

Manx Linksa series in which Cheryl Cousins from the One World Centre talks to local people, who have lived or worked in the developing world, about remarkable people they have met!

A life in the day of Jane Mwambe.

If we hear the words “volunteering overseas”, we all tend to conjure up images of feeding the poor, or relief work and medical staff... but we don't necessarily all have those skills and we many of us don't have the money or time to make a long term commitment to volunteering !

Chris Astley, living in Foxdale with his wife and three children, is an aviation engineer who has managed to balance his commitment to his family and job, with his desire to share his skills on a voluntary basis. He came to the Island to work for Manx Airlines 7 years ago having travelled extensively with his previous work in the RAF. Through this work he developed a deep respect for other cultures; aware that many of the people he met still hold onto family and community values, a thing he feels we are loosing touch with in our own society.

Working full time Chris has committed 4 weeks a year of his annual leave to working overseas with MAF, (Mission Aviation Fellowship); any where, any place... and his family comes too! In 2005 & 6 the family, supported by BA, set out for a months work in Nairobi, Kenya, responding to an advert requesting for help to fulfil short term resource gaps servicing the fleet of MAF planes... Chris would be sharing his own professional skills, his wife Angie and their three children Chloe, Libby and Max chose to help in an orphanage in the city.

Working alongside the MAF team at Wilson Airport Chris became friendly with the Kenyan pilots and staff, but one pilot in particular attracted his attention... Jane Mwambe, the only female pilot of the fleet! The job of a MAF pilot is demanding at any time, but at the age of 25 and the only female in this male dominated society Chris was aware that Jane has added pressure. It was her complete professionalism and dedication to her job, mixed with her humility that impressed Chris, and he found out her story.

Jane's childhood ambition to fly became a reality when her local church connected her to MAF and sponsored her through a Pilot Training Programme in Oxford. Fully qualified she could have taken a job with Kenya airways and receive a commercial salary starting at \$6000 a month, an enormous sum in Kenya, but Jane opted for substantially lower wages in her desire to help others, to pay back some of the advantages she had received. Flying solo on a daily basis for up to 6 hours a day Jane works to help ensure that the work of other charitable organisations, NGO's, missions and medical care can continue.

African weather systems are complex with cloud formations that can be deceptive and hard to read. With personal risk her work often takes her to remote areas that can't be accessed by road, where there are no runways for take offs and landings, and where the

sheer crowds of people standing on her “landing strip” can make the approach impossible, she can encounter life threatening situations on a daily basis.

The “taxi” aspect of the work helps to fund the general ongoing service of MAF which now operates in over 33 countries across the world, It is estimated that a MAF flight takes off every 3 minutes, every day. But the main priority of the work is emergency aid, offering a free service in emergency situations. On any day Jane could be involved in flight planning, or training new pilots, checking her own plane or revalidating her licence. Or, she could be flying her six seater Cessna 210 into the flood areas of Ethiopia to help evacuate people; into the border areas of war torn Sudan with food aid, transferred to special bullet proof planes, to help the Sudanese Aid Programme, or to northern Kenya to collect an emergency case that needs immediate hospital treatment.

It is hard for us to imagine being so far away from the safety network that we take for granted, to be living in areas that are so remote they are accessible only by plane. But for many people in our world this is their reality. With poor infrastructure people in remote areas of developing countries lack that safety net. They have limited ability to efficiently move goods and materials around the country, reinforcing poverty, limiting trading opportunities and taking up extensive time in each day in the transportation of wood, water a crops etc. Many remote villages throughout the developing world are dependant upon a network of HF radio as their only means of communication, usually based at a mission or medical centre often a few days walk away. MAF monitor this radio system 24/7. With grid reference Jane or her colleagues will be summoned to an emergency, to collect the injured party and return with them for hospital treatment. In tropical temperatures they can often be on the ground waiting for sometimes half a day, her role is to help facilitate aid, whether through an individual call or through aid and disaster relief.

MAF maintains high standards on all their aircraft, with high tech radio and equipment. Chris has worked through two summers doing modifications to comply with changes in aviation regulations, but is aware that for the success for MAF to operate around the world, it is not only the networking of funding that keeps the planes in the air, but the unique contribution of people like Jane Mwambe who risk their lives on a daily basis to ensure that aid and relief work can continue. Often it is their work that actually enables other charities to operate.

Chris works as the area Rep on the IoM for MAF (which is supported by the IoM Overseas Aid Budget) If you would like more details please contact :