

Hope and Homes for Children

Project SIerra Report - July – September 2008

Entire Programme Overview

The reporting period saw the end of the 07/08 academic year in July and the beginning of the new school year in September. To enable the children to return to school they were each provided with the following materials: a uniform, pair of shoes, exercise books, pencils and a school bag.

On August 5 and 6 staff from all of the project locations met in Makeni to hold a formal review of each family's support plans. This enabled them to assess every family's progress and to identify what stage of the programme they are at and what further support is still needed to enable them to become self-sufficient. The support plans were then updated accordingly.

It was also reported that on the whole, the physical health of the children and families on our programme has been improving with less people reporting for treatment at the medical centre. It is thought that this is a result of better healthcare education and people being able to access treatment early on, thus avoiding the need for longer treatment.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments of the reporting period is the newly enacted Child Right Act of Sierra Leone. Every member of the HANCI-SL staff underwent training and has a clear understanding of the important articles that the Act contains. The Act prohibits the forced marriage of girls, exploitative labour and other harmful practices which are issues facing the children and families we are supporting.

Programme Overview: Young Mothers

Locations: Bo, Makeni and Freetown – working with 150 young mothers approximately 300 beneficiaries at any one time.

This project targets vulnerable single young mothers who are living alone. The scheme aims to reintegrate these young mothers with their families or to empower them to be independent, active members of their community.

Update: Young Mothers

Bo

There are currently 90 young mothers undertaking vocational training at the Skills Training Centre. This number comprises of 45 existing beneficiaries and a further 45 new young mothers. They are taking part in tailoring, gara-tie and dyeing, catering, soap making and hairdressing, which is a new addition this academic year. Hairdressing was introduced at the girls' request and it has proved very popular and increased the number of trainees at the centre. Hairdressing is running at full capacity with 20 girls enrolled although many more applied. Gara-tying has the least number of new trainees and it is reported that this is due to cheaper, imported fabrics becoming more popular than locally made fabrics.

Day care has continued to be provided for the children of the young mothers on our programme. For this reporting period, on average 21 babies a day attend the centre. The number of children using

this facility is normally much higher but during this time some of the mothers left their children with family or friends as they have to walk a long way to the centre and there have been persistent rains. A second member of staff has been taken on to help care for the babies.

Newly enrolled mothers took part in a week of group counselling sessions to help them get to know each other and understand that they are not alone. One of the young women on the programme recently lost her father after a brief illness. As he was her only caregiver this hit her especially hard and the team have been giving her individual counselling and support to help her through this difficult time.

With the new mothers being enrolled into the programme a number of health issues had to be addressed. These included malaria, pneumonia, anaemia, worm infestations and diarrhoea. One of the children, aged 16 months, was suffering from a severe infection and had to be rushed to hospital for a blood transfusion to save her life. The team report that the mother left 'broken hearted' but returned from the hospital smiling and with her baby strong and healthy. A second child was referred to the hospital with a serious leg ulcer but after treatment is recovering well.

Makeni

The Team were delighted to report that 48 girls graduated from the programme during the reporting period. These young mothers, who had been on the programme for varying lengths of time, are all now able to care for their babies and look to their futures with confidence. They were given small enterprise start-up kits, for example, tailoring graduates were given sewing machines, so that they can go on to practice their trade and make an income so that they can take care of themselves and their children.

A few of the girls were enrolled in formal education so we worked with their parents and gave them small business enterprise grants so that they could generate an income to cover the cost of their daughters' continuing education. Of these girls, some have gone on to enrol in teacher training college.

Three girls are still being prepared to graduate the programme as they need extra support to live independently. The team were then able to consult the waiting list for girls wanting to join the programme and have enrolled ten new young mothers and their children. The team report that they have found that the recruitment for new beneficiaries has been come much easier as a result of their work to break down the stigma that the young mothers often face. Their advocacy work and community campaigns have helped more girls come forward and that is why they now have a waiting list.

Freetown

Fifty young mothers are currently enrolled on the programme at Freetown where they are either enrolled in school or undertaking vocational training. All of the seven girls who have chosen to undertake formal education passed their end of year exams and were able to progress to the next year. We provided them with the necessary uniform and equipment and paid their fees so that they can continue their education. The remaining 43 girls undertake vocational training.

There have been a number of reported issues relating to family relationships and social workers had to visit two of the girls' houses to help mediate problems within their homes. C left home to live on the streets after a heated argument with her father about the identity of the father of her baby. We helped the father to accept both C and her baby back and to settle their differences. M had a quarrel with her aunt and was told to leave her home. M spent two nights staying with a neighbour before we intervened to help settle the misunderstanding between them. The general health of the mothers and their children has improved and treatment was only given for a range of minor ailments.

The team arranged a live radio discussion on Radio Citizen FM 103.7 on the topic of the increase in teenage pregnancy and what could be done about it. The five panellists, made up of three staff and two beneficiaries, took part in a half hour discussion before they had a half hour public phone in. Many of the callers praised the programme and pledged to support teenage girls in difficult circumstances.

Programme Overview: Children Living Alone

Location: Freetown - the project will work with up to 50 children at any one time.

The project targets vulnerable children who are living on the streets of Freetown with the aim of reunifying them with their family, extended family or wider community.

The project will help these children return home. However, reintegration into family and community life can be difficult and requires ongoing guidance and support. When they join the project the children are counselled, given access to healthcare and provided with nutritious meals. Emergency placements are available when deemed necessary. Meanwhile, the project will work with the family and community to mediate the child's safe return and assess whether the family requires extra support. Once the reunification has taken place, social workers monitor each child's progress and care.

Update: Children Living Alone

This programme operates in Wellington and Kissy in the east end of Freetown. These areas are densely populated and receive little attention from the Government or other non-governmental organizations.

Eighteen of the beneficiaries on this programme were enrolled in school. Of the seven children who were in primary school, all but one child progressed to the next year. Two of the pupils were promoted straight into secondary school as they had made significant progress in their work and gained above average marks in their exams. Three children dropped out of school and social workers are counselling them and encouraging them to return. The children continuing their education received materials to enable them to start the new academic year and we paid their fees.

Trainees on the final year of the vocational skills programme attended six week professional placements in welding, carpentry and tailoring. Social workers monitored their activities and the supervisors in the work places reported that the interns were all committed to work, punctual and keen to learn new things.

Programme Overview: Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)

Locations: Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tambakha - 200 families, approximately 1,000 beneficiaries. (Bo and Mattru: 80 families. Makeni, Tambakha and Kamakwie: 120 families.)

This project targets the most vulnerable children and their families within individual communities. The aim is to strengthen families that are at risk of breakdown due to extreme poverty, illness or death of a parent. Beneficiaries are identified by working with local community leaders and organisations. The support for each family is individually tailored to that family's needs. The overall aim of this project is to work with an individual family to enable them to become self-sufficient. As one family leaves the programme a new family will join.

Update: Integrated Child and Family Support

Bo

There continue to be 40 families enrolled on the programme, comprising 40 parents and 148 children. During this quarter the HANCI-SL team embarked on the following activities:

- **Family and Community visits**

HANCI-SL staff continued with their community visits and used them as an opportunity to discuss the rights of children with their care givers. During this period the team were able to visit six communities. They also held two meetings with the Community Child Monitoring Groups to discuss child welfare issues that they had identified within the community.

The team gave a further update on a female head of a household who has a physical disability. She has been able to expand her petty trading business and is now able to buy enough food for her family and she is beginning to be able to cover the costs of their basic needs which she is really pleased about.

- **Education**

The team visited three secondary and six primary schools, to discuss with teachers the pupils' academic performance with their teachers. The children are reported to be making great progress with their academic work. At the end of the academic year 90% of the children on our programme got the grades needed to move up to the next year.

In September, we paid the school fees for 130 children and provided them all with school materials. The materials were distributed before the schools reopened and some were given out in a ceremony attended by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, school authorities, chiefs and community members. A local radio station, KISS 104 FM, also covered the event.

- **Medical support**

The general health situation of the families enrolled on the project has continued to improve and it is thought that this is as a result of the community health talks. During this reporting period they held talks about the prevention of burns and lacerations. Cases of malaria, pneumonia, anaemia and worms were all treated and in total 34 children were referred for further treatment.

Makeni

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme, comprising 60 adults and 127 children. During this quarter activities included:

- **Education**

95% of the children being supported passed their end of year exams and have been able to progress into the next year. Those who did not pass were either sick during the exam or had missed school because of family problems. Social workers are working with each of these children and it was agreed that the sick child could take his exam at a later date.

School materials were given to 126 children which was a relief to many care givers The school fees of these children were also paid.

- **Small business support**

After the review of their support plans in August, nine families received sixty palm oil seedlings each. Now planted, each family has an acre to cultivate. Despite the intervention of a vet, four pigs died at the Farm Resource Centre as a result of a skin disease and worms. Seven animals remain.

- **Medical support**

The health of the children has continued to improve with a gradual reduction in the number of cases reporting for treatment at the Medical Centre. One child needed to be referred to hospital with a severely swollen stomach and although his progress is slow he is expected to make a full recovery.

Tambakha and Kamakwie

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme in Tambakha comprising 40 adults and 120 children. In Kamakwie, there are a further 40 families totalling 131 beneficiaries.

- **Education**

Across the projects, 171 children attended school in the 2007/08 academic year. 35 children failed their end of year exams and are repeating the year. Social workers will be meeting with these pupil's teachers to discuss each child. It was reported that there has been a considerable improvement in the performance of some children who were academically weak.

The school fees were paid and materials were provided so that all of these children could return to school in September.

- **Medical support**

The nurse has continued to visit families and has treated illnesses such as malaria, typhoid and tropical ulcers. There has also been a marked reduction in the number of children and care givers needing medical attention.

Sadly a seven year old child living with his grandmother in Kamakwie died after a long illness. The boy had been referred to the hospital for treatment but doctors were unable to save him. Social workers have been counselling the family during this difficult time.

Mattru

There are currently 40 families enrolled on the programme comprising 40 adults and 144 children. Ongoing monitoring visits have been made to all families this quarter assessing the following areas:

- **Education**

Over 90% of children passed their end of year exams and on September 18 and 19, 132 children were presented with materials for the new academic year. Local radio station Voice of Women covered the event which was attended by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, school authorities, chiefs and community members. In total, 89 primary school pupils, 38 secondary school pupils and vocational trainees received materials.

During the presentations, the Paramount Chief of the Ywabeko Chiefdom urged parents to make education a priority for children and urged them not to send their children to work if it

meant they would miss school because ‘as future leaders children need to be given the opportunity to go to school.’

- **Health**

The improvement in the general health of all beneficiary families has continued. The project nurse dealt with mainly common illnesses although there was one referral to hospital of a child who was suffering from severe stomachache. The nurse also gave immediate treatment to a child who was bitten by a snake while helping her grandmother to weed the cassava garden. The child made a full recovery.

Mabinty and Mariama’s story

Fifteen year old Mabinty and ten year old Mariama live with their grandmother in the village of Kaba Ferry, just across the river from the rural town of Tambakha. Both of the girls had to drop out of school in 2006 because their grandmother could not afford the fees, uniform and books needed for them to continue their education. Their grandmother has a small business cooking food at the river crossing point but this only provided a small income. The three of them lived together in a one room thatched hut.

Village elders were worried about the family and brought them to HANCI-SL’s attention. A social worker immediately visited the family to discuss their situation with them and to see what support they would need. Their social and economic circumstances were assessed.

The social worker looked at the family’s relationships with one another and also the wider community and ascertained that the girls had an excellent relationship with their grandmother. However, it was recognised that the family had become isolated from their neighbours and extended family members who were living close by. A key factor in this isolation was that the family did not have any shoes and only a few items of clothing between them. We provided them with some clothing and a pair of shoes each. This really helped enhance the family’s social standing and involvement in community activities.

As both of the girls were out of school one of the first things we did was facilitate their return. Mabinty and Mariama settled back in well and are making good progress. The family’s living conditions were also assessed and found to be adequate as their home provided shelter and was of a similar standard to others in the village. However, it was noted that they had very few utensils and would benefit from basic household items such as a hurricane lamp, water carrier, bucket, plates, cups and dishes.

Providing these relatively simple things also helped the grandmother’s small cooking business. Before, the business was limited by a lack of resources but the grandmother identified, along with the social worker, that it would be possible to develop it and increase the household’s income. A small grant further helped with this.

Mabinty said: “I am extremely grateful for the golden opportunity to revive my educational dreams. Had it not been for this project, I would probably never be talking about schooling any longer. However, this organisation has rescued me from this desperate situation and they have given my family a life. With this continued support, I am confident of achieving my dream of becoming a medical doctor because I would like to reduce unnecessary deaths in my community.”

Names have been changed to protect identities.