

March 2009 case study: ICFS PROJECT – BO

Edith Kamara

When 45-year-old Edith Kamara came to the attention of HANCI -SL she was living in little more than a cubicle; a basic single roomed hut. Her depression and isolation were evident in her words; “I have no one to look up to, no friends, no family, no husband to call my own. Because I am poor and sick nobody knows I exist. I am only waiting for my death to be very fast.” Only after several counseling sessions did her full story emerge.

She had lived in a family home, built by her father, with her husband John and their three children. After the death of her father, who had been a kind and positive influence, her family quarreled with her husband and physically abused her children. Edith confronted her family only to receive accusations and insults. Her love and loyalty for her husband led to a quarrel with her elder brother’s wife leaving Edith seriously beaten. It was then that Edith decided to leave the family house and they moved into the single roomed hut.

To help keep his family, Manka looked after some land where he did some gardening but he had no income. When things became even harder, he abandoned his family leaving Edith pregnant with their fourth child. The stress of her desperate situation as a single parent contributed to a stroke affecting her right arm and leg. After this illness which left Edith unable to walk or work, the responsibility for managing the home rested entirely with the eldest daughter Boima, then thirteen years old. With no word or contact from their father, Boima, begged, laboured and struggled, working locally in exchange for food or tips to feed her siblings and to pay for her mother’s treatment. It was impossible for her to go to her mother’s relatives to ask for help.

As a result Boima dropped out of school. In an attempt to ensure her siblings’ survival they were handed over to neighbours who instead used for them child labour. It was at this stage that HANCI-SL became aware of Edith’s situation and she joined the project in Bo. She received food, clothing, medical support, a programme of counseling and was also linked up with Handicap International for physiotherapy.

The local community participated in counseling workshops to help them accept Edith and her children. The children returned to live with their mother and they were provided with the materials they needed to return to school. Meanwhile Edith received specific counseling regarding her relationship with her family. With her agreement the family was contacted and they started a parallel process towards reconciliation. During these months efforts were made to contact her husband to encourage him to come home to take care of his wife and children. When he returned a small business grant enabled him to do this. When soon after, the roof blew off their cubicle and the community was asked to temporarily accommodate Edith, her husband and children, they were again in a vulnerable and difficult situation.

Following negotiations with the community, Edith's elder brother agreed to give them a piece of land in the family compound. Here, the family and the local community helped Edith and her husband to build a two-bedroom dwelling. With her husband back and successfully running a small business, the children in school and the family living in a safe home close to her family relatives, Edith now feels confident and secure. As well as the health of her children and the companionship of her husband, she is recognized and respected by her neighbours and community members.

During the social workers' last visit Edith commented that she is alive because God sent HANCI-SL to rescue her and that she is what she is today because of people she did not know. With a broad smile on her face, she looked straight into the eyes of the coordinator and said thanks to her and kindly asked her to pass the smile onto all those who have helped her.

**Hope and Homes for Children
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