



Hope and Homes for Children Partnership with Soroptimist International

Project SIerra: A Family and a Future

Project Report: October – December 2009

Programme Overview: Young Mothers

Locations: Bo and Makeni - working with up to 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.

This quarter the team continued to facilitate family and community mediation and counselling activities. In collaboration with community child rights monitoring groups and the Family Support Unit of the local Police, three family and community reconciliation sessions were organised between young mothers and community members. There were also eight separate group counselling sessions held for the young mothers, covering topics such as child care, family planning and respect for family and community. These helped the young women understand their roles and responsibilities.

The Centre at Bo continues to play a pivotal role supporting the young mothers and their babies by providing, for many, the only nutritional meal they receive each day. The team believe these meals significantly help to reduce illness and improve the health of the beneficiaries.

In October, 27 young mothers in their final year of vocational training undertook work placements in a variety of businesses and organisations in the local area. This work experience is vital for the young women as it helps to build their skills and

confidence. On completion of their training the young mothers will receive a start-up kit to help them in their chosen profession of gara tie dying, hairdressing, tailoring or catering. Both of these activities will give them the means and experience required to prepare them for the job market.

Makeni

There are currently 13 young mothers and their 13 babies enrolled on the project.

General examination results were released this quarter and the team was able to make follow-up visits to the five young women who had been waiting for these. They were pleased to report that four of the women passed their exams. Two have since moved on to secondary school and the others two have the option to go to higher institutes of learning. They are deciding with their families. They have also both graduated from the program and are able to live independently as active members of their communities.

The fifth young mother had become pregnant during the long break from school. The team had been concerned about her previously and had been unable to find out her exam results. Unfortunately she then decided to leave the program and, despite attempts to make contact, the team feel it is unlikely she will return.

In November, the project was able to support the families of the remaining young mothers by providing small business grants, training and advice in small business management. These families are struggling economically and therefore have found it very difficult to support the young mothers and their babies and this has led to tensions and difficulties. By strengthening these families economically they are in a much better position to be able to support and provide for the young mothers in the long term.

To ensure that the young mothers and their babies could celebrate the Christmas season, along with other members of the community, the team distributed second hand clothing to them as a special gift for the festive season. The young women were all grateful to the team. They said that they were treated as if they were family and that they will never forget the project's contribution to what they are today.

The team has been preparing individual support plans for each of the mothers to help them exit the program within the next six months. As the majority of mothers are fully integrated with their families and communities and with the newly received business support grants are almost ready to live independently of the projects support.

Programme Overview: Young Mothers and Children Living Alone in Freetown

Location: Kissy, Western area of Freetown. Working with up to 70 children, 37 parents/caregivers and approximately 409 extended family members at any one time. The project targets vulnerable children and young mothers who are living alone in 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 currently seventy children enrolled on the project. There are currently no young mothers enrolled but plans remain to register a 30 young mothers in early 2010.

Following the successful reunification of 37 children with their parents from the previous quarter the team have been able to trace the parents of a further 31 children. This means there are now 68 children who have been reunited with their parents. They are still enrolled on the project and will continue to be supported during their vocational or formal education. The remaining two children do not want to return to their families and wish to live independently but as they are very young the team is working to resolve this issue in each child's best interest.

Before the children were reintegrated with their families three discussion groups were held with parents and care givers to ensure that they were prepared for taking the children back. Towards the end of the quarter the team arranged a workshop called '*Family Reconciliation: A Vital Role in Community Development*'. This was organised to enable heads of families and community groups to come together to find solutions to the issues raised by children living on the streets in their community. Speakers from the Ministry of Social Welfare, the community and the Project team spoke on different subjects including child protection and community reconciliation. Street life was highlighted as a threat to the future of the country and speakers appealed to community members to help parents, in whatever way they could to ensure that children are well taken care of and protected from all forms of abuse and neglect.

In November, a radio discussion was organised by the team on issues including the effects that living on the street has on the development of children and the impact their coping techniques have on the wider community. This was also held to encourage children living alone understand the difficulties and dangers they face on the streets to be reunited with their families.

End of term exams were conducted for the thirty children enrolled in the vocational training course at the Centre. The remaining forty children are enrolled in a number of primary and secondary schools across Freetown. The team made a total of 25 schools visits with the purpose of monitoring the performance of each child in school. On the whole the visitation reports were very encouraging and show that the majority of children are improving with the exception of a few. The parents of those having difficulties were visited to encourage them to monitor the school work of their children.

In mid-December all the children benefitted from the distribution of second hand clothes. This was just in time for their Christmas holidays, providing a feel-good factor thereby encouraging them to attend their vocational training or school. This simple act brought about many positive changes in the appearance and hygiene of the beneficiaries as they feel happier and more confident about socialising with other school children.

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 that family's needs. The overall aim of this project is to work with an individual family to enable them to become self-sufficient. As one family leaves the programme a new family is able to join.

Programme Updates:

Bo

The team in Bo have been very pleased to report that 100% of the children enrolled on the project (148 children) have returned to school when reopened in October. The children are doing very well in their academic work. The team are closely monitoring those children who have repeated their classes from last year to ensure that their performance improves and they are allowed time to study at home.

The team is working with each of the 40 families enrolled on the project to develop and agree individual support plans. The team then hopes to establish clearly defined interventions for the possible exit of these families in the not too distant future as they become self-sufficient.

Psychosocial support and counselling continued to be provided to the families and is a source of much encouragement for them.

Mattru

There are currently 143 children and 40 caregivers/parents supported by the project in Mattru.

At the start of this quarter the team visited the schools of the children on the project to check that they had returned to school. They were pleased that all the children had returned to school with the exception of two. One of these was a boy who had a swollen leg and in need of medical attention and the other is a girl who was suffering from appendicitis.

The team also monitored the progress of each child and found that 90% of them were doing very well. Unfortunately one girl was asked to leave the school because her performance was described as far below average. The team intervened with the school but they were unable to get her readmitted however but they were able to find her a place at another school. They will continue to monitor her progress with the support of her teachers and guardian.

In November, a ceremony was held for four graduates of the tailoring and carpentry training courses and the team distributed start-up kits to each of them. The recipients were very happy to be given an opportunity to start earning their living independently.

They all promised to take good care of their tools and use them as a vehicle to move out of poverty. The team are committed to supporting these young people as they implement their new trade within their respective communities.

There was a rise in reported cases of medical problems in this quarter and this has been attributed to the changing weather in this southern region of Sierra Leone. A total of 66 project beneficiaries fell ill and this prompted the nurse to organise a seminar focusing on personal hygiene. This was attended by 33 of the families on the project.

Makeni

As in the previous quarter the team in Makeni are engaged in assessing the educational performance of all 126 beneficiaries this quarter. They were pleased that all the children have returned to school after re-opening in October.

The team continue to work closely to support the parents and caregivers of those children who repeated their classes, as a result of absenteeism, from the previous term. Social Workers found that the caregivers/parents were finding it hard feed their children and so often they did not attend school. The small business support that the project has since provided for these families means that they now got the ability to feed their children and the attendance level at school has greatly improved.

A Business Development Manager was employed to assist the 40 families, who received the small business support, to develop realistic and sustainable long-term plans. The Manager will also monitor the administration of the small business grants and will support the families, together with the rest of the Makeni team, until they are ready to exit the project in phases over the next six months.

The team continue to provide psychosocial support and counselling as part of the holistic approach of the project.

Kamakwie

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

The team was able to visit the children across 11 schools and the vocational training centre. The performance of 75% of the children was very encouraging, but the remainder were having some difficulties. The team are working closely with parents/caregivers to encourage them to allow the children the time to do their studies.

In November, the team succeeded in mobilising a community in Kamakwie to start the collection of materials needed to repair the house of an elderly grandmother. They divided themselves up into smaller groups to undertake different subprojects on to complete the work.

The Integrated Child and Family Support Manager visited Kamakwie this quarter and provided training for the team's staff. This included training on creating and reviewing individual support plans for the project beneficiaries.

Tambakha

Tambakha is a rural and very remote area of the country. The team is currently working with 37 families with a total of 122 children.

The team was able to visit all the children in their schools and held consultative meetings with the school authorities to follow up the progress of the children in their new academic year. They were pleased to discover that 80% of the children were doing very well at school however 20% were struggling with their lessons. The discussions with the school authority were around how best to help these children cope with their academic work. The Social Worker has also held group and individual counselling sessions with the children on the need to improve their general conduct in school.

The team has continued with their programme to repair the houses of vulnerable families in the community and have been involved in fixing three houses. They successfully motivated the local community members to support the identified families and assist skilled labourers with the renovation. Community members helped to make mud blocks and cut roofing sticks from the forest.

Twenty families were identified as being ready to exit the project in 2010. A planning meeting was held with each family to talk about this and to prepare them for living independently.

The team continued to provide both medical and psychosocial support to the beneficiaries.

On Christmas Eve the team were able to distribute second hand clothing to the children and families on the project. The children were reported to be jubilant as they received their packages and the team reported how these children actively interacted with their peers moving around their communities in high spirit proudly putting on their clothes.

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Case Study

Lois: Young Mothers Project, Bo

Lois lives in Makeni with her four year old daughter. As a small girl she was orphaned when both of her parents died in the war. She was taken in by her aunt. At first, things went smoothly and Lois was happy living with her aunt and her aunt's children. Unfortunately, when another of her cousins returned home, family life deteriorated and the girls continually quarrelled. The situation with her cousin and her aunt reached breaking point and she was asked to leave – at the time she was just 15 years old.

Lois moved to Makeni to live with friends but with no income she turned to prostitution in order to survive. Within a few months, she became pregnant. Despite not knowing who the father was and with the disapproval of her friends, Lois decided to have the baby. During this time she managed to obtain food and other necessities by working for neighbours and other friends. After her daughter's birth, life became very difficult, so much so that Lois considered abandoning her daughter. It was at this point that, having heard of her plight, HANCI-SL/HHC staff contacted her and offered support and she was accepted onto the Young Mothers Programme in Makeni.

As a member of the project, Lois was able to have access to education; and a Counsellor and Social Worker were assigned to her. Lois did well and received good exam results. After her graduation she applied for the Sierra Leone Police Force and was accepted. She was posted to the Makeni Police Force, where she now lives independently with her daughter in their rented home.

Grateful for all the help she has received from HANCI-SL, Lois acknowledges how important the guidance and support has been to her. In return she is able to help other young mothers with babies by returning to talk with them in the Makeni Centre. She also takes part in various radio programmes set up to raise issues concerning children's rights. Simultaneously, she is continuing to study. Her biggest dream is to become a Sierra Leone Policewoman in the UN Peacekeeping Mission for Officers. Such is her determination she is very likely to achieve her goal.