

The “Container to Malawi” project

Paul Sigmund (May 2010)

As I look back over the past few months, the “Container to Malawi” project has been an amazing conglomeration of the contributions of many people. It is impossible to miss God’s hand in every aspect of the process. There is a story behind each item on that pallet.

The project came about because we wanted to better serve the orphan children at Ministry of Hope, but there is only so much one can carry in a suitcase. My friend Dean Temple works for UTC, a freight forwarding company which specializes in international container shipping. Dean has been terrific in guiding us step-by-step in the intricacies of international exporting, which is much less expensive than air freight.

A member of my small group at Liberty Corner Church introduced me to her friend Kathy Sturgeon, who works for Colgate-Palmolive Corporation. She in turn offered to personally deliver my letter explaining that efforts to provide health education have little consequence when the instruments necessary are not affordable, and requesting their support. Within one week, a very substantial shipment of toothpaste, hand soap, and toothbrushes arrived at the church.

Last year, we encountered a Malawian musical group at one of the feeding centers. The three musicians had made their own instruments, including a guitar built from an oil can, a 2 x 4 piece of wood, and lengths of copper wire for strings. The drum set featured oil cans and pots for the drums, a pot lid and scraps of sheet metal for the cymbals. Together, they sounded terrific!

I was determined to find one or two used cymbals to give to the drummer. It was just an idea, until a month ago when I saw a woman in the process of dragging an entire rock & roll drum set out to the curb for clean-up week! One of the neighbors had already grabbed a drum, but when he heard I wished to ship the entire set to Malawi, and the story of the kid with the homemade drums, he ran home and donated it back.

I shared this story with Keith Goellner, drummer at the church’s contemporary service, and he took the entire set home and lovingly restored the broken components, secured donations from music stores to replace the drum heads and other missing parts, and found packing boxes (the big green footlocker) to safely ship everything. He also donated a dozen professional drumsticks. Chris Weisbecker, a church member, later donated three more drums. Now we’re thinking about initiating a drum training program fashioned after the program at New City Kids Church in Jersey City, where the kids teach other kids how to play musical instruments!

Malawian children love soccer, but lack the ability to purchase real soccer balls, so they commonly compress plastic shopping bags into a ball size and wrap it with tape. Through the Free Cycle Network, Chris Schueler, a local soccer coach, contacted me with a dozen year-old balls in good condition and asked if we could use more. She took it upon herself to contact all of the other coaches in the league, as well as a soccer training center, and collected 117 balls for us!

We were then offered cases of used children’s books, and the 7 cases on the pallet will become the initiation of a small library at several of the feeding centers. We’ve also cut out the wooden components for 4 nice bookcases, which the Vision Team will assemble when they arrive in Malawi.

The other items on the pallet include many new and used blankets donated by members of the church. Blankets are a true luxury to families and children, and it does become cold and damp in the Malawian winter, and rainy season months. I have no doubt God will see that shipment to its intended destination.