



Hope and Homes for Children Partnership with Soroptimist International

Project SIerra: A Family And A Future

Project Report: July – September 2010

Programme Overview: Young Mothers

Location: Bo.

The project works with 104 young mothers and 58 babies. The project targets vulnerable single young mothers who are living alone. It helps to prevent them from being separated from their babies by supporting them to learn essential parenting skills. It also aims to reintegrate them with their families and empower them to be independent, active members of their community. There are also approximately 140 members of the wider community who benefit from the project by attending workshops run by the team.

Programme Update:

Bo

In July a special graduation ceremony was held for the 27 young mothers who, as reported in the previous quarter, had successfully completed their training. The ceremony guests included families and friends of the young women as well as community leaders and other key project stakeholders. During the ceremony each graduate was presented with a start-up kit for their acquired skill, with hair dressing and tailoring being the most popular.

Since July, the team is pleased to report that 80% of these young women have established their own businesses using the skills they were trained in. The remaining women are being employed by the owners of the businesses where they went for their on-the-job training. This is a clear indication of the high quality of training delivered by the staff at the Bo Centre.

Also in July, the team was able to assess all the young mothers who remain in training at the Centre, to decide if they can progress to the next performance level. The team was pleased that the majority of them can now progress to a higher level. Only 17 young mothers are required to repeat some of their classes. Staff members are working closely with all young mothers to ensure they can exit the programme as soon as they are ready.

During this quarter, 32 new young mothers joined the project and started at the Bo training Centre. These mothers had been referred to the project by the police, the Ministry of Social Welfare and by community leaders. Since their arrival, team members have been supporting each new mother by providing one to one counselling to help them cope with any issues directly affecting them. The team has also begun preparing them for a much brighter future.

As usual, the feeding program continues to be one of the best aspects of the project. Prior to joining the project, very poor young mothers from the rural areas would struggle to find food for their next meal. Many had been banished from their family home as a result of a pregnancy outside wedlock. The feeding programme for these young women and their babies has really been a worthy venture by the project as the team seek to promote child right issues in Bo. There has been a remarkable difference in health of both the mothers and their babies benefiting from this service.

Project Sierra's HANCI team was particularly pleased to report that it has been voted the best humanitarian organisation and awarded a Certificate of Merit by the YMCA and the Bo City Council. According to the National Youth Secretary of the YMCA in Sierra Leone, the Certificate was awarded because of the high quality of strategy and expertise the project uses to help young mothers, their babies and children living alone, to achieve their full potential. The National Youth Secretary said the project team is well-known for advocating child rights issues and that it had been selected as the best NGO by the people of Bo.

Programme Overview: Young Mothers and Children Living Alone in Freetown

Location: Kissy, Western area of Freetown.

Working with 70 children, 37 parents/caregivers and 409 extended family members. The project targets vulnerable children and young mothers who are living alone on the streets of Freetown. The aim is to reunite the children with their families or extended families and support them to live together. With the young mothers the aim is to prevent them being separated from their babies and empower them to be independent, active members of the community.

Programme Update:

There are 70 children enrolled on the Children Living Alone project at the Kissy Centre.

The major part of this quarter was spent assessing the academic progress of the 40 children in formal schooling. The team was happy to report that 32 children have done very well and have progressed to new classes. Five of the remaining children are awaiting results and three are repeating some classes because of poor performances. One child was expelled from the school by the authorities because of unacceptable conduct in school however the team was able to find another school for him and are helping him improve his behaviour.

As in the last few months the team had continued to reunite young mothers and children with their estranged families. The team had been having difficulty reuniting one girl and her baby with her father. In the past, the father had turned down all attempts by neighbours and religious leaders to reconcile them. The team was pleased to report that the family are now happily together after the father visited the Centre on several occasions as a gesture of appreciation of the team's effort. The

team was typically determined not to give up on the welfare of the young mother and her baby.

In September, a ceremony was held at the Kissy Centre to distribute educational materials to the beneficiaries. Items distributed included school bags, uniforms, black shoes, exercise books, pens, pencils, erasers, sharpeners, second hand clothes and tuition fees for the year for those in formal education. Those in the vocational training also received practical materials like hair accessories, welding material, carpentry items and sewing materials. Family members, community Chiefs, a Principal from a community secondary school and the Deputy Officer Commanding the family Support Unit of the Kissy Police all attended the ceremony.

The team is very pleased that the new Social Workers are gradually learning our approach to young mothers and children living alone. The team is also delighted that the Program Manager, Lois Kamara, has been accepted into the university to pursue a degree course in Social work.

Programme Overview: Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)

Locations: Bo, Mattru, Kamakwie, Tambakha.

This project works with up to 200 families, with a total of up to 1000 family members. It 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 the death of a parent. Beneficiaries are identified by working with local community leaders and organisations. The support for each family is individually tailored to meet their needs and to support them to independence.

Programme Updates:

Bo

In this quarter the main focus for the team was preparing 18 of the 30 previously identified families for exiting the project. As this was the first time families from the Bo project were leaving the project the Programme Manager for urban areas, Lois Kamara, was there to provide support during the process. Although the team fell below its targeted number of 30 families it still succeeded in enabling 18 families with 62 children to leave the project. These families were full of praise for the project and for the staff who had worked so closely with them. The team is working with the remaining 12 families to support them through the leaving process in the coming 4th quarter.

As this quarter marked the end of the school academic year; so the team was busy following up and assessing the academic performances of children to determine how best they can be supported in the coming school year. The team is pleased to report that 99% of the children in the primary school level made it to new classes. Only one boy and one girl were asked to repeat their classes as a result of poor performances. Those in the secondary school level also recorded a similar performance; 50 of them promoted to new classes with two boys and a girl repeating their classes. They will all be supported in returning to school in the new academic year.

The project continues to provide healthcare support to beneficiaries who are sick and can not afford the cost of going to public hospitals. Most of the children under the age of five who came to see the Project Nurse were able to be referred to health care

services run by the government from where they received free treatments. The most common causes of sickness reported this quarter were for Malaria, Pneumonia and skin infections.

Matru

This quarter the team successfully prepared 12 families (those who had been identified in the previous quarter) to leave the project. During the 18 month period during which they were enrolled on the project, they received a diverse range of support from the team, ranging from vital medical care to educational support. To help ensure a smooth exit of the families, several counselling sessions were held. The team then gave small business support to all of the families. The remaining 27 families will receive continued support from the project until the end of the year.

A priority this quarter was to ensure schools materials were distributed and charges paid. The team was pleased to report that they, together with the Project Management Committee, supervised the distribution of learning materials to all 90 school children on the active family support project for the 2010/2011 academic year. Each child's package included a school bag, two sets of uniforms, a pair of shoes, exercise books, pens, pencils, an eraser, a sharpener and a ruler. The distribution was done in three different communities on the 16th, 17th and 18th September. Every beneficiary and family, together with a large representation of community elders, witnessed this activity. It also received extensive coverage on Radio Voice of Women in Matru and on Radio Bontico. These community radio stations sent three reporters to cover the distribution.

Lastly, as a result of the very heavy rains in Matru, the level of reported cases of illnesses, such as malaria, increased and this kept the Nurse very busy during this reporting period.

Kamakwie

Kamakwie is a rural and remote area of the country. The team is currently working with 36 families, consisting of 147 children.

The team was able to follow up on the educational performance of 53 of the children currently in formal education. Their performance was encouraging as 77% of them were promoted to a new class. In August, children from 10 families who are still in the project were supported with education materials to adequately prepare them for the new school year. This group was encouraged by the team to take good care of these items. The team is pleased to report that all of the children (those currently part of the project and those who left last quarter) returned to school in September to start the new school year.

The project was able to provide a single mother of six children with a small business grant to support her family as they are prepared to leave the project in the coming months. The team is confident that this family can be fully integrated into their community without any major issues.

As a way forward, the team held consultative meetings with various community stakeholders on the 21st September. They discussed a proposed new approach in working with the community to benefit more families in Kamakwie. Community stakeholders were supportive of a broader based community approach in delivering the project.

In preparing 10 families for leaving the project, the team held general counselling sessions with the families and members of the wider community. This has been very important for these families to feel secure within the community as they leave the project. The community was also reminded by the team of their expected role in supporting these families for their full integration into the community. To ensure this, the social workers held 36 rounds of individual family counselling sessions and six community support sessions.

Tambakha

Tambakha is a rural and very remote area of the country. The team is currently supporting a total of 36 families, consisting of 121 children.

Following the successful exit of six families in the previous quarter the team has been working to support the 12 remaining families and preparing them to leave the project by the end of this year. They have been assessing the school performances of 36 children from these families and nearly all the children have been promoted to a new class. In September, as in other project areas, they were supported with various educational materials to start the new school year.

As part of the team's plans to prepare families to leave the project, one family has been provided with roofing materials to repair their leaking roof which has been a major source of illness. The materials provided included zinc roofing sheets, assorted nails and cash payment for labour to carry out the work. The family had been using palm leaves as doors and windows which have now been replaced with doors and windows made from solid wood. The family's social esteem has been enhanced in the community as a result of these improvements.

Another family was supported with a small business grant to prepare them for leaving the project. This family is hoping to develop a stable source of income in the Tambakha chiefdom from this grant; something they have wanted to do for a long time.

In August the team met with various community stakeholders. They discussed the possibility of introducing a community based approach targeting the wider community of the Tambakha chiefdom. The feedback the team received was very positive.

Case Study: Martha – Young Mother's Support, Bo

When Martha was 12 years old her parents separated and she and her three younger siblings moved from the small village in the East of Sierra Leone, to live with her mother in Bo. Sadly, very soon afterwards, family life further deteriorated as her mother began to suffer from a serious mental illness and eventually abandoned the children; leaving them in the care of their grandmother. Despite living on a very small income, the children thrived within the care of their grandmother and for five years she provided stability, warmth and love. Tragically, when Martha was 17 years old, her grandmother died and she took on the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. Martha's mother reappeared briefly but it was clear that she was still very ill and not receiving any treatment for her illness. Martha felt that she had no option other than to abandon her studies, find a job and support her entire family – a huge responsibility for a 17 year old.

Life was further complicated when Martha became pregnant and the father refused to support her. Without a family support network that would help with childcare, Martha

was unable to work and her younger siblings were no longer able to attend school. Daily life was bleak, without any income or support. Thankfully, Martha was referred to our Young Mothers Programme in Bo and she enrolled on the catering course in September 2008. From the beginning, Martha was fully committed to this opportunity to learn new skills that would eventually enable her to earn an income for her baby and her siblings. With support from our programme, Martha's baby was cared for while she studied and her siblings were supported to return to their education. After 18 months of hard work, Martha successfully graduated from the Young Mothers Programme and was further supported with a business start up kit which included catering equipment. A local hotel offered her full time employment and she has assistance with child care. Martha's income is sufficient to provide for her family, enable her siblings to complete their education and also pay for her mother to receive medical help.

Quite rightly, Martha is extremely proud of her achievements and is happy to provide advice and support to other young women who face similar challenges and advocate for the work of the Young Mothers Programme in Bo.

Case Study: Kadie – Young Mother's Support, Freetown

Kadie's parents broke up when she was a young girl and she was cared for by her father and step-mother in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Kadie's peer group were a bad influence on her and her behaviour quickly deteriorated. Despite interventions from her grandmother and stepmother, Kadie continued to behave badly and things continued to deteriorate.

Two years into her secondary education, Kadie became pregnant by a fellow student. Her father was furious when he found out about her pregnancy and in his anger he told Kadie he would kill her if he ever set eyes on her again. With little choice, Kadie left the family home and lived on the streets with her friends. It was there that her baby was born.

Some neighbours took pity on Kadie and her baby son and gave her shelter. However, in a very short time, they began to exploit Kadie and made her undertake all kinds of labour in exchange for shelter. The situation became unbearable and Kadie felt no other option but to take her baby son and leave.

Once more, she returned to the streets but this time with a young baby to support life was even tougher. Kadie's baby son became very sick. With severe diarrhoea and vomiting the baby was close to death. Luckily one of Kadie's friends knew of HANCI/Hope and Homes for Children project in Kissy and persuaded Kadie to make contact and seek help.

Kadie and her baby son arrived at the Kissy Centre looking weak and malnourished. Immediately our team began to working to care for Kadie and her son. With the correct treatment and care, Kadie and her baby's health recovered very quickly. The team then encouraged Kadie to learn a skill which would help her bring in an income to support her and her baby in the future. Kadie opted to study hairdressing through one of the training workshops available at the Kissy Centre. Having addressed the urgent issues of their health and the ability for Kadie to earn an income, the next major challenge was to heal the damaged relationship between Kadie and her father and also locate her mother. After several counselling sessions, Kadie broke down in tears. She expressed regret at her earlier behaviour and said how very much she

longed to return home to her father, despite his threats against her. We assured her that we would be there to support her when they met.

For four months, in spite of our efforts and Kadie's pleading, her father continued to remain hostile. Kadie's mother agreed for her daughter and grandson to move in with her and finally we managed to broker an agreement with Kadie's father. He agreed to support her financially while she continued her training at the Kissy Centre.

Kadie and her son are now living happily with her mother and her father pays regular visits to see her at the Kissy Centre and watches her progress in her studies with real interest. The family are now on the path to independence and a more secure future.

Thank you to Soroptimist International

Your support makes all of this possible. Through Project SIerra: A Family and a Future you are making a real difference to the lives of women, children and their families. On their behalf thank you all very much.