

June 2008 case study

Rosemary's story

Rosemary is 19 years old and was brought up in Freetown. When Rosemary was in secondary school her parents' relationship began to breakdown and eventually they agreed to divorce. Rosemary lived with her father who later remarried. However, Rosemary and her stepmother did not get on and she was often mistreated. Her stepmother also persuaded Rosemary's father to stop paying her school fees and Rosemary had to drop out of school. Rosemary was determined to continue her education but found it difficult to find any employment so she could pay for herself. Sadly, Rosemary soon found herself working as a sex worker.

Her situation at home continued to deteriorate and Rosemary decided that she had no alternative but to leave home and together with a friend she ran away to Bo. Shortly after arriving in Bo she started a relationship with a young man and became pregnant. When he discovered this he told her that he wanted nothing more to do with her. Six months later her friend from Freetown decided that she wanted to return home, leaving Rosemary completely alone.

Rosemary found it difficult to cope. She had no money for antenatal care and just managed to pay for her food and rent. Fortunately, a community nurse offered to deliver Rosemary's baby for free. After the birth Rosemary became ill and was unable to feed her baby. A community member intervened on her behalf and brought her case to the attention of HANCI-SL. A social worker visited Rosemary to assess her situation. She was immediately enrolled on the Young Mothers Programme and referred to the project nurse. After a week of medical care Rosemary's health improved and she was able to begin the programme. Her daughter was still unwell and continued to receive medical care at the daycare centre.

Rosemary decided to train in catering and hotel management. Within weeks her daughter's health improved and following counselling sessions Rosemary's self-esteem began to increase. As part of her training Rosemary undertook work experience at a local hotel where she gained valuable practical experience in catering.

Social workers also visited Rosemary's family in Freetown to assess whether she would be able to be reunified with them. Her parents were invited to attend workshops on the rights of teenage mothers and the role and responsibilities of parents. During individual counselling sessions, Rosemary's father and stepmother acknowledged that their behaviour towards Rosemary had been wrong and that they were pleased to see how well she was doing on the Young Mothers Programme. A social worker continued to visit Rosemary's family and they agreed to attend her graduation ceremony.

During a very colourful celebration Rosemary received a Certificate of Merit in Catering and Hotel Management. Her father and stepmother were there to witness her achievement and then after the ceremony there was an emotional reunion with

her family who she hadn't seen her since she left Freetown two years earlier. After the ceremony, HANCI-SL social workers arranged a reconciliation meeting between Rosemary and her parents where they were able to talk through the issues of the previous few years. The meeting was extremely successful and Rosemary's parents gave their permission for her to stay and continue her life in Bo but made it clear that they wanted to be part of it.

Rosemary has now established a small business with the start-up kit she received after she graduated. She makes cakes and other sweet food items which she sells in her community and she sometimes does catering for her friends. She makes enough money to pay for the room in which she lives with her daughter as well as her food, clothing, medical bills and daycare costs. Additionally, she has also been able to save enough money to establish a small roadside shop. Rosemary is now an active and respected member of her community. She has a growing business and a very positive outlook about her future. Below is a statement from Rosemary which was taken during a recent monitoring meeting.

"I am very grateful for the assistance that HANCI-SL rendered to me and my lovely child at the time when we were in greatest need of help. I tell you, had it not been for your timely intervention, I would still be in the streets today and I might not even be talking about a daughter. The community would still be mocking me today, calling me all sorts of names; heaven knows what they thought about me then. However, I tell you, the story today is completely different; my community respects and supports me. They know that I can earn my livelihood through my own sweat and they respect me for that. But let me tell you in retrospect that the most important moment in my life was when my father and my stepmother accepted to witness my graduation ceremony in Bo. I did not believe it was actually happening to me when I received word from your social worker that my parents have consented to travel up to Bo to support me at my graduation. It was like a dream come true when my father and my stepmother embraced me in the full view of the public. It was a very, very wonderful experience that I will never forget."