school is up to each volunteer. They can be as active, creative and hands-on as they like. They create the experience that they will have at the school(s), so it is up to them to be able to find out the best way they can help out at the school and with the pupils. Maurice is always available to hear volunteers' concerns/ideas.

It is recommended that volunteers ask their Standard teacher for extra copies of the textbooks, so they can follow along during class and assist the pupils both during and after school. Maurice will be able to assist in providing extra copies of subject textbooks if the teacher does not have extras. (Volunteers may be able to find these books in the office at Mwaya Beach on the bookshelf.)

Teachers are expected to submit their lesson plans to the deputy headteacher for marking and for completion each week. Therefore, the teacher has a plan for teaching each day and the material to cover, so volunteers should be able to view these in advance.

During class, volunteers can:

- Help with marking.
- Circulate and answer questions during work periods.
- Maintain attention and quiet behaviour during lessons.

- Suggest alternative ways to teach a subject (i.e. group work, etc.)
- Decide to teach lessons or to hold additional group classes after school.

One of the most effective ways to work at Mwaya Primary School is to take small groups out of the lessons to work on whatever your best subjects are. These small classes can be held at the library, which has a small outside (but with a roof) classroom with a blackboard — volunteers should let the Librarian know in advance, he will make sure that the cupboard is unlocked so that chairs, chalk and dusters can be accessed. Even if he forgets, pupils can sit on the wall and chalk is available in the office, although dusters can be hard to come by (a piece of paper works reasonably well in an emergency!). If volunteers decide to do this, it is worth bearing the following things in mind:

– It is possible for help with translating to be given to volunteers if the pupils are not following, and volunteers should ask Maurice about this. Help with translating has enabled volunteers to teach English to Standards 3 and 4 as well as the older groups. Barton, the Librarian, will translate important information for volunteers if they are stuck.

– Volunteers are advised to have a look at the timetable before they take a group to the library, to find out what time the lesson is meant to be finishing.

– If pupils finish the work set for them before the end of the lesson, it is up to volunteers to decide whether to try and stretch them with something else or to send them back to class early. Volunteers might want to have something planned for this eventuality. It is worth noting that some of the pupils work very quickly, while others struggle to understand the work even if it has been explained to them two or three times in ChiTonga!

– Pupils will give their names if asked. It is worth telling the class teacher if (a) a pupil is consistently disruptive, (b) a pupil is markedly slower than everyone else in the class. Such volunteer feedback has previously helped teachers to identify which pupils need extra help, or need to repeat a Standard.

Kazando Primary School

This school is located in Kazando village, about a 20 minute cycle ride from Mwaya Beach, but it can be hard to find. However, many local people will be happy to show the way and, if volunteers are interested to see the school and assist there, they should ask to go during their induction. The tricky bit is remembering when to leave the main path. It is handy to remember that the left turn is not long after the Katenthere football pitch, which is on the right. There are also some houses with distinctive tin roofs on the left of the track, just before the turning. Taking the quickest, most bicycle-friendly route involves crossing a river, which may not be easy during the rainy season. If the river is too swollen, ask local people for alternative directions.

School Set-Up

Previously, Kazando Primary School only taught Standards 1 to 6 but in recent times, they have started to offer Standard 7 and 8 classes. This is because the school buildings have been improved and new ones built however the school has fewer paid teachers than any of the other primary schools we support, and relies heavily on volunteer teachers from the local communities.

The school is also very short of resources compared to the other schools, but the class sizes are much smaller.

Classroom Visits

The orientation process for new volunteers at Kazando Primary School will be very similar to Mwaya Primary School. Volunteers will be invited to sit in on various classes and lessons. Based on this experience, volunteers will be able to make a decision about how best to spend their time at the school.

Because of the smaller class sizes, it is easier to teach whole classes at Kazando Primary School than at Mwaya Primary School, and the need to take small groups out is not as pressing. It is still possible to do so, although more difficult during rainy season — there is a shady tree and a partially covered outside classroom, each with a portable blackboard.

There is a big literacy problem at Kazando Primary School, with some pupils as high as Standard 4 unable to write coherently at all.

After-school Teaching (Extra Classes)

As class sizes are very large in most of the schools (at times over 70 pupils per class), offering after-school lessons to smaller groups is very beneficial to dedicated and keen pupils.

Speak with the teacher and ask them to suggest names of pupils who are dedicated, motivated and keen.

Note: Although there are disruptive pupils in all classes, these pupils can do well in smaller groups and will benefit from extra learning.

Volunteers should hold all after-school classes at the primary school whose pupils they will be teaching, although volunteers may wish to consider tutoring very small groups of older pupils, or individuals, at Mwaya Beach. Volunteers who also teach at Kapanda Secondary School should bear in mind that some Standard 8 pupils are capable of learning English with students from Forms 1 and 2. Grouping students according to ability like this can help volunteers to get more meaningful work done in the time available to them.

Resources for volunteers to plan their own classes/lessons can be found at:

- The office at Mwaya Beach (resources such as TEFL, mathematics, science, etc.)
- Mwaya Community Library also has a section for resource material by subject.

Volunteers can create their own material and handouts on the volunteers' laptop at Mwaya Beach — there are photocopying facilities in Chintheche. There is also an internet café in Chintheche should volunteers wish to use shared teaching resources that are available online. However, this will get very expensive after a while, so perhaps generally this should only be done if volunteers really need a written resource that cannot just be written on the blackboard (e.g. a comprehension passage).

Additional Notes/Food for Thought

Standard 8 pupils take their final examination in late June/early July. They are tested on five subjects:

- English
- Primary Science
- Maths
- Chichewa
- Social Studies

A mock exam is organised in mid-May for pupils who are able to pay.

Every Friday during Term 2, Standard 8 pupils take a subject test to review previously learnt material and to assist in preparing for their final examination.

Secondary education is not free. Although primary education is free (except for the cost of their uniforms), secondary school (and boarding schools) bear a cost, making it difficult for many pupils to continue their education beyond primary school.

The Malawian government has said that it is illegal to use corporal punishment at primary schools; therefore, beating of the pupils should not occur. Teachers do occasionally violate this law, and there are concerns that some teachers beat pupils as a routine teaching method, i.e. for getting a wrong answer. This contributes to a problem that can be seen often in schools in Malawi, which is that pupils — particularly girls — would rather remain silent than risk giving a wrong answer.

Many volunteers have organised extra classes for secondary school students. Kapanda Secondary School is the closest to Mwaya, and Chifira Secondary School is located just north of Kande and is also an area where volunteers can be of assistance. Extra classes can be arranged at Mwaya Beach in the training room or on the terrace, and many of these students are from the Mwaya/Matete area, therefore making it easy for them to come to classes held at Mwaya Beach. If volunteers wish to hold extra classes for secondary school students other than those attending Kapanda, it is advisable to speak with Maurice and Morton or Dan about how these can be arranged.

A reading club at the library has been set up for children to attend on a Saturday morning.

Remember to keep Maurice, Morton and Dan informed about your involvement at the schools.

Kapanda Community Day Secondary School

History

Kapanda Community Day Secondary School (CDSS) was built by Ripple Africa and opened in 2008 in response

to the fact that many students had to walk over 12km to get to school every day. Although Ripple Africa built the school, it is a government school and the teachers are appointed and paid by the government. The school has changed quite a bit since it opened in 2008 and is developing all the time.

Subjects

Ten different subjects are taught at Kapanda:

- Maths
- English
- Chichewa
- Physical Science
- Geography
- Biology
- Agriculture
- Bible Knowledge
- History
- Social Studies
- Physical Education
- Life Skills (similar to PSCE (Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education) in England)

Forms

There are four Forms in secondary school. Forms 1 and 2 follow a course of about 10 subjects. In Forms 3 and 4 the students usually drop one or two subjects as they prepare to sit their MSCE (Malawi School Certificate Examinations) at the end of Form 4. Each Form stays in its own classroom while the teachers circulate.

Buildings and Facilities

At present, there are four classrooms housed in two double classroom blocks plus another building comprising a staff room, a headteacher's office, and a store cupboard which doubles as a library.

The physics laboratory, which was completed in mid 2012, is a resource for all the secondary schools in the Nkhata Bay District as they have all the necessary equipment which was supplied by the Institute of Physics.

We've also built a Computer Laboratory through a partnership with IT Schools Africa which has 60 computers, and we built a Girl's Dormitory for 54 students, and a dining and study block.

Ripple Africa has also provided five teachers' houses. These houses are vital for those teachers who are transferred into the area as it is often difficult and can be expensive to find and rent accommodation locally. Another advantage of having the houses so close is that the teachers living at the school can supervise the students who attend night school in order to revise for their national examinations.

There are also staff and student toilet blocks, and a water pump at the school. Close to the school, there is a football pitch and a netball court, and just beyond these there is an agricultural project originally run by Ripple Africa but which is now run by the school. The school now has mains electricity too.

School Terms

The school terms are similar to those in the UK, and these are roughly:

Term 1: September - December

Term 2: January - March

Term 3: April - July

Attitude to Volunteers

Volunteers are welcomed by the staff at Kapanda, and they are always happy to accommodate the volunteers in whatever capacity they wish to become involved. Students are keen and hardworking (with, of course, the occasional troublemaker!) and will often ask volunteers for extra lessons, and many volunteers enjoy tutoring individuals or giving extra lessons for a group of students in the afternoons at Mwaya Beach.

Occasionally, students may ask volunteers for help to pay school fees or to buy uniforms. Although we ask volunteers not to sponsor individual students, we do understand that volunteers will naturally form friendships with some individuals during the period of their placement. As a result, we have written a policy on student sponsorship which is part of the Volunteer Handbook.

Location

Kapanda CDSS is located between Matete and Chiomba along the lakeshore road. The easiest way for volunteers to reach it is by bicycle, and this takes approximately 20 minutes.

School Opening Hours

School starts at 7:30am every day, except on Mondays when there is assembly which takes place at 7:15am. There are nine lesson periods which are split into three sections with a 15 minute break after the first section of three lesson periods and a 10 minute break after the second section of three lesson periods. Each lesson period lasts for 40 minutes which means that the school day ends at 1:55pm.

Open School

In addition to the government run day school, there is also an open school which is run privately by the school. This takes place from 2:10pm to 5:30pm and welcomes all those students who were not selected to attend secondary school. For this reason, the students are of a lower academic ability and many have poor English which makes teaching much more difficult for the volunteers. Some students, however, do very well and these students are oftenselected to move to day school as an incentive to work hard.