

Madagascar School Aims to Empower Students

Antananarivo, Madagascar

[Note from Editor: This article from the Nazarene News tells of a school that is helping youth and adults learn English, study the Bible, and learn computer skills. Nazarene Educators Worldwide salutes these schools that see a need and find ways to help students learn about God and find ways to earn a living.]

At the Nazarene district center in Antananarivo, rooms that used to sit vacant are now alive with activity as students learn English, study the Bible, and gain computer skills. The new learning center, the Living Hope School, opened January 13, 2015, through Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

Madagascar missionaries Ronald and Shelly Miller saw the school as a way to support the district financially — students pay a monthly fee equal to about \$5 to \$10 — while also equipping community members with job skills. "It's all about empowerment," Ronald said. "We're trying to help them get jobs and be competitive."

The Millers expected an inaugural class of about five students. Instead, 18 students enrolled, ranging in age from about 15 to 40 years old. "Some of the students are school-aged but not attending a regular school," Shelly said. That's not uncommon in Madagascar, where UNICEF reports schools are crowded, and there aren't enough funds to pay teachers. UNICEF also reports only about 60 percent of children in Madagascar who enter the first grade finish primary school.

"Here in Madagascar, education in general is very, very low," Shelly said. "There are not enough schools in the country to accompany all the children, so there are a lot of kids who never get to finish high school. The Living Hope School is a place where anyone, with a high school diploma or not, can come and learn."

The Millers expect enrollment to double next semester. Their goal is to get the school accredited and expand class offerings. Currently, there are five teachers, including Ronald, who teaches Bible; Shelly, who teaches English; NCM's Pastor Patrice Georges and Vola Harisoa, who both teach English, and a professional web designer who teaches computer basics.

Many people worked together over the past year to make Living Hope a reality, including Madagascar District Superintendent Richard Ravelomanantsoa and his wife, Therese Ravelomanantsoa (director of a local Nazarene compassionate ministry center), along with Pastor Georges and Harisoa. Two Work & Witness teams helped to get the building ready, and one team donated 20 computers. "Because of the volunteer work and donations, the school's start-up cost for NCM was less than \$500," Ronald said.

Another vision for Living Hope is that it will provide a place for youth who graduate from Antananarivo's compassionate ministry center, the AMI-4 Street Kids Center. The center provides 420 children under the age of 18 with meals, education, and support.

"We find that many kids after they finish, they just go back onto the streets," Ronald said. "So we're trying to create a continuation."

The school will also provide local pastors with computer training and is raising money to sponsor college students.

The Living Hope School is just one aspect of the new Living Hope Project in Madagascar. Another branch of the project is the Living Hope Evangelism Team that is organizing a Work & Witness trip from Madagascar to South Africa later this year.

Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, and Ronald said he's been asked, "Shouldn't we be sending Work & Witness teams to you?" One of the trip's goals is to inspire other Africans to get involved in missions also.

"We want to impact Madagascar, but we want to really awaken more districts to also become mission-minded," he said.

--Church of the Nazarene Africa Region via *Out of Africa*

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