



The International Soroptimist – March 2008 edition

SI Quadrennial Project - Project Sierra: a Family and a Future

At the time of writing, over GBP £27,000 (US \$53,000) has been remitted to our Quadrennial Project partner, Hope and Homes for Children, for Project Sierra: a Family and a Future. What a wonderful gift for the New Year to know that our support is becoming real for those children and young mothers in Sierra Leone whom Project Sierra will serve! Thank you!

Improving the health of women and girls is an important part of Project Sierra. In Sierra Leone, of 1,000 children born, 283 will die before their 5th birthday – the highest mortality rate of under-fives in the world (UNDP 2006). Malaria and diarrhoea are particularly dangerous killers. The maternal mortality rate in Sierra Leone is also the highest in the world (2005) – one in six women dies of childbirth related causes. Access to medical or trained birth attendant services is lacking in many areas. The need to travel long distances and the high cost of travel or medicines mean that many of the poorest families have little access to medical care. Poverty and low awareness (education) inhibit access to the most basic services.

As Soroptimists we are committed to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals. MDG 4 aims to reduce the mortality rate among the under-5 year olds by two thirds. MDG 5 aims to reduce maternal mortality by three fourths by 2015. MDG 6 aims to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases. These aspirations are ambitious and a long way off in many countries, including Sierra Leone. But, through Project Sierra, *your* Soroptimist action *will* make a real difference! Your work for the project will be improving the health chances of many – the children, young women and families in the programme and other needy children in the community.

Project Sierra will help to boost the general health and strength to combat illness of young children living in extreme poverty, by improving living conditions and nutrition. All of the children and families in the programmes have access to medical facilities, medicines and treatment through Project Sierra. These are made available to other vulnerable children within the host communities also.

Carers and young mothers are taught about health, nutrition, disease prevention and child care. The health of the very young children within the programme is carefully

monitored. Sexual health and HIV/AIDS education is included in the education for young mothers. Local partnerships with specialist health and preventive health service providers give Project Sierra the benefit of suitably trained experts. As well as the intensive direct support to the children and families most in need, Project Sierra works with the wider community to spread the benefit of the programme – health elements included in village consultations and outreach also plays a role in raising awareness and promoting the Project's values.

Soroptimists around the world are taking Project Sierra to heart. The project DVD is being used by clubs and regions to raise awareness and support their fundraising activities; Soroptimists have translated project materials in Europe, Japan and the Americas. A great range of events – concerts, quizzes, sponsored walks, meals, fashion shows, exhibitions – have already been held or are being planned. Our UN representatives have used Project Sierra materials at a recent NGO forum organized by UNESCO in Paris.

Hope and Homes for Children supports women and girls by strengthening families, and by ensuring family care for children, including very young mothers, who have none. The UN has nominated May 15th as the International Day of the Family. Clubs may also like to use this day to make themselves aware and learn more about Project Sierra by studying the websites and promoting our Quadrennial Project within their local communities.

Thank you so much for the wonderful start! Do check the website www.projectsierra.org regularly for updates. Don't forget to report on your involvement with the Project for SI programme! Please send photos and information to your Federation Liaisons. I look forward to sharing the news of your activities and of how you are helping to bring a healthier future to women and children in Sierra Leone through Project Sierra.

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March 2008