



## **Hope and Homes for Children Partnership with Soroptimist International**

### **Project Sierra: A Family and a Future**

Project Report: January . March 2010

#### **Programme Overview: Young Mothers,**

Locations: Bo and Makeni - working with 117 young mothers and 71 babies.

There are approximately 315 direct and indirect beneficiaries at any one time. The project targets vulnerable, single young mothers who are living alone. It helps to prevent them 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.

#### **Programme Updates:**

##### **Bo**

The project in Bo has a total of 104 young mothers and 58 babies enrolled. There are also approximately 140 members of the wider community who indirectly benefit from the project by attending workshops run by the project team.

The team continued to facilitate family mediation talks this quarter. There had been problems within four families where young mothers did not feel accepted. The team met community elders and with their support the issues were resolved and the mothers now feel more accepted in their homes. There were also five separate group discussions held, with a total number of 76 girls in the Centre, to help them reintegrate well into their communities. The team understand how important it is to collaborate with the local community as this ensures that our work is sustainable in the long term.

The team visited the 27 young mothers who were in job placements and gave them encouragement and support. Various heads of the organisations where the girls are placed have made very positive comments about their work and are pleased with their performance. The team feel that this group of young mothers will be ready to exit the project by the end of the academic year. They have also witnessed how the beneficial effects of the training on the young women. The team reported that it has injected new life in them following the long periods spent in training at the centre.

For those who are not on job placements, internal exams were conducted and the team was pleased with their progress. The examination covered both theory and practical tests for the training courses at the Centre.

This quarter the project nurse treated a total number of 46 young mothers and 29 babies for malaria, worm infestation, typhoid fever, stomach ache and other minor ailments. The nurse decided to arrange a health talk on basic cleanliness and healthy living because of the high sickness level. In total 68 girls attended.

The team were also pleased to have representatives from Soroptimist International visit the project in Bo on 25<sup>th</sup> January. The visit gave them the opportunity to introduce beneficiaries, those that have graduated from the projects and the staff team to the representatives as well as to illustrate the impact of Project Sierra.

### **Makeni:**

Over the course of Project Sierra our local staff team has recognized the importance of involving the local community in our work. This is why community mediation has been an activity frequently undertaken.

They have found that by gaining the support of the village chiefs and elders they then have the backing of all community members and can achieve a smooth transition for the beneficiaries back into the local community. This means that the young mothers, children living alone and the vulnerable families we work with are accepted with compassion by their neighbours which is important for their future.

To enable us to help even more vulnerable women, children and families we are starting to develop services which complement Sierra Leone's community-based society. This will be achieved by developing centres at the heart of the community, known as Community Hubs. These will enable us to keep the same quality of service we provide to individual beneficiaries but will enable the project to reach more people.

We have begun to focus our efforts towards the development of community hubs which means that we shall now be re-directing funds from certain project areas towards this. The Young Mothers and Integrated Child and Family Support projects in Makeni, for example, shall continue their valuable work with the beneficiaries but because of the quality of the work our partner, HANCI, has been able to access funding for these projects from other organisations. We shall continue to build the capacity of HANCI to enable them to access other funding sources while continuing to provide high quality services and at the same time focus on the development of community services.

## **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. With the children the aim is to reunify them with their family or extended family and support them to live together as a family. With young mothers it aims to prevent them being separated from their babies and empowers 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. This quarter there have been 30 new beneficiaries, 15 young mothers and their babies, enrolled on the Young Mothers project.

The 68 children who were reunited with their parents during the previous quarter continue to be supported by the team through their vocational or formal education. The team was also able to resolve the situation with the two children who did not want to return to their families. With their families approval they are now living with friends and doing well. The successful reunification of four of the young mothers with their families was also achieved.

At the Centre, assessment exams for the children were conducted with the majority of beneficiaries performing very well. The tutors have added basic literacy to the curriculum to ensure a greater understanding of all educational areas. A wider range of vocational training courses are now available with the addition of the new gara tye dying facility.

The medical service continues to have a positive impact on the health of beneficiaries. During this period it was found that nearly all of the young mothers were in bad health. They were observed closely and appropriate measures were given accordingly.

The feeding program continues to be an important service as this is often the only meal most of the beneficiaries are certain of each day. It contributes significantly to their healthy development and motivates them to attend the Centre each day.

This quarter the team have held meetings with community elders in three of the communities where many of the beneficiaries live. The purposes of the meetings were to encourage the elders to take an active role in child protection activities and to make their communities more child friendly. They can do this by working with parents to prevent their children from being abused and to encourage them to send them to school. The meetings were considered to be very successful.

There was also a radio discussion held to discuss the reasons why children drop out of schools and are often in conflict with the law. This radio coverage engages a wider audience in some of the bigger issues that the Project Sierra team have to face.

## **Programme Overview: Integrated Child and Family Support (ICFS)**

Locations: Bo, Mattru, Makeni, Kamakwie, Tambakha . working with up to 200 families, with up to 1000 family members.

This project 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**

The start of the New Year was very busy for the team who had the review of the individual support plans as their main focus for this quarter. The team was able to review all of the support plans for the 40 families (comprising of 148 children) and categorised them according to their degree of vulnerability and their readiness to exit the project. Of these, 17 families were identified as ready to exit the project in the next quarter. The team is working closely with the remaining 23 families to prepare timelines for when they will be ready to exit the project.

The team was also busy visiting the schools of beneficiaries which the school authorities found very encouraging. Most of the schools were preparing for their annual inter-house sport competition at the time. The team went along to support the children and said that they performed very well.

A big achievement for the team this quarter was finding alternative placements for 7 children whose caregivers had passed away early this year. It was challenging to encourage extended family members to take the children but, by providing the right support, they succeeded. Continued psychosocial support is being provided to the new families.

In February, the Centre held a training workshop for 11 voluntary members of the Community Child Rights Monitoring Group (CCRMGs), on how to provide support for children exiting the project. Community elders were also invited to talk to the members and to guarantee them their full support in ensuring that families exiting the project enjoy a sense of belonging in their communities and feel accepted. The team was encouraged by the commitment of both community elders and members of the CCRMGs.

#### **Mattru**

As with the team in Bo, the Mattru team's priority this quarter was to assess the support plans for each of the 40 families, comprising of 148 children. They have completed all assessments but are yet to identify which families are ready to exit the program. This will be a priority for the coming months.

In February the team conducted a training workshop for members of the Community Child Right Monitoring Group (CCRMG) on how to support families exiting the project at community level. A total of 19 members from Matru benefited from this training but it also attracted other child protection organisations (World Vision and Campaign for Good Governance). It was extremely positive for the team to know that our work is considered as pivotal to promoting child right issues by other organisations. Following the workshop a radio discussion was organised which involved participants from the workshop promoting child right issues within Matru.

The team succeeded in identifying an extended family placement for one child following the sudden death of their grandmother. This family have moved to Bo where they are now residing permanently.

### **Makeni**

The Makeni team has continued to work closely with all the beneficiaries during the 1st quarter and provide them with psychosocial counseling. As outlined earlier, the strategic changes that Project Sierra is taking, focusing on community-based services, means that the project shall now be managed by our partners, HANCI through other funding sources. This is a very positive indicator of how much Project Sierra has built the capacity of HANCI to develop other funding relationships. Project Sierra shall continue to fund the Project Manager and shall help to build HANCI's capacity as an organization but we shall not now be reporting directly on the work in Makeni.

### **Kamakwie**

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

During this quarter, the team made follow up visits to 12 schools to monitor the progress of the children there. Overall there has been an improvement in performance, 85% of the children are doing very well with their class work and are making steady progress. The remaining 15% are recommended as needing extra support and the social workers are encouraging the class teachers to help these children. Parents were also encouraged to ensure that children in need of extra support were given enough time to study at home.

In January, the team succeeded in reviewing the support plans of all 36 families and 22 were identified as being ready to exit the project by the end of May 2010. To make a better assessment of each family's situation, the team had to consider the following aspects for each; living condition, social relationships, health, educational progress of children and livelihood i.e. stable source of income. Those families who have had more than 90% of their initially planned interventions already completed were regarded as ready to exit the project by the end of the second quarter.

In February, the team was engaged in training members of the Community Child right Monitoring Group in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Children and Gender Affairs on how to promote and protect child right issues within their communities. At the end of this training session the members were recognised by the government as the official Child Welfare Committee members of their local communities; a structure

recognised by government in the Child Right of the government of Sierra Leone. They were presented to the local chiefs and other community leaders on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March where they were charged with the responsibility of protecting children within the chiefdom.

Also in February, a community session was held with the main aim of strengthening the community reintegration process for families exiting our project. The session included community stakeholders such as local chiefs, religious leaders, teachers, heads of local groups and traders in the community. A total of 170 people were in attendance. Those present pledged their support to help these families.

The project nurse has treated 86 beneficiaries this period while 71 adults and older children benefited from health talks. The talks have been helpful in raising awareness about common illnesses like cholera and diarrhoea which are very prevalent in remote communities like Kamakwie. During last season, over 45 people in some of these villages contracted cholera and diarrhoea but this year only nine cases were reported to us; indicative of the success of our interventions.

### **Tambakha**

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

With the support and supervision of the Program Manager the team succeeded in reviewing the support plans of the all 36 families this quarter. They have identified 20 who are very stable and are considered ready to exit the project. The remaining 16 families still need various levels of support before they are ready to exit the project.

In January, the team organised a workshop for members of the Tambakha Community Child Right Monitoring Group to train them in how to provide support to families exiting the project and integrating back into their communities. A review of the composition of the members was done to include more women than men. This is because Sierra Leone has always been a man's world where the views of women are less considered when making decisions about the welfare of children. So getting women to be included at this level is a break-through from traditional practice. A separate meeting was organised to prepare the wider community too.

The team successfully worked with the community to help three families rebuild the mud walls of their homes. These are families whose homes had become unstable and the team reported that they were potential death traps. The project is supplying zinc roofing sheets, nails and skilled labour to build the roofs. They work is expected to be completed by April before the start of the rainy season. If not then the rains could be dangerous as the walls stand to be washed away.

During this quarter, 42 beneficiaries received medical treatments plus a total of 316 people benefited from health talks by the project nurse. These health talks have proved very helpful in controlling the spread of highly contagious water borne diseases, such as cholera and diarrhoea, which have a track record of being very prevalent during February, March and April. The Health Centre records show that, this year, only six

cases were reported since the talks were given as compared to last year where 49 cases were brought to the Centre.

## **Hope and Homes for Children June 2010**

### **Case Study: Augusta**

When our team first met with Augusta in 2005, she was 14 years old and struggling to cope as a single mother to her baby daughter. The future looked bleak. With no support network, Augusta had been unable to complete her education and had very few parenting skills. Augusta was at risk of abandoning her baby daughter and their future life together.

As soon as Augusta joined our Young Mothers Support programme in Makeni she became more confident in her abilities. She quickly developed strong parenting skills and with the child care support offered through this programme, Augusta was able to return to school, safe in the knowledge that her baby daughter was safe and being well cared for.

In 2008 August enrolled at the University of Sierra Leone to study for a Certificate in Development Studies and her young daughter was enrolled at the local school. Our team provided Augusta with a Small Business Enterprise Grant which helped to provide this small family with the financial support they needed while they were studying.

Augusta's studies have been so successful that she has been invited by the University of Sierra Leone to enrol for the Degree Course in Development Studies. Her daughter is thriving at school and is now in Grade Four and inspired by her mother's success. Augusta's aim is to qualify as a social worker and work for HANCI-SL when she finishes her Degree.

Augusta's life could have been so different but through her hard work and determination and the support of our programme, she and her daughter now have the opportunity of a happy and rewarding future.