

**Lifted Up Manzununu Empowerment Group, Zimbabwe**  
**Partnered with St. Luke's UMC, Orlando, March 2021 – March 2024**

**SECOND YEAR HIGHLIGHTS - 2023**

- The group received funds from Zoe in the second year to begin a group income project and they chose to start a chicken layers project. They share some of the eggs among members for consumption and sell the rest to ensure that each group member can buy all needed groceries.
- The group still works together on their nutritional garden but they have commercialized it by specializing on cash crops such as tomatoes, onions, and cabbages.
- The group increased its table banking contribution from \$3 to \$5 per month. Members took loans to repair their toilets and houses, start project for their siblings, and start new businesses.
- Each group member is now running more than one business. Notable achievements have been made: they constructed/ repaired houses and toilets, constructed boreholes, bought large livestock, bought farming inputs, are paying school fees for siblings, and can access health care.
- The households are multiple crops in their fields such as maize, sunflower, sorghum, cow peas and beans. They bought the seeds using their own resources. The households are now able to eat three daily meals.
- The group assisted a youth whose property was grabbed by her uncle. The land was restored through the traditional leadership and he was able to use it for farming during the 2023 cropping season.

**FIRST YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT - 2022**

**Group Activities**

- Nutritional garden. They plant various vegetable like onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, cow peas and butternuts. They share some of their produce and sell the excess.
- Mutual help activities. They have been helping each other with harvests and home construction projects.

**Households Agricultural Activities**

The quality and quantity of meals has improved for most households and 24 are now food secure in that they are able to eat two or three meals a day.

- All 24 households planted crops which include maize, beans, cow peas, and groundnuts.
  - 80% of the group harvested an average of 6 x 50kg bags of maize or more. The maize was affected by lack of rain and the rest of the group harvested less. The worst affected households have been advised to use some of their profits from their income projects to purchase maize from other Zoe participants who had better harvests.
  - 88% of the group harvested an average of 150kg of cow peas, beans, and groundnuts (the remaining households were still in the process of harvesting at the time of this report). Households that harvested more small grains than they require for their own consumption were also encouraged to sell surplus to households who were hardest hit by the drought situation.
- All 24 households have kitchen gardens at their homes which they started by sharing excess seedlings from their group nutritional garden.

- 13 households are raising livestock which they purchased with their own resources. These animals serve as income projects, a form of savings, and are also kept for consumption as meat, eggs, and milk.

### **Household Income Generating Activities**

The following are the numbers and types of all income generating projects operated by the youth since they started participating in the Zoe program. Because of their rural location and current economic conditions, most have started with farming projects and often keep more than one type of livestock.

1 hairdressing salon	6 keep goats	8 keep traditional poultry
2 catering businesses	3 keep broiler chickens	3 raise turkeys
4 sell clothes and groceries	1 does fish farming	4 do market gardening

Zoe paid vocational training fees so that two of the youth could learn the catering business.

### **First year report from Zimbabwe on groups which began meeting April 2021**

*The following is an overview of the trainings and resources distributed to the children in empowerment groups during their first year in the Zoe Empowers Zimbabwe program.*

This review focuses on the 12 empowerment groups which were formed in March 2021 to start meeting in April 2021. It is a general outline of the support that Zoe Empowers provided to the participants in terms of trainings and inputs. There are 315 households and 996 children in this class.

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### **Income Generation**

The 315 heads of household attended training sessions on entrepreneurship, basic business practices, savings, customer care, and bookkeeping which were facilitated by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises. These trainings helped young people enhance their knowledge on starting, managing, and growing their businesses. The trainings also assisted young people to identify businesses that are viable and profitable based on their local economic environment. Business plans were created and shared with Zoe program facilitators for further advice. In June 2021, about 85% of the households received individual grants to start their businesses of selling items like groceries and secondhand clothing or rearing livestock and market farming. The other 15% received tools to start trade businesses.

The businesses are thriving. Some youth are beginning to diversify their businesses and the groups are now starting group village savings with contributions from members. Exchange visits were also done during this period with a few first-year group representatives meeting third-year groups so that they could learn from their experience. They youth also motivated each other to work hard in expanding and starting new businesses.

### **Food Security**

Only 3% of the families from this class of groups were managing to eat at least two meals per day upon recruitment into the program. The rest ate once a day or nothing due to lack of farming inputs or dependable sources of income. They survived on begging and working for other people in the community.

Soon after joining the Zoe program, all 315 heads of household were trained on horticulture, animal husbandry, conservation farming, and market linkages. In May 2021, they received inputs to start group nutrition gardens. Each group received the following: 25kgs fertilizer, 5kgs bean seeds, 100g cucumber seeds, 100g carrot seeds, 100g onion seeds, 100g tomato seeds, 100g rape seeds, and 100g butternut seeds. These group gardens teach the youth how to grow their own food, plus they share the produce among members to improve their diet and sell the surplus. Group members encouraged each other to start kitchen gardens at their homes and 88% households have done so.

In October 2021, every household received 50kg of fertilizer and 10kgs of certified maize seeds. About 12% of the households received small grains which include 5kg sorghum, 5kg beans, and 5kg cowpeas. Due to widespread climate change, the region where the first-year groups are located received erratic rainfall which negatively affected some of the crops. It is estimated that 70% will harvest at least one tonne (1000 kg) of maize which is a sufficient for providing a staple through to the next harvest, but the rest will likely get 350-700 kg.



*Hope Group after receiving farming inputs*

A total of 12 households received small livestock from Zoe which included Boschveld chickens for laying of eggs to sell and for meat production. Each group selected deserving members to receive these livestock from Zoe, many other members were able to purchase livestock on their own after starting their income projects.

### **Health & Hygiene**

The children entering the Zoe Empowers Zimbabwe program were very vulnerable to diseases and other health issues. Therefore, Zoe program facilitators together with local nurses, village health workers, and environmental health technicians, conducted trainings on topics of personal and environmental hygiene, malaria prevention, reproductive health, and COVID-19 prevention. Each youth was encouraged to bathe regularly, brush their teeth, build toilets, dig rubbish pits, and get drinking water from protected sources. Households were encouraged to construct 'tippy taps' for regular hand washing. In the past year, five members were directly assisted by Zoe to access medical treatment, surgery, and medication.



Above is pictured Blessing Group after receiving their health and hygiene kits. In May, all families received items like facemasks, towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, hand sanitizing soap, 20-liter water buckets, and mosquito repellent.

During the time of recruitment, COVID-19 was still prevalent and program facilitators encouraged households and mentors to get vaccinated against COVID-19. All 12 mentors were vaccinated and 82% of household members have received at least their first dose of the vaccine.

### **Child Rights**

Before Zoe, young people reported they had experienced various forms of abuse from their guardians or relatives. Some relatives forcibly took over property left by the children's deceased parents. Trainings on child rights, child marriages, and inheritance were conducted with all the 12 groups. Zoe assisted two young people through traditional leadership to recover land that they had lost to relatives. Counseling was provided to eight youths who were abused physically, emotionally, and sexually (one of these was referred to the local hospital for medical examinations and the matter was reported to the police). With support from Zoe, five youths have acquired their national identity cards and four acquired birth certificates.

### **Housing**

About 91% of the households had no secure housing upon recruitment. Houses had dirt floors and leaking roofs. Some could be repaired but others needed to be rebuilt. In June 2021, four families were given house construction materials by Zoe and with help from their groupmates were able to build new homes. Twenty-one houses were repaired with the heads of household using the profits realized from their income generating projects. About 77% of heads of household mentioned that their relatives now want to visit them after seeing changes at their homes whereas before people avoided them. Group members are encouraged to save funds towards improving their housing situation and to use locally available resources.

### **Education**

About 77% of siblings were not attending school regularly and some had dropped out altogether. To date, 44% have re-enrolled back into school. In the beginning, Zoe assisted 12 siblings with primary fees, 18 siblings with secondary fees, and others with uniforms and stationery. Heads of household can now pay for some of the school expenses using their own earnings, this includes eight youths who paid their own examinations fees using the profits from their businesses.

**Spiritual Strengthening**

About 90% of the households thought that God had abandoned them before their recruitment by Zoe. However, they now feel that God loves them. They start and finish their regular meetings with prayer. They have selected a group pastor and enjoy sharing devotions during their meetings. In May 2021, each group received a bible that they use to share bible teachings. During Easter 2022, the groups met and invited pastors of their choice to preach. It was a time of spiritual revival.

**Second Year Expectations**

Preparations to receive grants for group income projects are underway as the youth start their second year. Groups have started building fowl runs, have obtained land for rearing goats, and prepared land for horticulture. Only four had already received their group grants. They will use the earning from their group project to grow the group savings so that they use the money to boost already existing businesses and start new ones.

## Lifted Up Group, Zimbabwe

24 households and a total of 80 children



### **Charles (m) 20**

Kudakwashe (m) 16  
Dolso (m) 12  
Takunda (m) 5

### **Gift (m) 18**

Bridget (f) 12  
Ropafadzo (f) 8  
Takunda (m) 4

### **Tendai (m) 16**

Paida (f) 12  
Prince (m) 8  
Partneg (m) 5

### **Panashe (m) 17**

Ngoni (m) 20  
Munashe (m) 20  
Learnmore (m) 17  
Anotida (f) 5

### **Emmanuel (m) 15**

Norah (f) 19  
Farai (m) 12

### **Passmore (m) 20**

**Chengetai (m) 16**  
Mirriam (f) 10  
Wedzerai (m) 14

### **Winnie (f) 14**

Rejoice (f) 11  
Tafadzwa (f) 5  
Perfect (f) 11  
Tatenda (f) 2

### **Yolanda (f) 14**

Tatenda (m) 6  
Tawana (f) 3  
Melan (f) 1

### **Aron (m) 20**

Noah (m) 16  
Juliet (f) 16  
Amos (m) 12  
Maria (f) 12  
Elijah (m) 9  
Memory (f) 7  
Maria (f) 6  
Patience (f) 2  
Patina (f) 2  
Simon (m) 4

### **Emilia (f) 15**

Ennia (f) 9  
Tatenda (m) 8

### **Takunda (m) 15**

### **Tawanda (m) 18**

Ngoni (m) 12

### **Prince (m) 17**

**Tafadzwa (m) 20**  
Tanyaradzwa (f) 12  
Talent (m) 14  
Portia (f) 5  
Taonga (m) 7

### **Pure (m) 16**

### **Melanie (f) 14**

Colis (m) 10  
Lenon (m) 4

### **Sean (m) 14**

Wayne (m) 12  
Kassip (m) 10

### **Kennith (m) 16**

Clemance (f) 11  
Kevane (m) 11

### **Norest (m) 18**

Rayne (m) 10  
Rudairo (f) 9

### **Sifelani (m) 15**

Keith (m) 6

### **Aleck (m) 15**

Faith (f) 12  
Yen (m) 6

### **Mazvita (m) 17**

Moses (m) 13  
Ratidzo (m) 10  
Mabasa (f) 5

### **Allen (m) 16**

Profit (m) 7

**The following is an overview of how Zoe empowers orphaned and vulnerable children to move beyond the need for charity by comprehensively addressing the multiple challenges faced by those in living in extreme poverty.**

### **Group Formation**

When Zoe first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. Staff members explain how Zoe is an empowerment program, enabling children to move from crippling poverty and dependency to economic and social self-sufficiency. Although different from the usual relief approach, it resonates with leaders who want to see sustainable change in their village. Since staff are indigenous to each country in which Zoe operates they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available.

During the first meeting the youth elect leaders, make rules to guide their meetings, choose a group name, and decide when and where to hold weekly gatherings. To strengthen peer bonds, groups begin shared income activities and agricultural projects. Nearly all groups immediately establish a “merry-go-round” fund to encourage meeting attendance and provide financial benefits. During meetings, group members contribute a small amount into a single pool of money which is then given in full to a different member each time. A variation involves saving the money until there is enough to make bulk purchases of small livestock, groceries, or housewares to be distributed to each member.

The youth complete training on topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights within the first six months. If they have access to land they receive seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings are not attending school, Zoe provides uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who have skills are provided grants so that they can start small businesses, others begin vocational training. Most importantly, all begin to experience God’s love and they realize that though many are orphans, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

### **The Dream**

One of the first tasks new members complete is the creation of their “Dream” chart. Most orphaned and vulnerable children entering the Zoe empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive; there is neither time to think about the future nor reason to hope for something better. But through Zoe and your partnership, the children learn to imagine a new life and prepare to make it a reality.

The Zoe program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they examine their current situation and then set their goals. After considering their family’s hopes and needs, the youth who is considered the head of the household and is the primary member of their empowerment group creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions.



This youth then presents the Dream to the rest of the group members who express support and give feedback, especially concerning the primary goal. These Dream documents help the program facilitators better understand the conditions of the children’s lives so they can address specific needs or traumas suffered. The family keeps a copy of their Dream, often displaying it in their home to provide daily motivation as they strive to create their new life. As they progress through the empowerment program they will often update their Dream.

## **Connections**

One of the biggest disadvantages orphaned and vulnerable children face is isolation from peers and the larger community. Struggling on their own, the children lack moral support, access to community resources, and a network of people to help them progress and face challenges. Zoe creates connections.

Peer group. The youth served by Zoe have often dropped out of school and stopped attending church or community events. They do not even realize how many others share their plight, but at the first group meeting, when each new member tells their story, the bonding process begins. By working together on group projects and helping each other make improvements to their homes, friendships form and the group becomes an extended family committed to helping each other face challenges and achieve their dreams. New Zoe group members are also introduced to youth who have graduated from Zoe or been a member of another group for a couple years. These relationships provide advice based on experience, networking possibilities, and inspiration.

Program facilitator and mentor. Zoe program facilitators usually hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. They care deeply about the children and are available to provide counseling as needed, but they do not fill a role of guardian nor do they attend all the group meetings. This is important so that the youth develop their own problem solving abilities and can become fully self-reliant. Each group has a local mentor which they select to help represent and guide the group within their community. Mentors receive training from Zoe and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits, and help resolve challenges in the community.

Community leaders and government officials. This includes school administrators to help children return to classes; local leaders who can address cases of abuse and improperly seized property; government officials and specialists who can provide expert advice on business development, agriculture and higher education; and health service providers.

And a powerful connection is you! All Zoe groups know the opportunities they receive are from God, through the love and concern coming from their partners far away. They are amazed that you would care for them without ever having met them. This powerful connection is further strengthened if a partner can visit the country to witness what the youth have achieved.

## **Child Rights**

A major focus of Zoe's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international laws promise. Such training is often conducted by the local officials in charge of enforcing child rights so the children get to know those who are responsible for their protection. Additionally, Zoe's group-based model creates crowd support through which the youth can defend each other from all forms of abuse; physical, financial or emotional.

In the many communities where Zoe works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and often feel they are powerless to resist. Protecting the rights of girls includes educating the entire community about the dangers and harm inherent in all forms of mistreatment, especially child marriage, sex trafficking, and female genital mutilation. Zoe's emphasis on forming gender-mixed groups strengthens the support available to girls within their groups and creates leaders who will encourage fair and just treatment for all.



Zoe's goal is to ensure that all children are able to stand up for themselves and their rights in the community. Often children in the Zoe group learn these lessons so well that they not only defend their own rights, but also the rights of others who may be abused or neglected in their communities.

### **Food Security**

Children entering the Zoe empowerment program struggle every day to alleviate their hunger. Usually they try to find work, but because they lack status or an adult advocate in their community, they are paid extremely low wages or small amounts of food. They might try growing their own food, but they do not have the resources or knowledge to succeed. It is not unusual for these children to go two or three days without eating. Occasionally they must resort to begging or even taking from a neighbor's field just to survive. Even those children who do manage to eat daily suffer health consequences from the poor nutritional quality of their meals.

With guidance from Zoe program facilitators, new groups learn what foods they need to eat as well as explore different ways to attain a stable food source. Because Zoe is an empowerment program, the children are not told what to do, but are instead given options and training so that they can devise their own approach to becoming food secure and self-sufficient.

Children in rural areas who can access land will learn about the best agricultural practices for their region and then be given the seeds, fertilizer, and tools to begin vegetable gardens and/or plant crops like maize (corn). The households are also encouraged to start raising small animals, like rabbits or chickens, after learning about animal husbandry. In Zimbabwe, a new group usually plants a group "nutritional" garden before starting their own home gardens. This provides an opportunity to learn about growing different types of vegetables, the importance of having a balanced diet, and to how to work together as a team. In urban areas where they do not have access to land for planting or raising animals, the income project development is accelerated.

### **Income Generation**

Zoe helps the youth generate an income at both the group and household level. A group project might involve growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, or producing and selling a product like soap. These projects provide experience, foster group cohesion, and produce profits for the group's savings and loan fund. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Some youth who are already skilled immediately receive resources to begin businesses in trades like tailoring, auto mechanics, or hairstyling. Zoe urges youth to continue growing their wealth and financial security by completing vocational training, expanding their business into new markets, or starting multiple businesses.

Before distributing resources, Zoe trains all the heads of households on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group members take the following steps:

- Brainstorm what businesses could succeed in their community
- Create individual and group business plans and present these to the group for discussion
- Vote to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan

Once the business plan is approved, the individual receives a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit. Throughout this process the Zoe program facilitator is available to provide guidance but does not tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. If a poor decision is made, the youth will learn from the experience, but still have the support of their group and Zoe to try again.

To provide money for business expansion and also generate group income, many groups establish "table banks." Members start the fund by all contributing a set amount of money which is immediately made available for short

term loans with the interest paid up front. This pre-paid interest is also available for loans. The fund grows fast. Some groups pay dividends to all members, others use it for something that benefits the whole group like their Christmas party.

### **Health and Disease Prevention**

Zoe's goal is to address immediate health needs, teach the children how to live healthy lives, and connect them to medical resources. Preventative education includes:

- Basic hygiene practices such as hand washing, boiling water, and keep their home and surroundings clean
- Nutrition, especially important since the children have often had very limited diets
- Diseases transmission and treatment; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls' personal health and safety

Many of the children have lost a parent to HIV infection and often the children too are suffering from the virus although they may not realize either of these facts due to a lack of testing. There is great stigma associated with the disease so that people avoid testing and are even reluctant to seek treatment. Furthermore, there is a lack of even basic information about the disease and prevention. Zoe provides supportive opportunities for children to be tested, helps them access medications, and provides extensive education to counter the many misconceptions held in the community.

After youth attend training and begin implementing basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, Zoe provides the first distribution of items like mosquito nets, sleeping mats, blankets, and hygiene products. Health insurance in Zimbabwe is expensive so the families are encouraged to have resources set aside to address medical issues. Often the empowerment groups will create a special fund to help with emergencies.

Training also includes teaching the children about the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive in order to increase their status in the community. When the children look "smart" their confidence increases, they feel better about themselves, and others in the community begin treating them with respect and acceptance. In the second and third years of the program it is possible to pick out the once-ragged Zoe children because they are often the cleanest looking children in the village and carry themselves with pride and dignity.

### **Housing**

Often, children entering Zoe are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair or are homeless without a permanent residence. It is also common for orphaned and vulnerable children to work in exchange for a room; this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and with little time for other activities or to earn money for food. In general, Zoe does not provide housing for the children, but it does give the group funds which they can use to help out those members in greatest need by providing temporary rent assistance or materials to make emergency repairs. In Zimbabwe, the government has high standards for new construction. As a result, most of the children focus on making repairs to their existing home and they save money for a long term goal of building a good house.

### **Education**

Zoe does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join empowerment groups about the importance of education. These children desperately want to attend school. Prior to joining Zoe, many children participated in school, but were forced to drop out due to chronic illness, hunger, social ostracism, lack of

clothing, and/or lack of money. Once in the program, the young heads of households (many of whom have been out of the educational system for too long to be reintegrated) are eager to see their younger siblings back in school as soon as possible.

So that children can quickly return to school, Zoe will meet with school administrators and assist with some of the expenses such as uniforms, fees, and materials. The group may also pay for some of these materials when there is a special need. As with all other aspects of the Zoe program, the emphasis is on empowering the children to pay for their own educational expenses. It is a great source of pride and self-esteem for the youth who are the heads of their households to be able to share how they are able to work to send their younger siblings to school. It is like hearing parents brag about the accomplishments of their children and it is very moving to see in a sibling.

### **Faith**

Often the isolation that the children feel when they begin the Zoe program extends to their thoughts about God. Because they are abused and discriminated against by their community - and often this includes Christians in their village - they believe God has also abandoned or even cursed them. At other times they believe that maybe God does not exist, or if God does exist that they are somehow beyond God's love. In the very first meeting a Zoe staff member often shares the Lord's Prayer with the children, and talk about how they are not truly orphans because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

Meetings begin with Scripture readings, prayer, and devotions led by a group member, but while this is available to the children they are never coerced into the Christian faith. Zoe's program is religiously non-restrictive, yet offers a compelling view of the love Christians show to others. One of the most powerful parts of the empowerment program is the way these children put their faith into action in their own community. They forgive those who have harmed them; feed others who are even poorer than themselves; adopt other children and share their resources and knowledge with them; pray and care for one another; and pay fair wages to those who had once taken advantage of their situation with hard labor and poor pay. These children return good for evil and can be examples to all of what it means to live as Christians.