



PROJECT SIERRA: A FAMILY AND A FUTURE STUDY TOUR . MAY 2010

Andrea Mills, SI New York City and United Nations representative wrote a daily blog on the recent Study Tour, so that Soroptimists and others could share in the trip as it unfolded. Here are Andrea's postings (from the SI Programme Blog at www.siprogrammeblog.blogspot.com)

MONDAY, MAY 3, 2010

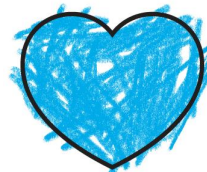
Soroptimists Back in Sierra Leone - 3rd Study Tour

Tonight we arrived in Sierra Leone and were greeted by Alison Sutherland, our Soroptimist Coordinator, and Joe Glackin from Hope and Homes for Children.

It is always interesting to arrive in a new country and arriving in Sierra Leone is definitely a team effort. Alison and Joe negotiated our transport from the airport, got us on the ferry and dealt with sudden room changes at the hotel. They even had water and a snack ready for us in the van during our trip. What more could we ask for?

Joe also deserves a gold star for hanging with nine women from all of the world for the week. Joe brought some support to our transport from the airport in the form of a young man who is the bookkeeper/accountant for Hope and Homes for Children in Sierra Leone. Of course, as an accountant myself, I was very happy to meet this young man who serves as their fiscal person. I couldn't wait to tell him that accounting is near and dear to my heart.

One of the highlights of the trip from airport was a little incident at the ferry terminal. With our van jam packed with nine women, our driver, Joe and the accountant/bookkeeper, we could not make it up the ramp onto the ferry! We



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all had to disembark, except for the driver, to reduce weight. Thank goodness the van made it up the ramp without us having to remove our luggage -- or having to push the van up the ramp. That would have been fun!

All in all, the journey from the airport to our hotel added a good travel story to my collection.

And the adventure continues."

TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2010

Project Sierra Study Tour - 2nd day

Reporter- for the Study Tours- Andrea Mills, SI Representative to the UN New York

"The second day of trip is our project visit to Bo. Bo is Sierra Leone's "second city". We headed out for a four hour ride to Bo after a morning information session about Hope and Homes for Children including confidentiality restrictions on photographing children.

We travelled in three SUVs with the third carrying a mechanic. I wondered why the SUV with the mechanic was always last, until our SUV clutch broke down. We coasted for a while until we came to a stop about 15 minutes outside of Bo. Luckily we were able to pile into the other SUVs and head to the project. It was bit crowded, but we all fit in.

As we continued our journey to the project, we were actually stopped by a police roadblock. All I was thinking was we were going to be in trouble with all these people piled into one SUV! We rolled down the window, the police officer looked in and began to laugh hysterically. I don't think it was something he could ever have expected -- a car full of Soroptimists! Thanks to Suba giving her beautiful smile we all avoided jail.



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WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2010

Project Sierra - Day 3 of the study tour

Here is the Day 3 blog from Andrea:

We started our morning with a special briefing on the day's activities in Makeni. We played a special trick on Joe, our fearless leader, but I am not allowed to blog about it on the Internet. I would be willing to disclose the secret though if an offer came with a bottle of a local Star Beer. After our briefing, we headed to Makeni in the northern province of Sierra Leone. It is one of the most scenic areas of the country, but also one of the places hardest hit by the recent civil war.

People say that Makeni is now its way up with support from the international community and the new national government. It is also centrally located in the country making it a hub for commerce.

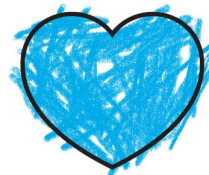
Our journey today was not without breakdowns. Apparently, there appears to be one person in our party who the breakdowns seem to following (Maureen!).

Our welcome today at the project in Makeni was truly fabulous. The children were so cute and it was so, so hot. They were waiting for us in the hot sun but could not wait to greet us, touch our hands and sing to us when we arrived. These welcomes are quite overpowering and a feeling comes over you of being thanked more than you deserve. There is so much more to be done.

Today's group gave us a performance and it was quite good. One thing that is very evident is the leadership skills we seen developing with the children.

After our performance, we took a tour of the site and visited the clinic. This site has a health clinic. Most people in Sierra Leone do not have access to a health clinic.

Today, we were taken to meet Section Chief Kamara the representative of the Paramount Chief Bai Kasana. A little history is that the Permanent Chief is the



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custodian of the land. We reported to the Chief about our meeting with Hanci. We had to meet him to ask for his blessing and to ask permission to visit some families. There are 144 chiefdoms with a Paramount Chief in each chiefdom followed by Section Chiefs and then each section has a Village Chief.

THURSDAY, MAY 6, 2010

Project Sierra - Day 4

Here is the latest from Andrea:

Today, once again, we paid a visit to a Paramount Chief. Chief Kandah Lucini presides over Kamakwie. When you meet with the Chief it is in what is called a barrie, a shaded circular hatched compound usually close to the chief's quarters. We again state how impressed we were about how the community is working with Hope and Homes for Children and Hanci. We can see that success happens when the community works in partnership to rebuild. We also have the chance to meet the recently elected Chief Pasantigie who was previously living in California. He is now a Section Chief in Kawakwie. Lisa Lefebvre, in our group, is also from California. Chief Pasantigie was very interested in talking with her about her home town.

John from Hanci was our guide today. He actually grew up in one of the villages in Kamakwie, was schooled in grade school, secondary school and university in Sierra Leone. He is now back in his home community working to improve the livelihood of the people.

We visited Kamabayo and met the Amadu family including a widowed mother and her six children. She lost her husband in the war. Hanci and Hope and Homes for Children have helped, along with the local community, to rebuild her home. She is such a beautiful women.

We also visited another woman whose husband is blind and must be the



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breadwinner and caretaker for the family. They were living in unbearable conditions until they were able to receive the same support to get a new home.

We next journeyed onto a new village, Masankone, and met with the Section Chief Bai Ferah Fokie. It is custom to introduce yourself to the chief. He greeted us wonderfully and stated that he is planning to crown our fearless leader, Joe, a Section Chief for all his hard efforts. He was very grateful for the support of Soroptimists around the world and especially for the work that Joe has done in the community.

FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2010

Project Sierra - last day

(Editor's note- I am so sad to post this last chapter - I have loved reading every moment of it and hope you have too! thanks so very much to our intrepid reporter - Andrea Mills)

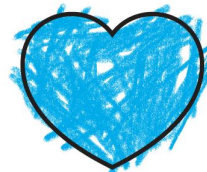
Our final adventures were to Kissy and Freetown.

Today we visited the Kissy project and were given a performance by the children. The performance showed how a young girl came to find herself on the streets of Freetown pregnant and then with child.

The children were such great actors. They had developed the skit on their own. The ending showed the young woman and child getting support from the Kissy project.

We also got to tour their facilities. They are teaching the young girls to be seamstresses and hairdressers. There was even one young lady who was taking up welding.

Once again we were all overcome with all the wonderful things that are



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happening. The team at Hanci, Lois, Kelfar, John and Abu continue to do such wonderful work in extremely tough conditions.

We also cannot say enough about Alison and Joe. They are our Soroptimist link to the efforts and without them, we would not have the communication that is needed for a project of this size.

On Friday we met at Hanci's offices to debrief and give our comments.

Maureen Maguire brought up the issues of prevention of pregnancy. Kelfar spoke how they are utilizing radio but know that they need to get to the schools and they are working on a more face-to-face forum.

Suba Parthiban asked how Hanci was able to recruit and train such a wonderful team. Kelfar spoke about how they recruit from the communities. This helps with finding the issues, gaining trust and speaking up on the rights of women and children.

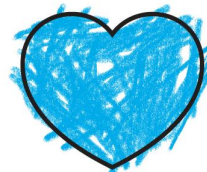
Karen Fyhring spoke about age requirements on when children are considered children. Kelfar spoke about how Sierra Leone enacted the Child Rights Act in 2008 through legislature. Currently, monitoring actions is tough but they are working on it. The legal requirement is that a child is considered a child until the age of 18.

June Gabbitas asked about if HANCI had resistance from the Chiefs for their efforts. Dr. Roland spoke about how they communicated to the Chiefs the rights of the child to slowly work to move to the rights of the woman.

After more questions, we concluded the meeting and I guess we could say our journeys.

I will not bore you with the details of getting back to the ferry, the heat or anything else, but if you would like to know someday, I will gladly share.

I would also like to say that, we Soroptimists, are not done. We still need to raise another £500,000. There are some conferences and a board meeting coming up. Also, I cannot stress enough, the importance to raise funds at the local level. We need to make our target. Please work hard at this.



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I want to leave this blog with the words from a sign hanging in the small clinic we visited with six beds with mattresses about two inches thick. I also apologize if I offend anyone.

Think Wise Thoughts -

In Happy Moments - Praise God
In Difficult Moments - Seek God First
In Quiet Moments - Worship God
In Painful Moments - Trust God
At Easy Moments - Thank God

Note: The third SI Study Tour to SI's Quadrennial Project, Project Sierra: a Family and a Future was hosted by partners Hope and Homes for Children and HANCI-SL (Help a Needy Child in Sierra Leone) from 2 . 7 May 2010. Soroptimists represented all four Federations and SI. The Group was: *Andrea Mills* (SI New York City, SI UN representative); *Lisa Lefebre* (SI Vallejo, USA, SI/A), *Ingrid Renwanz* (SI Suburban Essex, USA, SI/A); *Karen Fyhring* (SI Denmark, SI/E); *Suba Parthiban* (SI/E Programme Manager, SIE HQ Geneva, Switzerland); *Maureen Maguire* (SI Lurgan, N Ireland, Vice-President SIGBI), *June Gabbitas* (SI Grange-over-Sands, Project Sierra Ambassador NW England & Isle of Man, SIGBI) *Siew Yong Ng* (SI Petalang Jaya, Malaysia, President-Elect SISWP), *Robynne Paget* (SI Roturua, New Zealand, SISWP), with *Alison Sutherland* (SI Quadrennial Project Liaison, SI Freetown)



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