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MALAWI

SUCCESS STORY

Nutrition Program Earns Region's Trust

Community mobilizes behind therapeutic care for child malnutrition



Photo: Sufilana Alubino

Grace Simoke's father (right) volunteers his time at the outpatient therapy clinics where he teaches other parents about nutrition and options for treating children for malnutrition.

With USAID funding, over 1,200 volunteers in the region have been trained on identifying children with severe and moderate malnutrition.

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Grace Simoke was a bouncy toddler until December 2005, when she developed a fever and signs of malaria. Weeks later, Grace's condition worsened, with frequent vomiting and a loss of appetite leaving her weak and swollen. Friends discouraged her father from using Western medicines, which were thought to cause further harm. For six months, her parents kept Grace at home because they believed the hospital would worsen Grace's illness. As Grace's condition deteriorated, her father made the difficult decision to take her to the USAID-funded outpatient therapeutic program at a nearby hospital.

The outpatient therapeutic program is part of a newly developed community-based therapeutic care (CTC) program, which provides severely malnourished children with Plumpy'Nut, a ready-to-use peanut-based food fortified with essential vitamins, minerals, and fats. The program also educates parents on detecting malnutrition earlier and providing their children with nutritious food year round.

At the health center, Grace's father realized that the nutritional program was helpful rather than harmful, and he quickly became an advocate of the program in his village. For the next five weeks, he returned to the clinic every Tuesday to replenish his daughter's supplements and learn more about malnutrition, how to detect it, and what available treatment options are.

With USAID funding, over 1,200 volunteers in the region have been trained on identifying children with severe and moderate malnutrition and managing the children's treatment at home. Previously, only a limited number of children were able to access the nutritional rehabilitation units in their districts, which were geographically inaccessible to communities and whose programs were too time intensive for most families to commit to.

Since the start of the CTC program, 4,870 children have benefited. A year later, Grace is a healthy little girl full of energy, but she is not the only person who has benefited. Today, her father remains a CTC volunteer who has helped make the program a credible system of care in his community available to everyone.