



## **The International Soroptimist – December 2008 edition**

### Project Sierra - What a difference a year makes!

Over a year has passed since Project Sierra: a Family and a Future was launched as our International Quadrennial Project at the Glasgow Convention. What a successful year we have had. The photos here tell just a fraction of the story of the Project Sierra partnership so far!

Our funding target is to raise GBP£1 million (USD\$ 2 million) during the Quadrennium. Already, our partner Hope and Homes for Children has received from SI and individual donations a total of GBP £171,538.45 (USD \$271,974) that YOU have raised for Project Sierra! What a fantastic start - the most successful 1<sup>st</sup> year ever for a Quadrennial Project!

Regular reports from our partner Hope and Homes for Children are giving us insights into the work being undertaken with the girls, mothers and their children who you are supporting. We share some of their poignant personal stories – the grandmother who said she would die contented as her family now have a home to live in; a family who are no longer ashamed to go out as they now have decent second-hand clothes to wear; the positive health impact on young mothers and children due to the medical care they receive at the Project centres; a community dancing with joy when seedlings were distributed, enabling households to farm and provide for their children this year.

We are learning too of some of the challenges and how the Project works to overcome them – school and family visits help social workers to identify those who are struggling with family relationships or other pressures; addressing reasons why young mothers are not attending classes; locating their families and supporting young children to return to family life after the traumas of surviving alone on the streets.

President Margaret's visit to Sierra Leone earlier this year was a highlight of the Project's first year. The hospitality and care shown by all our hosts was wonderful – our partners Hope and Homes for Children and HANCI-SL, and from Soroptimist sisters of SI Freetown club. Most of all, we will always carry the emotion of the warm welcome, openness and enthusiasm of the young women, mothers and grandmothers who YOU are helping to support through Project Sierra, and their determination to make the most of opportunities you are making possible, for them to improve their own and their children's lives.

We saw how Project Sierra provides a safe and supportive environment where healing can take place and learning begin. Whilst caring for their own or lone children, women acquire good parenting skills, learn literacy and income generating skills. Care, professional support and guidance are given to them at every turn by dedicated staff teams.

Preparations are now underway for the first Project Sierra Study Tour, in February 2009. This will be a great opportunity for the eight Soroptimists nominated by Federations to represent you, to witness progress and challenges faced by women and girls in Project Sierra – and then to share with you the experiences they gain from the women and girls they will meet.

Promoting Project Sierra in each Federation is led by a superb team of Federation Project Liaisons: Tes Choa (SI/A), Hafdis Karlsdottir with Lisbeth Hass (SI/E), Anne MacDonald OBE (SIGBI) and Chris Knight (SISWP). They are the cornerstones for communicating between SI and the Boards and members of their Federation. All continue to work tirelessly to support your work on Project Sierra.

In all Federations, Soroptimist clubs and members have used 'tried and tested' ways of raising awareness and funds, as well as embarking on new, innovative ventures. SI's on-line Programme Focus Reporting database already hosts over 80 reports from clubs – and we know there is very much more going on! Again, I do urge you to share your successes, and your ideas!

Soroptimists' personal challenges include sponsored mountain climbs, bungee-jumps, walking, slimming. Others are using their professional skills and creative talents in art, embroidery, cake decorating, making Gift and greetings cards. Soroptimist clubs have linked support for Project Sierra with awareness and advocacy on Soroptimist Programme priorities in ways that resonate within their own local communities – such as education for girls, young people at risk of exploitation including trafficking, displacement due to conflict, homelessness, maternal and infant health.

The website [www.projectsierra.org](http://www.projectsierra.org) provides a forum for promoting Soroptimist activity, as well as for resources from our partners to support your awareness, advocacy and fundraising action. Do continue to use the website resources which are regularly updated.

I am confident that together we will build on the success of Project Sierra's first wonderful year. Your work here is incredibly important. Children are the future in any society. The UN has often stated that the best place for children to grow up and develop is in a family.

When Project Sierra was launched in Glasgow over a year ago, Hope and Homes for Children's Chief Executive Rick Foulsham said: *'I hope that together we will develop a shared ambition to give this work a universal relevance, so that our model of precisely targeted support for families and young women can be adopted by communities and Governments around the world.'*

Project Sierra uses Hope and Homes for Children's model of working through small scale but targeted interventions based on individual assessment of need. Your commitment is already benefiting many women, girls and their children in the communities in Sierra Leone where our Quadrennial Project is located. This alone is a huge achievement, and as our funding of the programme increases, more will be supported and the benefits will multiply. However, as you continue your support into

the next year and beyond, be aware too of the much wider reach that our International Soroptimist partnership will have. As well as the individuals taking part in the Project Sierra programmes, you are partners to developing a model of sustainable child protection programmes that can be replicated in many countries with severe needs.

You can be very proud of what we have achieved together so far. BE INSPIRED to keep it up.