

Thank you!

I'm delighted to say that our band of volunteers is steadily increasing. Over the past few months more prayer group leaders, speakers and admin assistants at head office have joined the ranks of our committed volunteers. Welcome and thank you all for being so generous with your time and talents!



Photo: Mark Hill Info@singsandsBB.com

You all make a big difference. Whether travelling to speak to a church group on our behalf, meeting monthly to uphold the work of the Mission in prayer, or sifting through photographs in the office it might be easy to forget that you are playing a part in pursuing a vision of a world without leprosy.

Recently a story was shared during one of our daily prayers and devotions. It may be familiar to you:

A man was walking along the seashore. As he looked down the beach he saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone dancing to the day, and began to walk faster to catch up. As he approached he saw it was a young boy who wasn't dancing, but was reaching down, picking up something and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

As the man got closer, he called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?" The young boy paused, looked up, and replied, "Throwing starfish into the sea."

"Why?" asked the man.

The boy answered, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw the starfish back into the water, they'll die." "But young man," came back the reply, "Don't you realise that there are miles and miles of beach, and starfish all along it? Nothing you can do will make a difference."

The young boy listened politely, then bent down to pick up another starfish. Holding it gently in the palm of his hand, he said, "Well, it'll make a difference to this one!" and he threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves.

We have all been gifted to make a difference, whatever the task, whatever the challenge. What is done in the Lord's name and through His Spirit has the power and potential to change circumstances and transform lives. Thank you to all of you for the valued part you play in transforming the lives of those affected by leprosy through your love, compassion and action.

Here to help

Over the past 18 months it has been a pleasure to get to know many of you, either through email or telephone conversations, or at events or volunteer speaker training days. Please remember that I'm here to support you in the voluntary work you do for The Leprosy Mission, and would love to hear from you! If you have a comment or question, need a travel expense claim form, are running short of leaflets, *New Day* or other resources do get in touch with me. Or if you're using an approach to prayer, or a useful resource at a speaking engagement that could be shared with other volunteers I'd be delighted to hear about it!



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A Mozambican volunteer

Volunteers greatly enhance the work of The Leprosy Mission, not just here in the UK but worldwide, through their generous gifts of time. Volunteering activities may differ from country to country, but the commitment and valuable contribution are the same. This is the story of one such volunteer.

On a visit to Mozambique for The Leprosy Mission in December 2009 Siân Arulanantham met Ali, a volunteer for ALEMO, the association of people affected by leprosy in Mozambique. He told her his story.

'I come from a village in the far north of Mozambique. I developed patches on my skin when I was about 24 years old. My relatives suspected leprosy as my uncle had it a few years ago. They were scared, thinking it must be very contagious, so they hid me away for months. They did not want to catch leprosy, or for anyone to know I had the disease. I was kept on my own in a room and not allowed out or to talk to anyone, just hidden away. No one would eat with me; for three months my family put my food in the room and went away, it was terrible. Eventually they took me to a witchdoctor, but the symptoms just got worse, so a family member suggested that I go to the hospital. Most of the family were against this as my uncle had not had proper treatment there and had to travel to Tanzania for help. Finally my mother decided that something had to be done and she took me to the hospital.

When we arrived we waited and waited but we were not seen. The next day we returned and waited again. My mother spoke to a nurse who agreed to find the district leprosy supervisor. I was told that I had the disease, and given the medication. I took it regularly and came back to the hospital each month for the next supply of drugs. You need courage to take the tablets.

They smell and taste bad and can make you vomit, but I faithfully took the medicine and after five months things began to improve. Other people with



Ali volunteers in Mozambique

leprosy were neglecting to take their medication, so staff used me as a good example to show them the need to follow the treatment. Two years after the first tablets, I was told that the problem was over. No more leprosy! Even if I injure myself now, I know how to take care of it and it does not take long to heal. My family no longer discriminate against me.

One day, a few years back, ALEMO came to visit our village. They wanted to form a group to support people affected by leprosy. The village leader did not tell me about the meeting as nobody knew that I'd had leprosy. I saw the group and wanted to join, but no one would believe that I had been affected by leprosy. They checked with medical staff at the hospital and discovered that I once had the disease. They let me join, and I was chosen to lead the group. I was glad to volunteer. I know what it feels like to have leprosy, the fear that people have of you and the discrimination that results. I want to tell people the truth about the disease, to help them understand that it is not very contagious and there is nothing to fear, it can be treated'.

It is good to be part of The Leprosy Mission's strategic planning workshop. The needs of people affected by leprosy are listened to, and by working together we can stop discrimination and improve people's lives.'

Meals for Miles

In 2009 The Leprosy Mission England and Wales pledged to counteract its carbon footprint by planting trees. Overall mileage for the year was calculated, and correlated to a figure of 1000 trees. These are to be purchased via Gifts for Life, and planted in Nigeria to provide income generation and an improved diet for people affected by leprosy – altogether a win-win situation!

Even if you do not claim all your mileage (or any of it), when you travel on our behalf I will need to keep a record of your journey so it can be included in the calculation for 2010.

Expenses

We recognise that volunteers make a gift of their time, and should not be out-of-pocket if this prevents them from offering their time. We therefore encourage everyone to reclaim their travel expenses in line with our volunteer expenses policy. If you would like to donate some or all of your expenses to The Leprosy Mission and you pay UK taxes, please consider submitting an expenses claim and then making a donation as this allows us to claim back gift aid on any qualifying donations. You can do this by filling in a claim form for the full amount of your expenses, then indicating the amount you would like to claim back at the bottom of the form. Please contact me if you would like to know more.



Are you part of a talented flower arranging group?

We are looking for 70 groups to take part in The Leprosy Mission's landmark event, the Festival of Flowers 2012, at Southwark Cathedral. Please visit www.tlmewfestivalofflowers.org.uk for details