

Ubwino Wa Amayi—still working wonders

Ubwino Wa Amayi, (for the good of the women) is a charity based in Southern Malawi primarily to pay school fees for girls and young women that dropped out of secondary school and further education for reasons beyond their control.

According to one of *Ubwino's* coordinators, Mary O'Neill, the worrisome rate of school drop-outs due to forced early marriages, unplanned pregnancies and financial problems in rural areas prompted her and friend Diane Calisse to do something about the situation.

"Education for women is essential for development and health. Females also suffer disproportionately from domestic violence, inequality in the work place, property grabbing and poverty," says O'Neill.

Set in Namitambo (near Zomba), *Ubwino* was established in June 2006 and facilitates the further education of girls without bias or exclusion on the basis of religion, political affiliation, disability or marital status.

"We have had seventy-five women in the program since we started. Fifty of the women are at secondary education level and twenty-five are attending trade school where they are learning different trades that will empower them and eventually empower the community at large," O'Neill explains.

Even with the removal of one barrier, namely the affordability of fees, it was found that some mothers were still not returning to school. Research showed one reason was due to lack of childcare.

The Community Committee and *Ubwino* put their heads together and came up with the idea of a nursery facility not just for the *Ubwino* funded girls but for the whole community.

"United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines early childhood as the period from birth to 8 years old. A time of remarkable brain development, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning," says Calisse.

The Namitembo Montessori nursery was built in one month by a group of volunteer builders from Ireland and local contractors, including two *Ubwino* funded female



Above and below: Mothers and children at the nursery at the nursery school

bricklayers.

It opened its doors in February and now has 87 pupils on a voyage of discovery that will stand

them in good stead for the rest of their lives and raise the bar for education standards in that community. ■

Ubwino's goals

In line with the six internationally-agreed education goals set by UNESCO and aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015, *Ubwino Wa Amayi* has the following goals:

- Goal 1- Expand early childhood care and education
- Goal 2- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Goal 3 – increase adult literacy by 50%
- Goal 4– Achieve gender parity and equality by 2015
- Goal 5 – Improve the quality of education



Callise (L) and O'Neill cut the ribbon

"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."

Maya Angelou

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Do you know of an inspirational woman who is working to make her community better? Tell her story! Contact Every woman editor Akossa Mphepo on 01910004 or send an email to akossamphepo@nationmw.net