

Love builds episodes 1-6 synopsis

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Albinism in Malawi project



Albinism is an inherited condition where there is little pigment produced in the skin, hair and eyes. This results in poor vision and skin that is extremely sensitive to the damaging effects of the sun

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Outputs of this albinism project are freely available via Coventry University's online repository [here](#).

Supported by Coventry University, an Innovation Fund grant from Sightsavers UK (described [here](#)) and several UK charities.

In this project we aim to use radio drama to

- highlight and address the barriers to education often experienced by those with albinism and
- showcase low cost interventions that can enhance the classroom experience and lives of those with this inherited condition.

A report on the development of this radio drama is available [here](#).

Below are outlines of the first six episodes of this drama, called [LOVE BUILDS](#).

Episode 1

The myths and beliefs about children with albinism in Malawi and other parts of Africa are challenged in this brief and passionate plea for love, togetherness, inclusion and understanding.

Albinism is an inherited condition where there is little pigment produced in the skin, hair and eyes. Madalo is a 9-year-old girl with albinism. Her quest for education is challenged when she faces stigma and inadequate support from peers and society. Mr. Zgambo, a new teacher at her school, is convinced that teachers, pupils and society can do better to address her needs. He believes LOVE BUILDS.

Episode 2

Building on the tone set by episode 1, episode 2 continues to challenge the myths and misconceptions about albinism in Malawi and other parts of Africa.

Madalo has for the moment surmounted the challenges that she faces at school and in her community, and it is clear that she is heading for a successful future. She becomes a model for the listener on how people with albinism are able to socialize normally, emphasizing the crucial element of appropriate dressing to ensure skin and eye protection. The story shows how supportive teachers and parents can together effectively contribute to the well-being of pupils with albinism by mentoring and paying close attention to their needs.

Episode 2 introduces a 14-year-old boy named Bright who has albinism. He is an orphaned street kid who has a talent in music which he exploits to beg from passersby for his survival. Miriam, Madalo's mother, hears Bright singing one day and takes a special interest in the boy. However, this does not go well on another occasion when she meets Bright while in the company of her boyfriend, Kondwani. There is a row between the two lovers which further shows the deep-rooted myths about albinism even among adults and educated people. This row leads to a temporary break in their relationship.

While bedding down at a street corner at night, Bright is attacked by a thug who steals the money that passers-by have given him. Although Bright is hurt, he is saved by three strangers who are to become an important part of his new story. One is Miriam, who will become his adopted mother.

Episode 3

This episode highlights how widespread ignorance about the cause of albinism leads to wrong decisions and wrong practices. It counters such ignorance by using positive characters to bring out the truth about albinism.

Bright is informally adopted by Miriam and is kindly welcomed into the family. Through a flashback of the events that occurred after Bright's birth, the episode shows how the cause of albinism is generally misunderstood and how this eventually leads to social and psychological disturbance of those affected.

A commonly-held myth about the cause of albinism is uncovered when Naliyera brings pressure to bear on her pregnant colleague Nachilenje. She instructs Nachilenje to close her eyes for fear that sight of the passing schoolchildren with albinism, Bright and Madalo, will lead her to give birth to a baby with albinism. Naliyera is immediately corrected by Nachilenje, who knows the true, hereditary cause of albinism.

On Bright's first day at Njalale school, Mr. Zgambo and Mrs. Namba illustrate how teachers can introduce new students with albinism in schools in a way that encourages acceptance and inclusion by their schoolmates.

Taking us to the town where Kondwani is attempting to repair his relationship with Miriam, the story introduces Luso, a medical student and nephew to Kondwani. While Kondwani's relationship with Miriam is on the edge of a cliff due to their previous heated argument over albinism, Luso is making subtle and clever efforts to bring them together. Over a lunch table, Luso engages with his uncle using rational arguments to dispel the wrong beliefs he holds about albinism, at the same time informing the listener.

However, back at Njalale school, trouble from the community seems to stand in the way of progress. Naliyera comes to the school's office and demands the immediate transfer of her children because she wrongly believes that they will contract albinism from the two pupils with albinism at the school. When the head teacher tries to put her right and denies her the transfer letters, she leaves the school fuming, claiming absolute rights over her own children.

Meanwhile in the classroom, Bright's friends have not yet come to terms with albinism and in the absence of the teacher, Bright feels isolated and scorned. Feeling miserable, Bright leaves the classroom, runs to his teachers and tells them that he wants to quit the school.

Episode 4

This episode conveys vital information on how to end discrimination against people with albinism and continues to address widely-held myths and beliefs.

The teachers Mr. Zgambo and Mrs. Namba try to convince Bright to reverse his decision to quit school after receiving a poor reception by his classmates. Although Bright is hesitant at first, it later becomes clear to him that he *can* overcome the challenges he faces and still excel in school, by learning from the experience of his friend Madalo.

In a conversation between Luso, Miriam and Kondwani, Luso helps his uncle to restore his relationship with Miriam. The dialogue introduces the hereditary nature of albinism and counters mistaken beliefs about its origins that are rooted in superstition. For Miriam and Kondwani, the revelation that they may be personally affected by albinism comes as a shock. As albinism is in both their families they realise they could have a baby with albinism if they get together as a couple.

The episode promotes teacher support in combating negative attitudes to albinism in schools and communities. Worried that Naliyera's children are not attending school because their mother erroneously fears that they will contract albinism, Mrs. Namba visits Naliyera's compound and tries to convince her that albinism is not contagious and that her children should return to school. She stresses that that all children should enjoy inclusive education. Naliyera is not convinced and remains angry.

In their continuing effort to end discrimination against albinism and promote inclusive education at their school, Mrs. Namba and Mr. Zamba appeal for community leadership support from the village chief Njalale. He responds positively to their request and meets

Madalo and Bright in the school's office to encourage them in their studies and assure them of support. He also promises to help prejudiced characters like Naliyera to understand the truth about albinism.

Soon after the Chief has dismissed Madalo and Bright, Naliyera bursts into the office in a panic. Her children have gone missing and she begs the school to help her look for them, even though she has refused to allow them to attend Njalale school because it accommodates pupils with albinism. Will the school authorities help her?

Episode 5

This episode addresses the birth and death myths associated with albinism.

Nachilenje goes with her new-born baby to comfort Naliyera whose children have gone missing in the village. When the children turn up in the company of Bright and Madalo, Naliyera reacts with disgust and hostility. She fears that her children may have contracted albinism from their companions. In the action that follows, the play dispels this myth and challenges the misconception that people with albinism are born with magical powers that allow them to perform extraordinary things. It makes clear that pregnant women cannot pass on albinism to their unborn children simply by looking at or speaking to a person with albinism.

Episode 5 introduces Eunice, who is heavily pregnant by Kondwani even as he continues to court Miriam. Miriam becomes suspicious and challenges Kondwani when she notices red lipstick on his cheek. Kondwani manages to talk his way out of the situation but his proposal of marriage to Miriam is rejected. Kondwani rightly suspects that Miriam fears the consequences if their marriage should produce a baby with albinism which, she knows, runs in both their families. He asks her to take more time to consider his proposal.

When Eunice gives birth to a baby boy with albinism, she is visited by Nachilenje, her cousin from Njalale village. Eunice confides the fears she has for her baby; women at the clinic have told her that she had given birth to a "super being" who will not die but just disappear. The ensuing conversation between Eunice and Nachilenje serves to counter this myth.

In Njalale, Naliyera makes a second attempt to get school transfer letters for her children from the head teacher, Mrs. Namba, because she fears they will contract albinism from Bright and Madalo. The chief and Mrs. Namba reason with Naliyera in an attempt to educate her about the real causes of albinism. Naliyera, however, thinks the two have connived against her. In this encounter the chief becomes a conduit through which the hereditary nature of albinism becomes clear to the listener. The chief pleads with Naliyera to send her children back to school.

Kondwani is excited about the birth of his new baby and shares his joy with his nephew, Luso, asking for his company to visit the child whom he hasn't yet seen. Luso reproaches him for two-timing with Miriam and Eunice and refuses to go with him.

Later, at Eunice's home, Kondwani rejects his own child when he sees the baby has albinism. He accuses Eunice of having cheated on him with a white man. Eunice is outraged at the accusation. She tries to reason with Kondwani but he refuses to accept that the baby is his. Finally she orders Kondwani to leave the house, taking with him the baby items he brought along. Eunice vows to him that she will have vengeance.

Episode 6

Episode 6 shows how strong local leadership can help create a safe environment for people with albinism.

Luso challenges Kondwani's superstitious beliefs about albinism while the latter is seeking solace in a bottle of whisky after a heated quarrel with Eunice. Kondwani refuses to accept that he is the father of her child with albinism. Although he continues to protest, it becomes clear that Luso's arguments are persuasive, as Kondwani later admits. Like Luso he is horrified by newspaper reports of the murder of people with albinism.

In Njalale village the chief is organising an albinism awareness campaign. In the street he comes across Zalimba, a school bully, who is cruelly teasing Bright. This encounter sheds light on the difficulties that people with albinism face as well as the mortal dangers. Their body parts are wrongly believed by some to have magical powers capable of bringing riches and good fortune. The chief separates the two boys and points out that Bright is no more responsible for his albinism than Zalimba is for his embarrassing personal features.

It becomes clear to Kondwani that he has to adopt a different approach towards albinism if he is to win Miriam. A shrewd deceiver, he apologises for his prejudices and pleads for a new start together. To convince Miriam he invents a young son of his own with albinism. Miriam finally accepts Kondwani's marriage proposal.

Elsewhere in the village of Njalale, Eunice pays a return visit to her cousin, Nachilenje, as she tries to cope with Kondwani's rejection of her and their child. She goes with Nachilenje to the albinism awareness meeting that the chief has organised. The chief condemns the spate of recent attacks on people with albinism. He explains its true causes and dispels associated myths.

Also present at the meeting are Kondwani and Miriam. Eunice spots them together and confronts Kondwani. Miriam is shocked to learn that the baby Eunice has on her back was fathered by Kondwani, who has rejected the baby boy because he was born with albinism. Miriam's romantic hopes are shattered. She and Eunice both abandon Kondwani in the street.

Further episodes

We hope to obtain further funding to continue this series.

Broadcasts

These episodes are also available in Chichewa and have been broadcast in both English and Chichewa in Malawi.