

# STEKA – What is it?

**Jim Roarty of the Parishes’ Justice and Peace Group writes:** ‘Our two parishes have committed us, through open parish meetings and parish pastoral councils, to support STEKA (StepKidsAwareness) – in particular the building of a skills training centre to enable children, when they leave STEKA, to find gainful employment.

But what is STEKA? Not everyone will have had the chance to hear Emma Wood’s presentations – including at all the Masses on a Sunday in early July - on this topic; hence this article.

STEKA is based in Blantyre, Malawi (named after David Livingstone’s home town in Lanarkshire). Malawi is one of the very poorest countries in the world but also one which has been hit badly by HIV/AIDS. As a result, there are many homeless children living on the streets where they become targets for abuse or are drawn into crime and violence.

The founder of STEKA, Godknows Maseko – himself formerly a street kid who escaped from a life of abuse and crime – and his wife Helen decided to do what they could do to help and the result is not an “orphanage” or an institution but a loving family. Children are brought by social services or the police and once Godknows and Helen know they are staying for good, they make sure that all their new children who don’t know their biological parents adopt their surname (Maseko) and call them mum and dad (for children still in contact with biological parents, they become aunt and uncle). The family all work together to support each other with everyone helping with chores and older children helping support the little ones.

There are currently 64 children in STEKA’s full time care – 28 girls and 36 boys between the ages of 9 months and 23 years and also further children whom STEKA support to achieve their educational goals whilst remaining with their biological families. All of STEKA’s children receive an education and Godknows and Helen are determined to ensure that the girls receive an equal education and opportunities as the boys, which is vital in a country with one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world and where girls are more likely to be illiterate than boys.

Our connection with STEKA has been through Sandra Ndale, a member of St John’s parish and choir for six months while she did a course at Queen Margaret University, and Gift Thomson, baptized in St John’s earlier this year, who has returned to do a four-year course at Queen Margaret University; Emma Wood, the QMU lecturer who has done so much work with STEKA, is providing him with accommodation and we warmly welcome him back into the parish community.

What we have committed ourselves to is financing a skills training centre. Godknows, (having himself escaped from a life on the streets) recognizes the need to build for the children more sustainable futures by developing a STEKA village consisting of workshops to teach life-changing vocational skills and facilities to provide psychosocial support. Our two parishes are aiming to raise £10,000 to enable him to do this.’

➤ (To see STEKA residents including Sandra, Gift and Godknows Maseko talk about the need for this see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKFk2U82V30> . (For more information, go to [www.stekaskills.com](http://www.stekaskills.com) to find out more about the STEKA family see [www.stekakids.com](http://www.stekakids.com) or the STEKA facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/stepkidsawareness/> or contact Jim Roarty)