

## Dear Friends of African Mothers Health Initiative,

We have completed our eighth year of service to some of the world's most needy mothers and babies. Half a world away in Africa pregnancy, childbirth, and the first year of life are dangerous periods during which many lives are lost.

**African Mothers Health Initiative (AMHI)** is a US-based nonprofit that supports the home based care of the most vulnerable recently delivered women and babies in Malawi.

### *A Graduate and His Baby Sister*



*This is Mdzatifuna. She is 23 years old and baby Maya in her lap is her fourth child. She never produced enough breast milk to sustain her children and as a result, her first two died in infancy. The boy beside her is three. He is alive and healthy thanks to the care and support the family received from our nurses during his first year of life. She has now returned to seek our help with Maya.*

AMHI is grateful for our sustaining donors who make our monthly accomplishments possible. Over the past year, you donated \$64,000. Your funds provided care for 107 babies and 76 women. You enabled Malawian nurses to conduct 1,248 home visits where they carried out physical assessments, provided health education to families and communities, and distributed formula and supplies to orphaned infants.

### **Expanding Our Board**

Some of you are receiving this letter for the first time. A close contact of yours on our board believed you would feel a connection to our work. We are happy to announce that we have new board members who bring their expertise, enthusiasm and energy to our work. Our board now includes Kimberley Chastain, Genevieve Grabman, Joanne Chiwaula, Apur Shah, Julia Betts, Meera Nosek, Dehlia Ramos Gonzalez, Judith Benkert, Celeste Sheppard, Genevieve Jorissen, Margret Sonnier, Meredith Kruger Kos, and Shelly Broussard.

### **Second Trip by Austin Nurses**

Three nurses from Austin, Texas (Dehlia Gonzalez, Gabi Liles, and Heather Hall) traveled again to Malawi. They conducted field visits

during which they participated our daily work. They also gave four in-service trainings to the Malawian nurses on infection control and standards, assessment and stabilization of the newborn, wound care assessment, and recertification of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation skills. A trip is currently being organized for April 2016. Please write [admin@africanmothers.org](mailto:admin@africanmothers.org) if you are interested in joining it.

### **Malawi Today**

2015 was a particularly rough year for this small country of 16.3 million people. Heavy rains and floods caused significant damage to homes, crops and infrastructure displacing hundreds of thousands. Now due to poor harvests, millions face the threat of famine. Impoverished households cannot supplement their harvests by purchasing food because of high prices and general food shortages within the county ([FEWS.net](http://FEWS.net)). The health situation is just as bleak. The too few hospitals and clinics are chronically undersupplied and understaffed. And, the Malawian Government does not even have the capacity to hire the few (51) graduates from its own medical school to add to the 300 physicians currently working in the country.

### ***Mutu umodzi susenza denga***

During my time in Malawi I found it incredibly heart-wrenching to stand face to face with desperate and engulfing need; to look someone in the eye and know I could not fix their problems but still maintain faith that my small contribution would make a significant and sustaining impact. Families needing help with a fragile baby also often have other

## Kangaroo Care



Malawi has the greatest percentage of low birth weight births worldwide. In an environment where high quality neonatal intensive care is unavailable, the simple intervention of keeping a tiny baby skin-to-skin with his guardian improves weight gain, helps him maintain a stable temperature, heart rate and breathing, and results in the best outcomes. Our nurses follow many babies discharged home at low weight and provide instruction and support so that these wee ones continue to grow well over their first year of life.

members - children and adults - teetering on the edge of survival. To maintain hope at times felt like a near impossible feat. But, Malawian women and children were the greatest sources of inspiration. The strength and tenacity of these people, the distances they walked, the sacrifices they made, the sheer determination to access care for a sick infant answered every doubt, every quiet moment of self-questioning "Is this worth it?". Frequently Beatrice, our director in Malawi would remind me, "*mutu umodzi susenza denga*" (one head alone does not hold up the roof). We all have to do our part to make things happen; to improve the situation in Malawi. We do what we can and trust that others with equal determination and grit are also using their skills to help. At times I worry that distance might dilute the force of commitment and determination to save lives that are small and uncounted and end quietly. We cannot draw strength from standing face to face with Malawian mothers and grandmothers. We must draw from. . . our own children playing or sleeping beside us, our personal experiences of birth, our gratitude for the care provided to us or to our loved ones who were too fragile to survive if not for the support from hospitals, nurses, midwives, and physicians. At moments our lives have depended on others. Let us continue to support the women and babies in Malawi, so that if nothing else, they too might experience the joy of snuggling close to the sweet smells of their children and growing up in the radiance of their mothers' love.

### Our Needs

We depend on you to sustain the care we provide in Malawi. We appreciate your involvement and feedback. Here are a few ways to help:

- Mail a check to: AMHI 7304 Carroll Ave. #173, Takoma Park, MD 20912
- Donate online at <http://www.africanmothers.org/donate/> (please consider a recurrent donation)
- Ask your employer about a matching end-of-year donation
- If you make purchases on Amazon, please go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and select "African Mothers Health Initiative" as your charity so that a percentage of the profits will come to us.

When I talked with Beatrice last week, she said, "Thank you for everything you are doing for the people of Malawi" and I am now passing her gratitude and my own on to you. Thank you, from all of us...the AMHI Board, the staff in Malawi, and most importantly the women and children we serve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Chiwaula". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Food for Thought: According to the 2015 Giving USA Report only 4.2% of American donations in 2014 went to international institutions. Though there are many excellent charities at home, your money can go farther and have greater impact with the world's poor when you send it abroad.*