

***Little Dresses for Africa...planting in the hearts of little girls that they are worthy.*** After seeing the difficult life so many experienced, especially the little girls and women, a seed was planted in the heart of Founder Rachel O'Neill. ***"I wanted to do something to show the little girls they are valuable, and that God has a plan for each of them"*** A simple idea was born and a goal to bring 1000 dresses back to the small village of Thobola in the Ntcheu district of Malawi, Africa was born.

Soon the vision spread as a simple way to honor the girls and volunteers from *all over the world* began to send simple sun dresses made from pillowcases. The simple pattern was adopted because even a novice seamstress could make one, since the pillowcase already had the side seams and hem in it. The dresses were taken to the girls and were a tangible way of giving hope. Not wanting to leave the boys out, **"Britches for Boys"** soon followed.

Simple lessons were shared of hygiene and sanitation with an emphasis on the value of education. Because of the interest Little Dresses for Africa was showing in the remote village, the government installed a borehole and came to vaccinate the children in the area. Little Dresses for Africa built a two-room primary school, named in honor of Rachel's mother, an educator. **The Nan Ray School of Learning** began with 2 rooms and 2 grades and continued to add a level each year, graduating it's first class of students in 2019 and continues to this day followed by a second school in **Mataka Village** which continues to add school levels, as does the third school in Lumbadzi, **Hope Primary School**.

Little Dresses for Africa soon discovered that their very popular dresses were much more than clothing. Reports were received that the girls wearing the new dresses were much less likely to be harassed or abducted on their way to draw water because others could see someone cared for them. **A sense of honor and pride was planted in the hearts of the young girls.** As the message spread, other countries began to request the dresses and boxes were sent by postal service, with mission teams and taken by LDFA teams serving in Africa. By 2021, over **10 million dresses and britches for boys had been sent to 97 countries in and around Africa** and the number continues to grow as volunteers sew millions of beautiful dresses and send them to headquarters in Michigan to be shipped to all parts of Africa and beyond. With the realization that the need was ever constant and could not wait for US Teams to distribute the items, 40ft containers full of relief, are shipped twice a year and a Non-government Organization (NGO) was established in Malawi to continue the distributions on a daily and weekly basis.

Projects focusing on orphans and widows were established all in line with the mission: **Glorify God, Serve Mankind and Walk in Obedience.** Gifts for the Widows and child-headed families included **"Buckets of Hope"** which contained a month's worth of supplies such as maize, sugar, oil, salt, sugar, tea, Vaseline, and other gifts to offer relief and hope to the most vulnerable. The Buckets are distributed through churches and personal home visits. The need for washable menstrual pads was discovered and **"The Dignity Program" was implemented.** Tens of thousands of pads continue to be distributed which keeps girls in school.

The work continues year round with as LDFA coordinates with other organizations to distribute relief in remote villages with items supplied out of our local warehouse in Malawi. Short term mission groups spend time in Malawi each year to teach and encourage.

LDFA is much more than little dresses. A decision was made to focus on 3 areas through the distribution of little dresses: **Clean water, primary education and community.**

**Clean water saves lives immediately** and increases sanitation and health while decreasing sickness and disease. It also keeps girls in school as the boreholes are closer and less time is required to go long dangerous distances to draw water.

**Primary education**, when placed near a village, immediately raises the bar in a community as a teacher brings knowledge and authority as well as showing the community the importance of education. Many young children are much more likely to attend when the school is nearby their village.

**Community sustains the efforts** by working together to take care of the borehole and school and making health and education a community priority. Starting with one well in a tiny village, LDFA and their supporters have installed over 120 wells in Malawi at the end of 2023, supplying life-saving clean water to over 550,000 and the number continues to grow as wells are sponsored. ***Every drop of water tells the story of life and changes the community for good.***