

African Mothers Health Initiative

Dear Friends,

We have arrived once again at the season of gratitude, at the end of a year that has tried us more than usual. I do not know one person who has sailed through untouched. In some way everyone's reality has shifted by financial loss, illness, death, fear, trauma, or isolation. In the wake of each hardship, we may be tempted to steel ourselves against the world; view our own suffering as exquisitely painful and unique. Or we may recognize our pain as the window to our shared humanity. Once we honestly experience the angles and edges of our own uncomfortable emotions we are better equipped to see and be present for the suffering of others. This year our hearts have been tilled - rocks moved and roots torn - the process was painful, but we are prepared for bounty.

In 2020 our work continued in Malawi against a backdrop of a nullified Presidential election, political rallies, and covid. Joyful Motherhood staff (JM is our Malawian implementing partner) continued to travel thousands of miles even during periods of civil unrest, knowing that the service they offered was life sustaining. This has been a memorable year and this year I would like to share a single story of resilience to illustrate what we do and why we do it.



Charity. This beautiful girl is Charity. She looks young for her 18 years, but her appearance belies her life experience. Almost two years ago, Charity learned she was pregnant. Her initial surprise carried only a faint shade of disappointment. She had dropped out of school the previous year because her family could not afford the modest

school fees or purchase the required supplies and uniform. Her parents were hard-working and though a baby would be a strain on the family, Charity knew they would find a way together. Her pregnancy progressed normally, she received the recommended prenatal care, and the delivery - though painful - also ended with a healthy mom and baby. After 24 hours, Charity and her baby boy returned home together. Her mother stayed by her side day and night tending to Charity and supporting her as she nursed her baby, but Charity's health deteriorated. When her mother could no longer soothe her, when she noticed her empty womb swell again, the three returned to the hospital. There Charity was diagnosed with a uterine infection, readmitted, and given antibiotics. Unfortunately, the infection raged on. A few days later she was transferred to the referral hospital and ultimately a doctor decided to remove her uterus and ovaries. At some point, while fighting for her life, her milk dried up. Joyful Motherhood nurses found her, her desperate mother and hungry newborn in the hospital. They enrolled her and her baby and

PROGRAM BASICS

Over 95% of infants enrolled in our program survive. This compares with only 80% of twins/triplets and 20-50% of orphans who do not receive assistance in the region.

Up to 1 in 5 women in sub-Saharan Africa may experience severe illness related to their pregnancies or deliveries. These women struggle to resume their daily lives, they suffer financially, their children are more likely to die, and they experience high rates of depression.

Women in our program receive regular health assessments, counseling and stipends for income generating projects.

This year we cared for 223 infants ages 0-2yrs and 40 critically ill postpartum women.

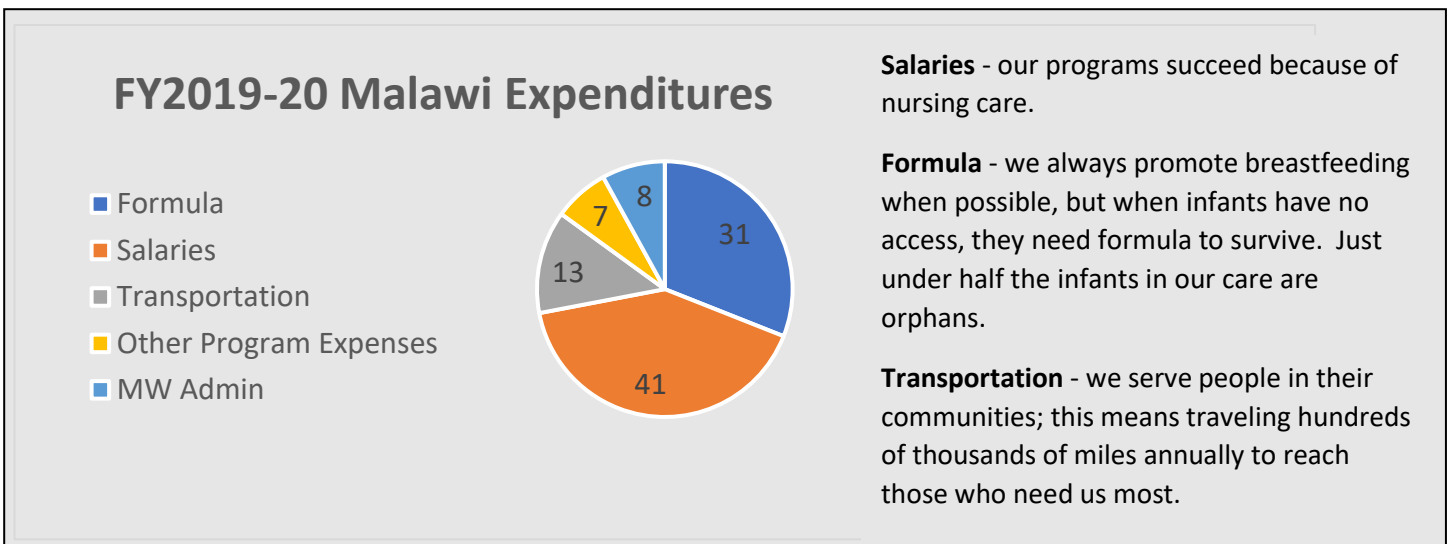
This year we raised \$77,242 and **over 95% was sent to Malawi** for project implementation.

81% of our funding comes directly from individual donors like you.

started visiting them there. Because Charity’s mother had to stay at her bedside throughout the hospitalization, a cousin took over the care of the baby [the extreme shortage of clinical staff means that family members are relied upon to ensure that patients’ basic needs are met while hospitalized]. JM nurses visited the baby in the cousin’s home and will continue to support him until he turns two – watching over his health and growth, helping educate the cousin on his care, providing the needed formula now, and enriched porridge later. Charity stayed in the hospital for two months. After her discharge, JM nurses continued visiting her in her village for an additional four months. It took Charity - a previously healthy young woman - six months to recover from her delivery. During the visits, the nurses assessed her health, provided iron supplements and enriched porridge, and counseled her and her family. At one-point Nitta, a JM nurse, told her, “Charity, your best husband will be your degree. If you are educated, you will always be able to feed yourself and you will not have to depend on anyone.” [Experiencing a total hysterectomy at a young age is always devastating, but even more so in a culture where a woman’s value is often linked to her fertility.] Six months after the birth, JM discharged Charity from the program and gave her 10,000MK (approx. \$14).

Nitta recently returned after a few months to follow up and learned that Charity had used the money to purchase what she needed to make and sell banana fritters. Charity proudly told Nitta that she had been saving her profits and now has enough to cover her school fees, supplies and uniform. She took the \$14 and transformed it into an opportunity to continue her education.

I recently read a quote by Bryan Stevenson, “The opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice.” I have been chewing on this for some time now, considering how this applies to our clients. Women, girls, and infants who are deeply impoverished, who do not have access to quality medical care or free education, who often do not have adequate food. What is our role in restoring justice? I believe it is this... showing up, offering compassionate care in the context of families and communities, respecting our beneficiaries’ self-awareness, and trusting their solutions. Charity transformed a meager donation into a world of possibilities for herself and an inspiration for others.



Goals for 2021. Our goal is to raise \$100K over the next fiscal year. With the additional funds we will hire a local program manager who will be able to network and write grants for local funding, improve the monitoring and evaluation of our program, and help determine the path for future organizational growth. These funds will also provide the investment needed to launch a solar panel project, which would provide a small panel to program graduates that they might use to charge phones for a fee in their communities.

Thank you for your support. Without your partnership, this work cannot continue. As 2020 draws to a close we wish you and your loved ones, health, peace, and joy. Happy Holidays from Joanne Jorissen Chiwaula, the Board of AMHI (Genevieve Grabman, Apur Shah, Dehlia Ramos Gonzalez, Marcianna Nosek, Shelly Broussard, Lavanya Sithanandam and Abiba Matengula) and from the staff and board of Joyful Motherhood in Malawi

To Donate: Mail us a check or donate at www.africanmothers.org/donate. All donations are tax deductible