



## The International Soroptimist – September 2007 edition

Introducing our new SI Quadrennial Project 2007-2011

Project Sierra: a Family and a Future

“The more I have learned more about Soroptimist International, the clearer it has become to me that our priorities are very closely aligned indeed. I have no doubt that we will form an excellent partnership and that together we will achieve truly astonishing results.”

(Rick Foulsham CMG, Chief Executive, Hope and Homes for Children)

Welcome to Soroptimist International’s exciting new quadrennial project, “Project Sierra: a Family and a Future”.

Our project partner is Hope and Homes for Children, a UK based NGO who work with orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children in Central and Eastern Europe and Africa. They believe that every child deserves to grow up in the love of a family and security of a home, so they can fulfil their potential.

Through the Project Sierra partnership, Soroptimists will be joining them to support women caring for children in extreme poverty and children who are alone or at risk of abandonment in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

Sierra Leone is one of the world’s poorest countries and is still recovering from the impact of a ten year civil conflict. The cost of war on children and families was immeasurable – they suffered the terrors of murder, torture and rape; communities were destroyed, over 2 million people (half the population) were displaced, many thousands of children were orphaned or separated from their families with many held against their will as child soldiers or sex slaves. Today Sierra Leone has the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. Extreme poverty (with over 70% of the population living on under \$2 per day), HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria all contribute to a life expectancy for women of just 42 years.

Project Sierra will work in urban and rural areas to:

- provide a vital lifeline for **families at risk of breakdown** due to the pressures of poverty, illness or death of one or both parents;

- help **young children who live on the streets** to return home. Alone and at risk of exploitation these children, some as young as six, are extremely vulnerable.
- empower and guide **vulnerable young mothers** who live alone, estranged from their families due to the stigma of having an illegitimate child. They too are in danger of exploitation and their babies at risk of neglect.

Working with local communities and expertise, support will be individually tailored to the needs of each child and family on the programme. It will include:

- **education** in school or skills **training**
- **health education** and **medical care**
- **counselling** and help to **strengthen family ties**
- **business or livelihood support** to help the family move towards self-sufficiency.

Over the next four years, Project Sierra will directly transform the lives of well over 3000 children and women. Families and communities will be strengthened. It will build the country's capacity in child protection, and will be of international benefit through sharing knowledge with other international agencies.

Rick Foulsham, Hope and Homes for Children's Chief Executive told Soroptimists at the Glasgow Convention of meeting young mothers during a recent visit to Sierra Leone: "We heard chilling stories of rape and extreme abuse, of young mothers being shunned by their own families and having to survive on the street. But every young mother who I spoke to had a real belief that, through our support, she would be able to make a new life for herself and her children. Every one was totally committed to their school work or their vocational training, absolutely determined to grab this opportunity with both hands, to stick by their babies and to guarantee the best future possible for them. I was moved and uplifted to witness such courage and confidence in the face of such adversity."

Project Sierra is YOUR project and YOUR chance to make a real and lasting difference to these women!

Resources are available now to help you get involved straight away. A dedicated Project Sierra website [www.projectSierra.org](http://www.projectSierra.org) has information and downloads for advocacy and fundraising. It will be regularly updated and will include news from Soroptimists of your successes – so please let me or your Federation Liaison know what you have been doing in support of the project

Soroptimist International's website [www.soroptimistinternational.org](http://www.soroptimistinternational.org) has information on the project, including the SI Club Protocol. Project Sierra brochures and DVDs are being sent to each Federation for members' use. Lapel pin badges and notelets are also available for sale to kick-start our fundraising.

So let us begin NOW to raise our Awareness, be Advocates, and Act to transform the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable women and children.

Alison Sutherland  
SI Quadrennial Project Liaison 2007-2011  
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