

Lord Provost Humanitarian Aid Mission to Malawi IT Project September 2008

Project Outline

On September 5th 2008 a party of 15 employees of Glasgow City Council and its associated companies: ACCESS and City Building, left Scotland to complete a two-week Humanitarian Aid mission in Malawi.

There were a number of aims for the mission including:

- new IT installations and training
- advanced training for previously trained staff
- auditing of previous IT installations
- building of a new prosthetics / orthotics clinic
- establishing of a new waste management regime
- consideration of future projects for the Lord Provost's Fund to undertake.

Staff representing Access were: Hilary Wood, Heather McDonald, Maria Quintas Zon and Sammy Birnie.



Achievement Summary

Lilongwe

1. Installation of networked PC and printer systems at 4 Primary School training centres
2. Installation of 3 networked PCs and printer for the newly built Prosthetics Clinic at Kamuzu Central Hospital
3. Delivery of PCs to Daeyang Luke Mission Hospital
4. Delivery of PCs to Kamuzu Central Hospital for dispersal by Sister Anne Carr, two of which will benefit Projects for Street Children.
5. Basic IT training of 12 primary school staff in two training centres
6. Audit of existing equipment previously installed at the City Assembly, Kamuzu Central Hospital and the College of Health Sciences.

Blantyre

7. Installation of 20 PCs at the training centre at Stella Maris Girls Secondary School
8. Installation of PCs and printer at Queen Elizabeth Hospital's Prosthetics Clinic
9. Basic IT training for 8 school staff and one technician
10. Advanced training for 10 staff in Word, Excel, Powerpoint and Access
11. Audit of 4 previous installations at state primary schools.



Background

A team of volunteers including staff from Access, DACS and formerly GCC IT work for several hours on a Tuesday evening “recycling” computers which have been released by the Council’s IT refresh policy.

The computers go through a 4-step cleansing and re-build process before packing and shipment to satisfy requests made to the Lord Provost’s office.

Two consignments of IT equipment and other goods were shipped to Malawi in April and June 2008, including:

- In excess of 250 PCs
- 8 printers
- a scanner
- a projector
- hubs, cables, plug bars, toolkits, training materials and paper

Four cages of IT equipment (PCs, monitors, etc) were provided to SchoolNet Malawi, who will distribute and install the equipment themselves.

In addition, staff carried 75 flash memory sticks (to enable the teachers to store their personal training documents), toolkits and 4 cameras with SD cards for use by schools in conjunction with Powerpoint presentations. All of which were very gratefully received by the Malawian teachers.



Key contacts in both Blantyre and Lilongwe were asked to ensure that suitable locations for the new installations were found and that adequate power for these was supplied, prior to the team’s arrival.

The Journey Begins

The full team flew into Lilongwe from Nairobi on Saturday, and the IT team travelled the 5 hour journey to Blantyre the following day. Part of the journey is on the border with Mozambique and evidence of the civil war can still be seen, some ten years after it ceased, with shells of buildings on one side and functioning shops on the Malawi side. Refugees now permanently reside on the land which was their camp and cross the road to farm in Mozambique on a daily basis.



We have learned from previous visits that in Malawi, flexibility is a requirement. A site audit of Stella Maris School was carried out and revealed a bright, airy building with new and adequate power supplies and desks provided by a previous consignment from the Provost’s fund. Unfortunately the IT equipment did not arrive until after lunch on the Tuesday, and not all the correct boxes had been sent from Lilongwe. In the interim, site audits of previous installations were undertaken and discussions were held with key managers from the Education Department regarding their advanced training requirements. A programme was agreed, to cover Word mail merge, Excel for

budget monitoring, Access for pupil records and analysis and Powerpoint for presentations. Basic, Advanced and Technical training courses were run simultaneously, at two sites, on the Wednesday and Thursday. Training materials left with the schools included online self-paced training and copies of notes for reference.

Installation of the networked system at Stella Maris School was completed on the Tuesday afternoon. Installation of the equipment for the prosthetics clinic was completed on the Thursday afternoon.

Audit of Previous Installations

In 2007, an IT training centre was established in each of 4 school divisions in Blantyre, and staff and technicians were given basic and technical training as appropriate. We returned to each school and were delighted that the equipment in each school was still in use. Staff were very keen to confirm their ongoing delight with the facilities and re-assured us that they were being well managed. Anecdotal evidence was confirmed by spot checks on the use of individual PCs.



At three of the four sites the equipment was still in good working order, though problems had occurred at each site and needed to be rectified:

- Bangwe had several PCs with power units blown, and an adaptor not working. Since the equipment in other sites is not displaying similar issues, this may be a power supply issue
- South Lunzu staff were greatly concerned about their dirty mice which they felt prevented the computers working – this was easily resolved! All of the units had been upgraded to Vista or XP but were fully working. They had recently agreed to train the local Police Force, creating a revenue stream which is to pay for a full-time trainer.



- Ndirande was dusty despite protective plastic covering, but again used by teachers and pupils. There was evidence of fees being charged for the use of the equipment and our concerns about this have been raised with the Education Manager.
- At Zingwangwa equipment consisting of 19 PCs were not capable of use. These had software updated and possibly attached to another server at a separate location, and as a result needed to be re-imaged to restore to their original spec. Two PCs failed to reboot and had to be removed.

Recommendations were discussed with the Education Manger, Sister Eunice Dambo, to ensure that the equipment is not upgraded without proper change controls, that fees for use should not be made for those still within school, and that the technician for Stella Maris could also oversee these 4 training sites.

We will continue to receive reports on the use of the equipment on a six monthly basis.



Lilongwe - Schools

Miriam Manyozo, the Computer Manager for Lilongwe City Assembly had prepared 4 primary schools for equipment installation: Chimutu, Chiuzema (built within the last 2 years), Chimanga and Lilongwe LEA. These were much smaller than the training centres in Blantyre and each school was given 7 PCs and a networked printer.



The equipment was received with great excitement and curiosity by the school pupils. Chimutu was the poorest location with no glass in the windows. A chalk board and curtains now protect the hut from the elements!

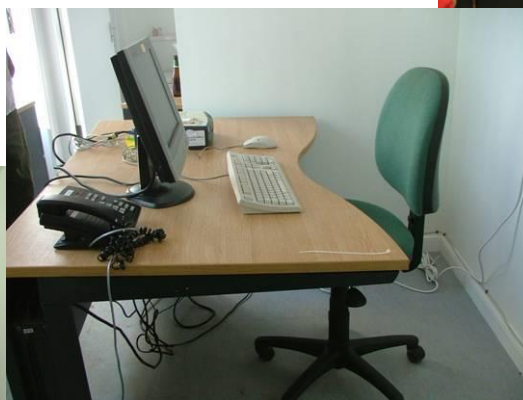


Two day basic IT training was given to staff from each school at two sites.

Lilongwe - Prosthetic Clinic

The team from City Building built a Prosthetics Clinic in the grounds of Kamuzu Central Hospital, which will be operated on an ongoing basis in conjunction by the charity "500 Miles".

Installation of a small network for the office staff at the prosthetics clinic took place on the last day of work, when the clinic was complete. Three PCs and a printer were successfully networked and Olivia Giles, the founder of 500 Miles, was overwhelmed with the result.



Audit of Previous Installations

A request was made for a visit Wenela, the 30 PC training centre installed by GCC in Lilongwe in 2006. It was hoped to use this to provide training for a large number of school staff at one go. However, the key holder was never found. The computer manager arranged for the premises to be opened and we found the installation untouched for 2 years. Electricity was not working and dirt and dust (and dead animals) were found throughout. Although the electricity was restored the following day, to enable us to identify that over 17 PCs no longer worked correctly, the premises had not been cleaned and were too dirty to be used.



The PCs in the Council offices were in mixed condition. Some were in use, some were not able to be used but left in situ and some were not able to be accessed. The technicians who had been trained previously, had not yet fixed the problems which had arisen, and these were resolved by the IT team. As a result it was agreed to recommend that the City Assembly should not be given any further assistance with computing equipment.

Previously installed equipment at the College of Health Sciences and with Sister Car at Kamas Hospital was in good use or rectified where appropriate. Remaining equipment and monitors were shared between these two sites only, and at Stella Maris in Blantyre.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As ever, the ability to provide IT equipment and training to a wide number of people in Malawi remains a privilege for us all. That we are able to complete the number and variety of tasks required in the short time available is a credit to the capability, flexibility and willingness of the IT team, to do whatever is required.

Last year we asked that a single person be identified as responsible for the equipment and its continued use, and to report this twice yearly. As such, this equipment has been better used than that in Lilongwe and we consider accountability to be a crucial part of providing the IT equipment and training. Accountability to a technical supervisor before changes are agreed should also help to maintain the community resource in good working order.

Schools are still eager to take advantage of internet access. While some teachers have personal access, the provision of wireless access via WiMAX is still not widely available in Malawi. Access should continue to monitor the progress of wireless internet availability and other IT initiatives such as Microsoft's Innovation Centres in Africa, and the "Unlimited Potential" Programme run in conjunction with the United Nations.



The disappointment of Wendell, which was soul destroying, is greatly outweighed by the joy and anticipation of the teaching staff undergoing training and who can envisage the potential and hope such a gift brings. They were, to a person, extremely grateful and keen to thank the people of Glasgow for their thoughtfulness.