

# The United Methodist **Reporter**

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United Methodist serves hearing-impaired in Mozambique

**By Roxanne Dass**

*Staff Writer*

Belucha is a 7-year-old girl with hardened skin, rotten teeth and the eyes of a 50-year-old. She is also unable to hear the world around her because of hearing loss.

Belucha is from Mozambique, the third poorest nation in the world, where there is no resident audiologist in the entire country and no advocacy for the hearing impaired.

In 1997, help arrived in the form of Jackie Clark, a senior audiologist and professor at the Callier Center for Communication Disorders at the University of Texas at Dallas.

mer, Dr. Clark goes with the support of her church, Trietsch UMC in Flower Mound, Texas, nique to diagnose hearing loss, distribute donated hearing aids and supplies, teach sign and provide other services for the hearing impaired.

Since her first visit, Dr. Clark and a team of volunteers go to Chicuque, Mozambique where she started and leads the Mozambique Audiology Mission. There she and her team of students, retirees and non-audiology professionals train students, doctors, nurses and social workers on diagnosing hearing loss and helping the hearing-impaired.

With help from hearing-aid manufacturers, Dr. Clark was able to screen almost 2,000 children in 2005 with borrowed equipment. She was then able to fit many of them with donated hearing aids, and continues to provide batteries and supplies for those she previously helped. She even had a doctor with her team who could write prescriptions and perform surgery if it was needed.

Dr. Clark said it takes almost a year to prepare for her trips to Mozambique, largely because she has to look for donations.

"Each year we have to ask for more hearing aids and supplies," she said. "The number of things we need grows exponentially every year."

In 1999, the Mozambican government started creating classrooms for children with hearing loss, but there was no official sign language of Mozambique. Dr. Clark and her team started to teach

the children American Sign Language because they had nothing else. In 2005, though, an official Mozambique sign book was created.

Dr. Clark said the mission is almost a burden because once she's started; she can't stop helping the people of Mozambique. She has to go back every year not only because she feels it's what God wants her to do, but also because people need to get new batteries for their hearing aids and more supplies.

"If we just stop, we're going to alienate a whole community that is already pushed aside," she said.

Dr. Clark is working with colleges in South Africa to help her carry the burden. She said she would continue going to Mozambique until the program is self-sufficient and she is out of a job there.

It's also children like Belucha that keep her coming back. When Dr. Clark first met the little girl, she would scream in terror when anyone came near her to run tests. After many hours of coaxing, Dr. Clark and her team were able to make ear molds and fit her with hearing aids.

"When she first heard my voice, she gave me a big, beautiful, toothless grin," she said. "It's because of moments like those that I came in the first place and continue to come."

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