

Global Good

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Local nonprofits work to change lives in Africa

By Bonnie Kruger

The proverb says, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to catch fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

A local nonprofit is living that mission in different remote villages in Africa.

Dawn Malcolm founded Ballwin-based nonprofit Lighting the Path in 2011, with a mission to empower women through social programs and outreach opportunities in several impoverished villages in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

“In college, I studied psychology and art as a double major, with a minor in French. Little did I know that God was orchestrating that eclectic group of studies,” Malcolm joked. “They have all served me well in my mission work.”



Using her art background, Malcolm has taught the local women to sew using patterns, how to make a small wood loom and mat as an alternate to sleeping on the ground, fabric weaving and dyeing fabric with indigo, a natural compound extracted from plants.

Burkina Faso, one of the three most undeveloped and poorest regions in Africa, is about the size of Colorado. Approximately 80 percent of its population lives in poverty. Compounding the issue is the fact that women are considered the property of their husbands and as such have no voice and, often, are perceived to have little or no value. Malcolm is working to change that perception.



Twice each year, Malcolm travels to Africa, staying for about a month each time.

Immersion into the African culture has helped bridge Lighting the Path’s relationship with the tribal chief and the villagers, allowing Lighting the Path “to effect small changes that can improve their lives immensely,” explained Malcolm.

“We want to share the story of faith,” she added. “Through this work we hope to show the love of Christ.”

This past fall she taught women from the Kimini village to make shea butter soap and lotion using natural resources found in Africa. The women earned \$32 from that project, the equivalent of 16 days’ wages. To support their trade, the women also received a small business finance lesson.

“The women are very grateful, and once they know your heart, they welcome you to their village,” Malcolm said. “When you empower the woman, the entire family benefits.”

The locals are subsistence farmers with their primary resources being cotton and peanuts. Using what is available, Malcolm taught the women to make sugared peanuts to sell in local markets.



Malcolm said the Moringa tree is another valuable resource found in the region. Its tiny leaves have enormous health benefits including seven times the Vitamin C of oranges, four times the Vitamin A of carrots, four times the calcium of milk, three times the potassium of bananas and two times the protein of yogurt.

She explained that the leaves can be crushed into a powder and mixed into soups and sauces. She hopes to increase the number of Moringa trees and educate the villagers on the use of its leaves for the health benefits.

Mostly working alone, Malcolm partners with

Sheltering Wings, a nonprofit mission organization based out of Alton, Illinois, that provides a Christina missionary presence, food, medical, school and orphanage resources to meet the basic needs of the villagers.

Like their adult counterparts, female children often are overlooked. Most families do not want to pay for their daughters' education beyond the sixth grade. However, a local pastor in Burkina Faso, who has seen the good work begun by Lighting The Path, has asked Malcolm to join him in creating a women and teen center to allow local females to finish their education. Both a dormitory and education building are planned, with Malcolm facilitating the skills training that would continue as a year-round program.

"It would look very similar to the type of training I do now but it would be available to larger groups of women and they would continue to train others in my absence," explained Malcolm. In the 10 months she is not traveling to Burkina Faso, Malcolm is researching grant opportunities, fundraising and studying French, the official language of Burkina Faso. Malcolm speaks French to an interpreter, who then translates it into the everyday Jula dialect.



Lighting the Path has been honored with being named one of the "Top rated non-profits of 2015" By Great Non-profits. Find out more information at www.lightingthepath.org