



Clean water is a life-changing for an African village.

The Measure of Success at Hands of Hope

Hands of Hope is a volunteer, not-for-profit organization dedicated to meeting the critical needs of women and children in Africa by addressing education, economic development, clean drinking water, and health services. For the past 18 years, Barrington area residents, volunteers, and donors have supported its life-changing mission for the people of Africa. Hands of Hope Founder and President Vicky Wauterlek and her team visited Zambia right after the latest Barrington Garden Fair & Marketplace to assess the progress of the current projects in Zambia and make plans for the organization's next investments. Here is what she learned on her recent trip to Africa.

HANDS OF HOPE, a not-for-profit volunteer organization, has been working to help alleviate poverty in the Western Province of Zambia for the past 10 years. One of the most exciting things about having the team travel to Zambia year after years is visiting the people in the villages that we have come to know and love, and to see the progress these people have made in fighting the long, hard battle out of extreme poverty.

One of those communities is the village of Lutende. Six years ago, we dug a well in this very poor and neglected remote village. The villagers live in mud huts surrounded by sand and little vegetation. They foraged for food and walked more than four miles several times a day to a polluted water source that kept the community in a constant state of poor health. The people had lost hope and felt they were abandoned by their country and by God. The new well brought a sense of hope. Over



Hands of Hope teaches agricultural conservation practices.

and over they said, "Water is life!"

As they gathered to thank us, the area chief expressed his gratitude and then began to tell us about their other challenges. There were no educational opportunities for the children as the nearest school was more than five miles away. The health clinic was 12 miles from Lutende. Looking into the eyes of the children who had gathered before us, we knew they were destined for the same hard future as their parents.

Our Hands of Hope team couldn't forget the faces of those children. We came home and raised



Handmade bricks will be used to build a family home.

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Hands of Hope provided resources for building this primary school.

enough funds to build a primary school, a health clinic, and we also added a few more wells. The community leaders campaigned to make sure all the local children attended the school. The new health clinic meant that the sick no longer had to walk such long distances to get medical help.


Over the next few years, our Zambian staff introduced agricultural conservation practices which helped boost the production of vegetables in the deep, sandy soils of the area. Our agronomists provided hundreds of cashew seedlings and taught the people how to care for them. The mature trees will provide extra income for their families.

The people were taught that by handling their money in a different way, saving a little and being strategic about spending what little they have, they can provide for their children's needs. By putting their small amounts together into a savings group, they could put their money to work by lending money to others in the community.

Lutende has come a long way, but there are still many challenges. Have we done enough to restore hope and a sense of dignity—so that people can see that they have the ability to make changes necessary to provide a better life for themselves and their children? We catch a glimpse, every once in a while, that perhaps we have.

Last week I received a photo from Allan, a father of three young children. It was a picture of a pile of bricks. I wrote back, "Allan, what are these bricks for?" He replied, "Mom, I am saving my money to buy cement, so I can make bricks to build my family a three-room house." I

texted back, "Allan, I am so proud of you!" He replied with a thumbs up.

Seeing poverty-stricken and hopeless communities come alive with anticipation for a better future is how we gauge success at Hands of Hope! 

Vicky Wauterlek is the founder and president of Hands of Hope. To learn more or to donate, visit www.handsofhopeonline.org.

