

Scotsman, 93, pedals daily towards £5,000 target to build African well

Mark Macaskill

Most men his age have taken their foot off the pedal. However, William Stewart, a 93-year-old Scotsman who suffers with Parkinson's is determined to "cycle" more than 10,000 miles in aid of poverty-stricken villagers in Malawi.

Stewart has been pedalling daily on a bike machine at his home since 2016. His goal is to raise funds for a new borehole to provide fresh water to villages in Ibuluma, in the north of the African country.

The existing well is too shallow and dries up during the summer, forcing locals to use river water and risk contracting dysentery, typhoid and cholera.

So far, Stewart, who also suffers with peripheral

neuropathy, a condition that causes weakness and pain in his legs and feet as a result of nerve damage, has clocked up 6,250 miles and raised £645 towards a target of at least £5,000.

He aims to pedal 10,500 miles, the distance from his home in Southampton to Melbourne, Australia, where he was born in 1927. His family moved back to Scotland when he was an infant.

"I've increased my sessions from two to three a day," said Stewart. "My weekly distance will be 63.75 miles. I reckon I'll reach Melbourne in March 2022.

"If you have a disability don't let it get you down. It's the things you can do that matter, not what you can't. Age is not the end of the world. It's important to have

a vision, something that drives you."

Stewart is a counselling tutor and in 2015 was assigned by the Institute of Counselling in Glasgow to help Levison Mlambya, a Malawian who had applied for a bursary.

Two years later, the pair set up a charitable foundation in Malawi's Chitipa district to support the elderly and about 700 children, many of whom are orphans. It provides food for the children from homegrown crops.

The borehole is close to the foundation's resource centre but needs to be much deeper and fitted with a solar-powered pump, connected to an electricity supply, with tanks to allow easier irrigation of crops and vegetables. It dries up as the water table drops and locals

have to wait until the rains in December.

Stewart's daughter, Mary Young, from Killearn in Stirlingshire, who helps to run his charity, said: "My father always longed to go back to the land of his birth but has never had the opportunity. Now he is on his way – in his imagination – while he keeps himself fit.

"An efficient borehole will not only help to keep the children safe from coronavirus and prevent them from having so much time away from school because of illness from water-borne diseases, but will also have a profound influence on the wellbeing of, and quality of life in, the whole community."

Stewart's foundation has already raised funds to help build a community centre for the Ibuluma villagers. It is



Stewart on his exercise bike

used to feed the orphans and provide life skills classes.

Donations can be made at crowdfunder.co.uk/clean-water-in-ibuluma-1