

An ever-increasing demand for therapy



The past year has seen new clients being supported by the project and we continue to provide vital therapy, referrals for operations and equipment and at the latter part of the year, we welcomed a new team member.

We are delighted to introduce you to Loveness, our new Disabilities and Rehabilitation Project Manager. Loveness joined the team in October 2023 as Matilda has now been promoted to support our Country Director and Senior Management team.

Loveness is a fully qualified physiotherapist with three years experience. Her passion for helping those affected by disabilities is evident when you see her interacting with the clients and their guardians. During the last three months of the year, Matilda worked with Loveness to ensure that she got to know both the clients who attend groups and also those who require home visits. She also supported her at the orthopedic clinics and with referrals to ensure that those needing operations and devices received them. We wish Matilda all the best in her new role and look forward to seeing the Disabilities and Rehabilitation project develop further under Loveness's guidance.



Year on year our client base has increased. By the end of 2023 we had 178 clients and 38 of these were new clients. Four of our youngest clients joined us before they were six months old. Three of the babies had cerebral palsy and the other had hydrocephalus and spina bifida. The earlier that parents and guardians seek help, the greater the chance the therapy will make a bigger difference in less time.



The other clients joining in 2023 had diagnoses including knock knees, bow legs, muscle dystrophy, cataracts, burn contractures and Downs Syndrome. Eleven clients were either discharged or left the group and sadly, three clients died.

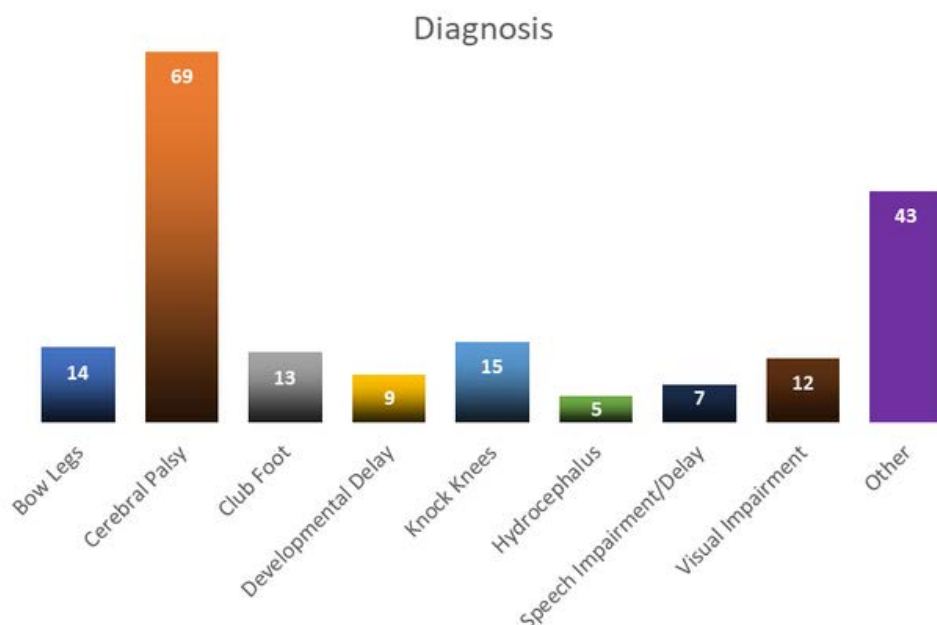
Of the 178 clients registered, 56% are male and the average age is 11 years old. As in 2022, 15% of our clients rely on nutritional support and 39% of the clients are not walking – a very small change on last year.

The groups that we run each week provide those living within 36 local villages a place to come and receive therapy and support. Two of the groups take place at local clinics, Kande and Kachere, while Matete is held in one of our pre-school buildings and Chituka is at one of our clients houses where there is a large communal area for other clients to gather.

Kande and Kachere continue to welcome the highest number of clients on a regular basis. In total, 132 clients attend group sessions or receive home visits each week whilst the remainder are Occasional Clients. These clients only come to the group sessions as and when they need monitoring for their long-term progress or to be referred for a new device.



Although 178 clients are registered, we have 187 diagnoses listed as several of the clients have multiple challenges, (for example the client mentioned earlier who has hydrocephalus and spina bifida.)



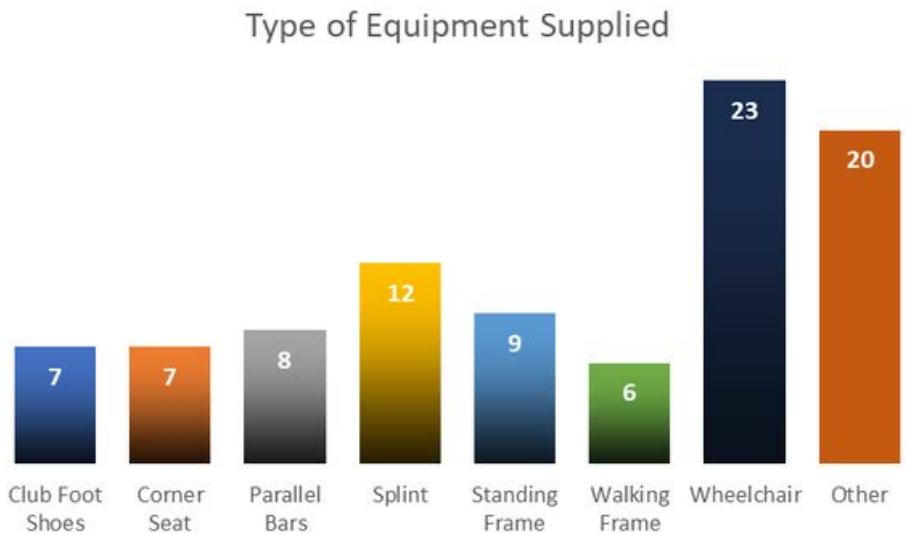
Matilda and Loveness create bespoke treatment plans so that each individual can work at their own pace and achieve realistic goals based on their personal circumstances. It is really important that the parents or guardians feel comfortable with the exercises that they can do at home with the child to ensure that there is the maximum opportunity for these goals to be achieved. Matilda and Loveness monitor progress and provide the relevant support and equipment needed.

We continued working with Mzuzu Central Hospital Prosthetics and Orthotics Centre so that clients could receive equipment such as bespoke splints and prosthetic limbs. As in 2022, the hospital did not always have the materials so we either had to purchase the raw materials directly or send clients to an alternative centre much further away.

For clients that needed them, we were able to secure wheelchairs from other organisations within Malawi, and our local carpenters built other equipment such as corner seats and parallel bars.

We also referred clients for operations and reviews with specialist surgeons.

Working together with the various organisations, and with the dedication of Matilda and Loveness, the clients and their families have seen many milestones achieved each year including Thomson who is now walking independently. 62% of our clients have shown signs of improvement.



Matilda is passionate about raising awareness within the community to reduce the stigma surrounding disabilities. Over the last couple of years, the training that teachers have received has been invaluable in enabling many of the clients to attend mainstream school with their peers.



Last year Matilda carried out awareness training with teachers, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and with students themselves. She said, “We had a teacher training in June at Chituka Primary School with 11 teachers as there is a high drop out rate of learners and especially those living with disabilities. During this training I addressed 317 learners from Standard 4 to 7 so that they can understand how they too can support their friends.”

Matilda and the PTAs welcomed various speakers including doctors, social welfare and education specialists to discuss child protection issues and how they can be overcome within the community, not all necessarily linked to children with disabilities but to support all youngsters. There was nutrition and first aid training provided to the families of our clients this year too.

This work will be continued by Loveness who is as dedicated as Matilda. She said, “I'm very passionate about my job because it has been my wish to see a child with disabilities reaching developmental milestones and being involved in daily activities. I believe that awareness training is very important for the sake of children because when teachers are aware of the needs for the children with disabilities, they are able to take care of them and interact with them.”

Loveness has high hopes for the year ahead. She continued, “I hope to see every child reaching their personal milestones.”

She will also continue working with our Agriculture teams as our fruit tree project provides families who have children with disabilities with fruit trees so that they not only improve their diets but can earn an income from the sale of any surplus fruit.



Unfortunately, we did not have any visiting physiotherapists this year, but we did have doctors and a nurse who supported with wound dressings, etc., on pressure sores and we welcomed a music therapy volunteer.

Ruaridh, and his guitar, joined Matilda during her home visits and group sessions. He learnt several of the local children's songs and wrote some songs with our Day Watchmen too, which he sang with Matilda and the children. Not only did he play and sing but the clients were encouraged to play accompanying instruments.

Music is such a big part of Malawian life so it was beautiful to see the added impact for the clients, especially those who are unable to easily communicate. The smiles on their faces were enough to know that they were enjoying the sounds being made. A music guide was created so that Loveness can continue to provide the clients and their families with music during the sessions.



Matilda said, "During my time running the project I achieved many things including starting and running the groups which helped the growth of the project. Many of my clients have succeeded in developmental stages and I loved all my clients. I trust Loveness to continue my hard work. Most importantly, she is a well-trained physiotherapist. She is cheerful, well mannered and grew up in a rural area. She is a mother too and will always think about the welfare of a child."

2023 Milestones

- Twelve clients with cerebral palsy have achieved different goals including gaining control of their head, being able to sit unaided and walking independently.
- Two clients with limb length discrepancy are now able to walk without pain having been fitted with a raised shoe.
- Two clients who require prosthetic legs continue to improve their balance and are now able to run around confidently.
- One client with club foot had corrective surgery and can now stand and walk independently.
- One of our clients with hydrocephalus is able to walk unaided.
- One client with Down Syndrome is walking with minimal support.
- One client with spina bifida and club foot is able to walk with minimal support.
- One client with knock knees is now walking independently.
- We have funded 23 clients to receive hospital check-ups or referrals for specialist equipment, and 10 to have operations.
- We are able to re-issue some of the equipment we make once a client progresses, for example, standing and walking frames. In addition, during 2023 we made two more sets of parallel bars, two corner seats, two standing frames and two walking frames. Seven wheelchairs were provided, four sets of knee pads, three splints, two pairs of raised shoes, two sets of prosthetic legs and a set of crutches. We also repaired several wheelchairs. The items were either donated or made by partner organisations.

