

## Tackling HIV in Malawi

In 2018-2019 a HIV testing, counselling, education and community development centre was established in a small town called Songani, near a city called Zomba, in Malawi, south-east Africa. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and it has an HIV incidence of up to 10% of the population.

The Centre was built at lightening speed during 2018 and 2019.



Since mid 2019, the service to the Songani residents has begun in style. The Centre has 8 staff. They test and/or counsel over 100 people a month. The library receives many hundreds of visits per month. Several hundred people come and play the games the Centre offers. There is a youth club, and a football team. People can use the large hall at the Centre for watching videos, for cultural events, and for festivals. It has just acquired a table tennis table.



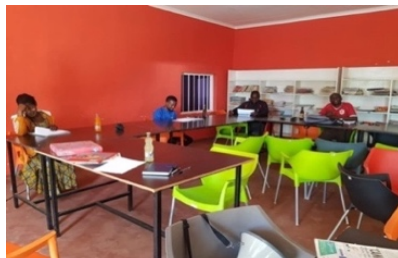
The Centre provides services to the community through the games, sports and cultural events. The library acts as an educational supplement especially for young people. And in doing these two things - the education and community services - it enables the staff to say to the users in a non-threatening way - “hey, why don’t you get yourself tested as well?”

The activities of the Centre have been affected by COVID-19 of course. The Centre closed for 3 weeks earlier in the year, in accordance with government guidelines. Now open again, hand-washing and social distancing are *de rigueur*. There have been many recent young visitors to the library and the games because the schools are still shut. In between times, the staff are working on a strategic plan for the future operation of the Centre.

Femmes d'Europe has contributed to the Centre: the Association supplied sewing kits and material for female sanitary ware. Not only can the young women concerned learn a new skill at the Centre, but they can also go to school again instead of being absent for a few days each month. FdE also bought mobile testing facilities so that the Centre staff could go out into the surrounding residential area to undertake the testing and counselling.



And we supplied a couple of laptops, which are a fantastic supplement for the library, as well as a testing table and extra chairs - basic essentials for the whole Centre. These elements have contributed significantly to what the Centre has been able to do and are greatly appreciated.



The participation of femmes d'Europe was enormously facilitated by the participation in the founding and funding of the Centre by a member of our Association, who continues to be fully involved in this highly worthwhile venture.

*According to the report of  
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Founder of Songani Centre\**

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