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This release is available online at www.themessagesproject.org.

CNN Heroes Partner to Support Children of Incarcerated Parents in Malawi

Personalized messages from mothers and fathers to be delivered to kids

Norfolk, VA – Approximately 2.7 million children in the country have at least one incarcerated parent, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. These children are among the highest risk population in our nation and are prone to behavioral problems, perform at a lower academic level, and are subject to future involvement with the criminal justice system themselves. Data show that maintaining (or in some cases, rebuilding) relationships between these children and their parents positively impacts child development, as well as reduces the likelihood of recidivism upon release of the offender.

[The Messages Project](#), a non-profit organization established in 1999 to focus on the needs of children of incarcerated parents across the United States, will be expanding its program to the African country of Malawi in August 2013. By recording and delivering video communications from incarcerated mothers and fathers to their children, The Messages Project has positively impacted thousands of families. Carolyn LeCroy, founder of The Messages Project, said, "Our program is about the *children*. Always has been. Always will be."

LeCroy has formed an alliance with Marie Da Silva of the [Jacaranda Foundation](#) in Malawi. Both women were named CNN Heroes in 2008 for their volunteer work advocating for youth, and now they are joining forces to aide this at-risk population in Africa. The Jacaranda School for Orphans formed in 2002 to serve a similar group of children – those living without parents.

"Marie and I knew from the minute we met that we would not only be great friends, but that we also had so much more to give these children through our programs," LeCroy said. "We started talking about how we could partner to bring these two wonderful initiatives together for the children in Malawi. This has been an ongoing effort, and we are finally going to get it done."

The Messages Project team plans to travel to Malawi to film messages in August. While there, Da Silva will assist in capturing these personal communications from incarcerated mothers and fathers. Unlike in the United States, where the videos are typically sent to children in the mail, most of the DVDs prepared in African prisons will need to be delivered in person. For families without electricity or televisions, a photo will be taken instead of video and sent home with a hand-written letter. Message deliveries also typically include a children's book that has been read by the parent during filming.

About The Messages Project

The Messages Project is a nonprofit organization that enables children of incarcerated parents to maintain and rebuild relationships with their mothers and fathers. Since 1999, The Messages Project has recorded and delivered more than 9,000 video messages from incarcerated parents

to their children. Carolyn LeCroy, founder of The Messages Project, was named a CNN Hero in 2008 for her efforts and advocacy for these at-risk youth. To find out how you can help [Take The Messages Project to Malawi](#), visit www.themessagesproject.org.

About The Jacaranda School for Orphans

The Jacaranda School for Orphans, opened in 2002 by the Jacaranda Foundation, provides free education, nourishment, health care, and home support to more than 400 orphans in Malawi. The children have the opportunity to attend the only free primary and secondary school in the area, where they also participate in sports, learn the arts, and acquire agriculture skills. Founder Marie Da Silva was honored as a CNN Hero in 2008. To learn more, visit www.jacarandafoundation.org.

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