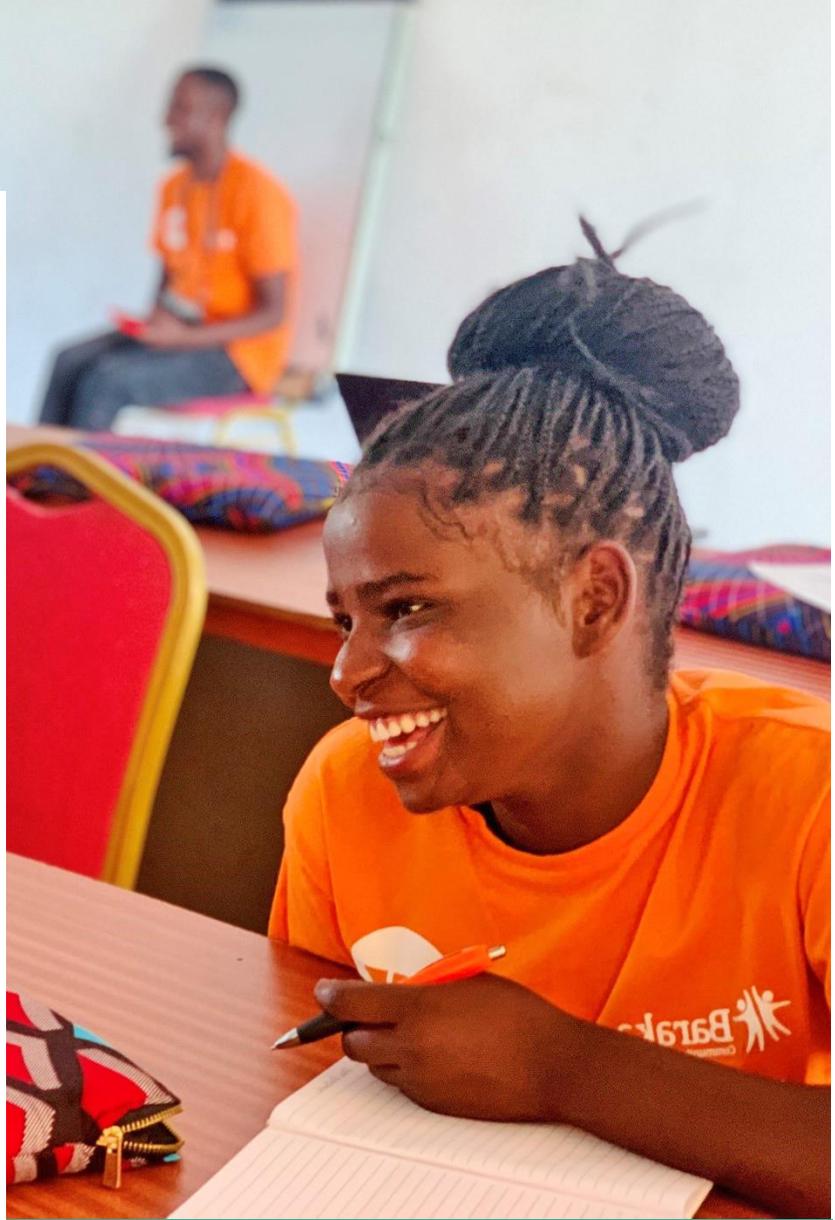


# The Baraka Learning Centre, Zambia



October 2021

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Baraka Zambia

By: Mike Phiri, Learning Centre Manager



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## **Introduction**

The Baraka Learning Centre (LC) has been a place of comfort and motivation for a lot of schools and residents of Kapiri Mposhi district. Having operated for just two years now, every school teacher and student is keen to visit the Centre and be part of the programmes and activities.

Despite the negative impact of Coronavirus from 2020 to 2021, the LC has undergone a lot of operational, educative and infrastructural development. It still remains the only place in the district that offers free education while making it fun and inspirational and is comfortably the most well-resourced educational facility in the district, if not the country.

## **Education**

The LC team has ensured that every programme is carried out with the utmost creativity and interactive methods. This maximises the students' involvement and participation as most of them come from rural schools and some do not even have access to education at all.

Due to the unique methods of training and teaching at the LC, children and adults find their visits refreshing and inspirational. This has made Baraka very popular in the district as it is the first to have helped and engaged the entire district in striving to educate each and every member of the community.

### **a. Programmes**

Each year, the LC increases its number of programmes and this year has been the most progressive so far as the classes have increased from 12 to 21 per week. With most schools eager to be included on the LC timetable, the team has to review the programmes every quarter to create slots for the new schools and local residents.

In 2021 so far 3 more schools have been added to the programme. The average class size has also increased to approximately 20-25 students per class.

Current programmes include:



*ICT teacher training workshop*

- School visits from Mulungushi, Victory, William Reid, Muleba Community School and Blue Butterfly Primary School. These schools all visit on a weekly basis.
- Adult Literacy for local community members. This offers mostly women with basic literacy and numeracy skills plus ICT training.
- ICT training for local teachers

with our charity partner IT Schools Africa.

- Study camps for our sponsored students.
- The Baraka Out Of School Trainees (BOOST). This has been perhaps the most successful programme implemented at the LC as it has had a very positive impact on the development of the local community children. It is from this programme that our sponsorship team now selects most of the students sponsored in Kapiri as all these children's parents and guardians have financial difficulties.



*Sponsorship student study camp*

- An expansion to the extra-curricular activities. With the new playground and play bus, these activities have taken a more intuitive approach and also include an after school club for our sponsored students, weekend reading programme and gardening club of which are all at their peak.



*Outdoor play session with William Reid Primary School*



*Thelma*



*Bupe with Isaac, one of the sponsored students from the BOOST class.*

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## **b. Content**

The LC does not directly fall under the Zambian curriculum but rather moves along with it because of the variation of donations received per year from UK schools and sponsors. This makes the LC an educational and cultural bridge that uses the more advanced and updated UK curriculum and then integrates this into the Zambian curriculum. This gives us a wider approach on what content to use during the lesson delivery process.

The LC works with a lot of rural schools and implementation of the lessons is very different from that in regular Zambian schools. These methods of teaching speed track the delivery of the content used to make it easier for the student to interpret the material to their own understanding.

This content involves:

- Curated content from the educational websites such as Twinkl (with is UK based), YouTube and children's Television programmes on the Local Zambian cable.
- Card, board and outdoor games collected and donated from sponsors in the UK.
- Story books from famous UK authors, reading scheme books and non- fiction books. These are at various levels and often help students develop an interest in reading.

## **Infrastructure**

The LC has had immense development in its infrastructure in the last year and most of the buildings are now fully operational.

Since 2020, the LC has completed the construction of a Library with a classroom. This is the first communal library in the district and despite not being officially open yet, it has already created great excitement.

In a major development we obtained funding for solar power for the entire Centre which was installed in June. This has eradicated most of our power limitations and has

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enabled us to greatly increase our productivity and run more and longer sessions. With no power expenses and limitations, the LC is able to bring in more schools to use the ICT facilities as well as take the laptops out to the more rural and remote schools. Other projects include Shane's play bus, an old bus that we have converted into a "learn by playing" facility for the younger children. This is in memory of Shane Garrett who was a great friend of Andy's and Baraka's who sadly passed away last year. The educational resources for the play bus have been sent out from the UK by a generous supporter.

We now also have a playground with a variety of equipment including slides, swings and monkey bars.

## **LC Staff and Operations**

As the organization develops, our team is also increasing.

Our team consists of hardworking individuals who are intuitive, professional and passionate towards achieving our common goal.

Currently we have three departments:

### **1. The Operations Department**

This department is led by Andrew Tembo who is also the Director of Baraka Zambia. AT (as he is known) is goal oriented and always strives for the best in both the organization and the whole BZ team. He inspires the entire team and is the go to person for a lot of administration and accounting issues. He oversees all construction and maintenance at the LC.

The department team consists of:

- Timmy and Moses who look after the day to day maintenance, cleaning and gardening.
- Leen who amongst other things is in charge of the new vegetable and fruit area.
- Stephen, the latest addition to the team, is in charge of night time security.

### **2. The Sponsorship Department**

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This is now led by Francis Bwalya (or Franny) our Sponsorship Programmes Manager, who is the BZ Human Resource and Safeguarding Manager.

Francis is supported by two field officers namely Cosmas and Thelma.

- Cosmas has been with Baraka for over 10 years and predominantly looks after our Lusaka based children.
- Thelma joined the team recently and is based at the Learning Centre where she is in charge of the Kapiri sponsored students.

We are currently sponsoring 25 children in the vicinity of the LC (and over 130 in total in Zambia). The programme at the LC is dramatically changing children's lives and giving them educational opportunities previously denied. Within the programme we support a number of disabled children. Our long term aim is to increase the percentage of LC based children within the programme as a whole.

### **3. The Education Department**

The Education department is led by Mike Phiri, who also came through the Baraka ranks as a sponsored student. Mike's team are responsible for the planning and running of all lessons and activities at the LC.

Mike's team of teachers include:

- Bupe who joined the team in early September 2020. She has proved to be a valuable addition to the team and is more than just a teacher to the children.
- Thelma who was recruited from a local primary school also joined the team in October 2020. Her role has recently expanded to encompass the sponsorship programme at the LC.
- Geli who has recently joined the LC team from our Maamba safe house and will be predominantly working as an ICT teacher.

### **4. Internship and gap year students**

This programme started in 2020 with Jairos Nkata as our first gap year student who spent the whole year at the LC helping us out whilst evaluating his career choices and learning important communication and work skills. This year we received two students, Drascilla and Esther, who had performed very well in their GCSE examinations last year.

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The two girls came in to help as teaching assistants earlier this year and have learnt important life skills, built up their Curriculum Vitae and improved their ICT knowledge. The initiative also helps the students' confidence and general life awareness since they come from very rural backgrounds.

We hope to develop and expand this programme due to the considerable impact and success in its infancy.



*Drascilla*



*Esther*

## **Covid-19**

In line with government policy, we have had to close the LC a few times in the last year or so. However, the LC continued to function at full throttle and still had a significant impact on the beneficiaries of our programmes.

Our aim of achieving 10,000 visits for 2021 was rendered impossible, however we are on course for 8,000-9,000 visitors despite the frequent closures.

In addition to the programmes the LC acted as a support hub for our students during Covid-19 by providing educational packs and general support as well as community outreach.

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## Conclusion

Ever since the Baraka Learning Centre was officially opened in January 2020, it has served as a beacon for free education and inspires so many residents of the district. On a weekly basis we receive many new visitors that range from simply the curious to those that want to be part of our programmes and children that see the Centre as a safe haven or their only hope of an education.

Over the coming years, the LC will change the lives of thousands of children and help improve hundreds of teachers. It has not only become the talk of the district but the talk of the entire province. We expect that the LC will become the greatest educational facility in the whole of Zambia, and we are well on our way to achieving this.