

**Progress Empowerment Group, Manica Bridge, Zimbabwe
In Shared Partnership with Saxapahaw UMC and Jared & Valerie Stine
October 2019 – September 2022**

FIRST YEAR CASE STUDY REPORT - November 2020

The Zoe Empowers program facilitator who works with your group provided the following report on the activities and achievements of a household supported by your partnership. Although each child is unique, this report reflects the challenges and progress of every household as they move through Zoe's empowerment model. Additional information about your group's progress follows this case study.

Head of Household: Eunice (21)

Dependents: Sister – Ashley (16), Brother – Nokutenda (12)

Challenges: Eunice still feels connected to her parents despite their deaths because she carries their memories in her heart. Her parents died in 2011 and 2013 due to mysterious events within the family that led to misunderstandings. One afternoon while her parents were working in their garden during the rainy season, a lightning strike occurred. After that event, her parents became seriously ill and went to the hospital, but their sickness was difficult to diagnose. Eunice's parents had their close relatives and friends sell their cattle to seek specialist doctors. However, all efforts were in vain as the bills continued to increase until they could no longer pay and were discharged from the hospital without answers or healing. Her father died soon after and her mother was bedridden. Two years later, her mother died leaving Eunice and the children alone. Their lives changed since they were young and struggled to make a living. As eldest, Eunice tried to ensure there was food on the table with help from a few well-wishers. In 2014, they moved to live with their grandmother who was unable to properly care for them due to her age. Eunice dropped out of school to work piece jobs. The community had no respect for girls with some telling her she wouldn't go far in life or that it was better for her to marry. She did not listen to their ill-advice as she was determined to see her life change for the better. She started learning to make clay pots and calabashes from her grandmother to earn income. In 2019, Eunice heard about Zoe's recruitment and was eager to join since she had seen it change other children's lives in her community. From that point on, she started to learn new things and see life from a different perspective.



Eunice with her siblings and grandmother

The Dream: Training in the Dream process teaches the children how to develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency and creating a Dream chart provides daily inspiration to work towards the goal. The following are Eunice's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- What makes you feel sad? *Death of my parents, the suffering of orphans*
- What makes you happy? *Ball games, reading the Bible, and attending church services*

- What happens in the community that you do not like? *People who drink beer and shout at others, smoking, exploitation of children*
- What is your dream for the future? *To have many goats and chickens for income generation, to ensure that my siblings complete their education, and to provide enough food for my family at all times*
- What will be your guiding principles to achieve your dream? *Practice many vocational skills, spend more time doing my project, and expand my garden*

Family Specific Achievements Because of Your Partnership

“Zoe has managed to take me out of the great pool of poverty. I now have hope that all my things will prosper.”

Income Generation & Agricultural Projects: Eunice received business training through Zoe and was given an income generating grant in January 2020 to start her project. She bought 8 traditional chickens for \$5USD each and 26 boschveld chickens (egg layers) for \$3USD each. The boschveld chickens are now ready to lay eggs. She expects to have at least 5 crates of eggs per week, selling each crate of 30 eggs for \$3USD. By July, she had 50 traditional chickens and sold 20 chickens. Eunice is skilled making clay pots and calabashes that she sells for \$1-\$8. In her second year, she plans to expand her projects and diversify by breeding goats.



Eunice with her traditional and boschveld chickens

Eunice used the remainder of her grant to buy garden seeds to plant a vegetable garden and food crops that her family works together to maintain. She has ten beds of crops include cabbages, covo, tronchulda, and okra. The produce is used for family consumption and the surplus is sold to earn additional income to buy other basic needs. She sells one bundle of vegetables for \$0.20.



Eunice in her kitchen garden & holding her dream chart in front of the toilet she built.

Health & Housing: Zoe provided training on health, hygiene, and disease prevention to learn standards to implement at home to prevent illness. Eunice saved her profits and bought \$6 bags of cement to build a new latrine to ensure good health. She also built a dish drying rack.

Education, Community Relations, and Spiritual Strengthening: Eunice’s desire was to see her younger brother attend school with a lunch box. With her business earnings, she is now able to use some of her profits to support his education when schools reopen after COVID-19. Through Zoe’s child rights training, Eunice is now aware of her rights and able express herself confidently. She belongs to Kuera Apostolic Faith.

Eunice’s Prayer Requests: *To see her project flourish and have outstanding skills in monitoring her project*

GENERAL UPDATES ON THE PROGRESS EMPOWERMENT GROUP

Group Income Projects: Progress Empowerment Group has a market garden project and are waiting for funds to start additional group projects. Their garden contains beans, butternuts, cucumbers, cabbages, and carrots which they sell in the nearby markets. Currently, due to COVID restrictions, members meet in pod groups consisting of five heads of household to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Pod groups rotate attending to the garden.

Group Activities: Progress Group is in an area surrounded by small shops and households that are close together. They have begun to influence other youths in their community to start their own projects using small capital.

Food Security and Agricultural Projects: All 29 households planted maize and beans during the rainy season. Some members planted other crops such as sorghum which is more drought resistant. Members harvested an average of 10-20 bags of maize due to insufficient rains and fall armyworm invasions. Twenty households established kitchen gardens using seedlings from the group garden. Twenty-five households raise livestock such as rabbits, traditional poultry, and goats.

Income Generating Activities: Zoe supported four households with fees to attend vocational training in catering and housekeeping. One member used his profits to complete a course in front-end loader and dump truck. Members projects are listed below.

Projects	# of youth
Boschveld chickens (egg layers)	6
Buy/sell groceries & secondhand clothes	6
Traditional poultry	8
Farming cabbages	1
Keeping goats	3
Broiler chickens	2

Name List: Before an empowerment group name list is created, Zoe staff members take time to get to know the youth. They make home visits to record information about the children, their dependents, and caregivers. They assess if any emergency interventions are required to alleviate health issues, abusive conditions, or inadequate shelter. Once they have confirmed who is eligible for the Zoe program, and have allowed time for children who are not interested to drop out and others to join, then the staff creates the name list. Please note, children joining the Zoe program often have no parents or birth documentation, and have suffered multiple traumas in their young lives. Sometimes they are suspicious of the people asking questions. For these reasons, the children occasionally provide erroneous information which we later correct.

On the following page is the list of names and a picture of your specific group. The names in bold are heads of household, followed by their siblings and dependents. Although Zoe records both first and second names, we use only first names in public lists to preserve the privacy of children in the program. The ages of the orphans and vulnerable children in the Zoe program range between infant and college age; however, the youth who is the head of household must be old enough to manage a small business and so is usually between 14 and 21 years old.

Many of the children live with an elderly grandparent or disabled caregiver. Most often such arrangements include shelter only and the caregiver is unable to provide food, education, health care or other support which children need. Child rights are especially important in such situations so that the children are not abused.

The children are encouraged and strengthened by the knowledge that their partner is not only supporting them with resources, but also with prayer and in the belief that they are capable of great things. Thank you for making this journey of transformation with them.

Progress Group, Zimbabwe

29 households and a total of 88 children



Idah (f) 20

Alex (m) 17

Konoriah (m) 17

Simon (m) 14
Esther (f) 12
Loice (f) 18

Tatenda (m) 20

Lyn (f) 6
Divine (m) 18
Tadiwa (f) 10

Patrick (m) 20

Adrian (f) 4
Adrian (f) 9

Takudzwa (m) 16

Takudzwa (m) 16
Tashinga (m) 10

Andrew (m) 20

Luke (f) 16

Miriam (f) 14

Takudzwa (m) 16

Ruvarashe (f) 5
Ruvarashe (f) 17

Tanaka (m) 16

Nenyasha (m) 9

Walter (m) 19

Allan (m) 20
Passmore (m) 6
Colleta (f) 8

Carlton (m) 16

Lynn (f) 14
Ashia (f) 12
Ashely (f) 12
Moreblessing (f) 9
Millicent (f) 1

Lordstar (f) 18

Kudakwashe (m) 18

Linet (f) 12
Nokutenda (f) 6

Caroline (f) 20

Tinotenda (m) 17
Gift (m) 12
Thelma (f) 4
Michelle (f) 3

Emilia (f) 20

Sarah (f) 7
Alice (f) 4

Eunice (f) 20

Nokutenda (f) 11
Ashley (f) 15

Bonisiwe (f) 20

Maraka (f) 12
Cassidy (m) 7
Samantha (f) 9

Bliss (f) 17

Tadiwa (m) 13
Ruvimbo (f) 9

Tanya (f) 15

Tamel (f) 13
Tanatswa (m) 10
Samuel (m) 8
Quinton (m) 4

Kudzai (m) 19

Melody (f) 13
Daniel (m) 9
Tawana (m) 8

Nomore (m) 17

Sophia (f) 2

Privelege (f) 19

Tashinga (f) 8
Marlon (m) 5
Diana (f) 3

Bridget (f) 20

Kayler (f) 1
Faith (f) 8
Panashe (m) 8

Ivan (m) 16

David (m) 16

Ruth (f) 14
Sarah (f) 12
Agnes (f) 7
Dorcas (f) 5
Tapiwa (m) 1

Victor (m) 19

Shupai (m) 18

Ladine (f) 17

Neimer (m) 5

Nomatter (f) 18

Godfrey (m) 21

The following is an overview of how Zoe empowers orphans and vulnerable children to move beyond the need for charity by comprehensively addressing the multiple challenges faced by those in living in extreme poverty.

Group Formation

When Zoe first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. Staff members explain how Zoe is an empowerment program, enabling children to move from crippling poverty and dependency to economic and social self-sufficiency. Although different from the usual relief approach, it resonates with leaders who want to see sustainable change in their village. Since staff are indigenous to each country in which Zoe operates they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available.

During the first meeting the youth elect leaders, make rules to guide their meetings, choose a group name, and decide when and where to hold weekly gatherings. To strengthen peer bonds, groups begin shared income activities and agricultural projects. Nearly all groups immediately establish a “merry-go-round” fund to encourage meeting attendance and provide financial benefits. During meetings, group members contribute a small amount into a single pool of money which is then given in full to a different member each time. A variation involves saving the money until there is enough to make bulk purchases of small livestock, groceries, or housewares to be distributed to each member.

The youth complete training on topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights within the first six months. If they have access to land they receive seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings are not attending school, Zoe provides uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who have skills are provided grants so that they can start small businesses, others begin vocational training. Most importantly, all begin to experience God’s love and they realize that though many are orphans, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

The Dream

One of the first tasks new members complete is the creation of their “Dream” chart. Most orphans and vulnerable children entering the Zoe empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive; there is neither time to think about the future nor reason to hope for something better. But through Zoe and your partnership, the children learn to imagine a new life and prepare to make it a reality.

The Zoe program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they examine their current situation and then set their goals. After considering their family’s hopes and needs, the youth who is considered the head of the household and is the primary member of their empowerment group creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions.



This youth then presents the Dream to the rest of the group members who express support and give feedback, especially concerning the primary goal. These Dream documents help the program facilitators better understand the conditions of the children’s lives so they can address specific needs or traumas suffered. The family keeps a

copy of their Dream, often displaying it in their home to provide daily motivation as they strive to create their new life. As they progress through the empowerment program they will often update their Dream.

Connections

One of the biggest disadvantages orphans and vulnerable children face is isolation from peers and the larger community. Struggling on their own, the children lack moral support, access to community resources, and a network of people to help them progress and face challenges. Zoe creates connections.

Peer group. The youth served by Zoe have often dropped out of school and stopped attending church or community events. They do not even realize how many others share their plight, but at the first group meeting, when each new member tells their story, the bonding process begins. By working together on group projects and helping each other make improvements to their homes, friendships form and the group becomes an extended family committed to helping each other face challenges and achieve their dreams. New Zoe group members are also introduced to youth who have graduated from Zoe or been a member of another group for a couple years. These relationships provide advice based on experience, networking possibilities, and inspiration.

Program facilitator and mentor. Zoe program facilitators usually hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. They care deeply about the children and are available to provide counseling as needed, but they do not fill a role of guardian nor do they attend all the group meetings. This is important so that the youth develop their own problem solving abilities and can become fully self-reliant. Each group has a local mentor which they select to help represent and guide the group within their community. Mentors receive training from Zoe and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits, and help resolve challenges in the community.

Community leaders and government officials. This includes school administrators to help children return to classes; local leaders who can address cases of abuse and improperly seized property; government officials and specialists who can provide expert advice on business development, agriculture and higher education; and health service providers.

And a powerful connection is you! All Zoe groups know the opportunities they receive are from God, through the love and concern coming from their partners far away. They are amazed that you would care for them without ever having met them. This powerful connection is further strengthened if a partner can visit the country to witness what the youth have achieved.

Child Rights

A major focus of Zoe's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international laws promise. Such training is often conducted by the local officials in charge of enforcing child rights so the children get to know those who are responsible for their protection. Additionally, Zoe's group-based model creates crowd support through which the youth can defend each other from all forms of abuse; physical, financial or emotional.

In the many communities where Zoe works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and often feel they are powerless to resist. Protecting the rights of girls includes educating the entire community about the dangers and harm inherent in all forms of mistreatment, especially child marriage, sex trafficking, and female genital

mutilation. Zoe's emphasis on forming gender-mixed groups strengthens the support available to girls within their groups and creates leaders who will encourage fair and just treatment for all.

Zoe's goal is to ensure that all children are able to stand up for themselves and their rights in the community. Often children in the Zoe group learn these lessons so well that they not only defend their own rights, but also the rights of others who may be abused or neglected in their communities.

Food Security

Children entering the Zoe empowerment program struggle every day to alleviate their hunger. Usually they try to find work, but because they lack status or an adult advocate in their community, they are paid extremely low wages or small amounts of food. They might try growing their own food, but they do not have the resources or knowledge to succeed. It is not unusual for these children to go two or three days without eating. Occasionally they must resort to begging or even taking from a neighbor's field just to survive. Even those children who do manage to eat daily suffer health consequences from the poor nutritional quality of their meals.

With guidance from Zoe program facilitators, new groups learn what foods they need to eat as well as explore different ways to attain a stable food source. Because Zoe is an empowerment program, the children are not told what to do, but are instead given options and training so that they can devise their own approach to becoming food secure and self-sufficient.

Children in rural areas who can access land will learn about the best agricultural practices for their region and then be given the seeds, fertilizer, and tools to begin vegetable gardens and/or plant crops like maize (corn). The households are also encouraged to start raising small animals, like rabbits or chickens, after learning about animal husbandry. In Zimbabwe, a new group usually plants a group "nutritional" garden before starting their own home gardens. This provides an opportunity to learn about growing different types of vegetables, the importance of having a balanced diet, and to how to work together as a team. In urban areas where they do not have access to land for planting or raising animals, the income project development is accelerated.

Income Generation

Zoe helps the youth generate an income at both the group and household level. A group project might involve growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, or producing and selling a product like soap. These projects provide experience, foster group cohesion, and produce profits for the group's savings and loan fund. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Some youth who are already skilled immediately receive resources to begin businesses in trades like tailoring, auto mechanics, or hairstyling. Zoe urges youth to continue growing their wealth and financial security by completing vocational training, expanding their business into new markets, or starting multiple businesses.

Before distributing resources, Zoe trains all the heads of households on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group members take the following steps:

- Brainstorm what businesses could succeed in their community
- Create individual and group business plans and present these to the group for discussion
- Vote to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan

Once the business plan is approved, the individual receives a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit. Throughout this process the Zoe program facilitator is available to provide guidance but does not tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. If a poor decision is made, the youth will learn from the experience, but still have the support of their group and Zoe to try again.

To provide money for business expansion and also generate group income, many groups establish “table banks.” Members start the fund by all contributing a set amount of money which is immediately made available for short term loans with the interest paid up front. This pre-paid interest is also available for loans. The fund grows fast. Some groups pay dividends to all members, others use it for something that benefits the whole group like their Christmas party.

Health and Disease Prevention

Zoe’s goal is to address immediate health needs, teach the children how to live healthy lives, and connect them to medical resources. Preventative education includes:

- Basic hygiene practices such as hand washing, boiling water, and keep their home and surroundings clean
- Nutrition, especially important since the children have often had very limited diets
- Diseases transmission and treatment; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls’ personal health and safety

Many of the children have lost a parent to HIV infection and often the children too are suffering from the virus. Because of the associated stigma, they are usually reluctant to discuss their status and sometimes even avoid treatment. Zoe provides supportive opportunities for children to be tested, helps them access medications, and educates to counter the many misconceptions held in the community.

After youth achieve basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, Zoe provides the first distribution of items like mosquito nets, sleeping mats, blankets, and hygiene products. Zoe helps families enroll in health insurance plans and/or access medical care by providing assistance. For continued self-care, the youth learn to budget their own money for insurance, emergencies, and health related products. In Zimbabwe, insurance is quite expensive so the families are encouraged to have resources set aside to address medical issues.

Training also includes teaching the children about the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive in order to increase their status in the community. When the children look “smart” their confidence increases, they feel better about themselves, and others in the community begin treating them with respect and acceptance. In the second and third years of the program it is possible to pick out the once-ragged Zoe children because they are often the cleanest looking children in the village and carry themselves with pride and dignity.

Housing

Often, children entering Zoe are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair or are homeless without a permanent residence. It is also common for orphans and vulnerable children to work in exchange for a room; this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and with little time for other activities or to earn money for food. In general, Zoe does not provide housing for the children, but it does give the group funds which

they can use to help out those members in greatest need by providing temporary rent assistance or materials to make emergency repairs. In some programs, Zoe is able to provide basic construction materials like roofing materials or windows. Usually, the youth save money to improve their housing and their groupmates provide labor assistance as needed.

Education

Zoe does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join empowerment groups about the importance of education. These children desperately want to attend school. Prior to joining Zoe, many children participated in school, but were forced to drop out due to chronic illness, hunger, social ostracism, lack of clothing, and/or lack of money. Once in the program, the young heads of households (many of whom have been out of the educational system for too long to be reintegrated) are eager to see their younger siblings back in school as soon as possible.

So that children can quickly return to school, Zoe will meet with school administrators and assist with some of the expenses such as uniforms, fees, and materials. The group may also pay for some of these materials when there is a special need. As with all other aspects of the Zoe program, the emphasis is on empowering the children to pay for their own educational expenses. It is a great source of pride and self-esteem for the youth who are the heads of their households to be able to share how they are able to work to send their younger siblings to school. It is like hearing parents brag about the accomplishments of their children and it is very moving to see in a sibling.

Faith

Often the isolation that the children feel when they begin the Zoe program extends to their thoughts about God. Because they are abused and discriminated against by their community - and often this includes Christians in their village - they believe God has also abandoned or even cursed them. At other times they believe that maybe God does not exist, or if God does exist that they are somehow beyond God's love. In the very first meeting a Zoe staff member often shares the Lord's Prayer with the children, and talk about how they are not truly orphans because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

Meetings begin with Scripture readings, prayer, and devotions led by a group member, but while this is available to the children they are never coerced into the Christian faith. Zoe's program is religiously non-restrictive, yet offers a compelling view of the love Christians show to others. One of the most powerful parts of the empowerment program is the way these children put their faith into action in their own community. They forgive those who have harmed them; feed others who are even poorer than themselves; adopt other children and share their resources and knowledge with them; pray and care for one another; and pay fair wages to those who had once taken advantage of their situation with hard labor and poor pay. These children return good for evil and can be examples to all of what it means to live as Christians.