

Action Hope Malawi

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"Improving quality of life"



RESTORING HOPE: GRACE'S PATH FROM EXPLOITATION TO EDUCATION

Programme name: Improved sexual health, HIV prevention, Resilience and protection of rights for key populations in Uganda and Malawi

Programme Phase

T1-T2 2026

Stakeholders

- AHM – PEER educators
- District Social Welfare Office
- Child Protection Worker (CPWs)
- Lunzu & Kachere Local schools and teachers
- Victim Support Unit – Police
- Mother groups and community volunteers/leader



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Challenges faced by Grace leading to her involvement in sex work

Grace is a 14-year-old who resides in Lunzu, Blantyre district. She lives with her 58-year-old grandmother who she looks up to as a sole provider. Grace's late mother was a female sex worker in the same area however she has grown up without knowing who her father is. The grandmother only depends on a commission-based fish selling business which does not provide adequate income to provide for their family. "We couldn't afford the luxury life of drinking tea daily as such I went to school on an empty stomach sometimes", shares Grace while interacting with our programs officer Kulimbantima. The continued challenges their family was experiencing forced her to drop-out of school so that she can be supporting her grandmother to make money for their daily sustenance.

Identification of Grace for Re-enrollment into school

Grace was identified during the identification exercise conducted in Bantyre by Action Hope Malawi. Her situation raised concern and the child protection worker (CPW) of Lunzu was engaged to track the place of residence of the girl.

Action Hope Malawi together with the Lunzu Child Protection Officer visited Grace's home and it was confirmed that she needed urgent support and protection. Grace was re-enrolled in a school-based support program. The support program has since provided Grace with counselling and mental health support. Action Hope Malawi also supported her with school materials including exercise books, a new uniform and a school bag to ensure uninterrupted education for the girl.

"It felt like a heavy door has finally opened", said Grace when Action Hope Malawi and the child protection officer visited her home. For the first time, she realized she did not have to face everything alone. She added that she now walks to school with a clear mind and a hopeful heart. The Child Protection Officer of Lunzu, Anthony Luka also explained that although Lunzu and Kachere have long been difficult places for children, the changes being seen are real, with stronger community structures and more people willing to help duty bearers to turn the hotspots into safer spaces free of underage girls.

Promoting the economic resilience of caregivers to support underage girls

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The caregiver of Grace is expected to undergo a vocational skills training to be implemented by Action Hope Malawi for her to have her own business and be economically independent rather than depending on commission based business.

Currently, Grace's grandmother has already been trained in financial management skills through the use of PEIS model facilitated by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social welfare with support from Action Hope Malawi and she is also a member of Mwaiwathu PEIS group in Lunzu, Blantyre.

Working together to end underage sex work in Blantyre and Machinga districts

Beyond Grace's case, the initiative has withdrawn 100 underage girls from sex work in the districts of Blantyre and Machinga, increased awareness of child rights and reporting mechanisms. The case has also assisted in the continued strengthening and coordination among all involved stakeholders. The availability of community structures including child protection workers, male champions and peer educators has proven to be an effective strategy by the Government of Malawi and Action Hope Malawi since it helps bridge the gap between community members and services.

As the programme plans to remove 400 underage girls from sex work, these structures will continue serving as the much need link with the communities. The programme "Improved sexual health, HIV prevention, Resilience and protection of rights for key populations in Uganda and Malawi" is a four-year programme being implemented in Zomba, Blantyre and Machinga districts in Malawi with support from CISU through Aids Fondet.