

**HELP A NEEDY CHILD IN SIERRA LEONE (HANCi-SL)
STREET CHILDREN OF SIERRA LEONE (SCoSL) PROJECT REPORT**

STREET CHILD MAKENI –APRIL 2009.

Introduction

April has been an extraordinary month, with the twin (mutually re-enforcing) achievements of the reunification of the majority of the children (page 2)& the return of the first children to school (page 7) representing defining moments in the life of the project.

“As the project gets older by the day, so we strive to increase the popularization of its aims and activities to the wider communities we work with. The activities that took place this month gave the project a new phase both in the transition process of its beneficiaries as well as in the engagement of more stakeholders.

Our outreach is gradually yielding the desired outcomes, and the responses we are receiving from the people we work with continue to underscore the fact that the project was never a mistake, and that with sustained commitment, we all shall succeed in this venture”.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **74 New Reunifications**
- **34 children return to school**
- **Our daily attendance reaches the 100 average mark**
- **2 new members of staff are employed**

- First meeting with Local Educational Authorities
- First meeting with Law Enforcement Officers held
- More parents commit themselves to accept their children home again
- The interim care centre continues to carry out its activities.

I. Work, Progress and Challenges – The Street Children

Overview

We started this month with the very strong drive to complete the tracing and the reunification process as well as place the already reunified beneficiaries into schools. This was a strategic move that was to convince the skeptics about the sincerity and goals of this programme. To this end, we intensified our outreach into the schools and consolidated our community involvement and mobilization with the collaborative support of our local partners. In our advocacy drive, we held the first session with Law enforcement officers in order to better understand our collective responsibilities in promoting and protecting the security of our children. Internally, the centre remained busy in its counseling, recreation, medicare and other activities. Thus was the scope of the activities in April.

Family Tracing and Reconciliation

As one of the prime activities for the month, our commitment to it was massive. We were therefore able to complete the **successful reunification of 74 beneficiaries in collaboration with the MSWGCA. This has brought the total reunified cases to 108, leaving only 12 for the completion of the entire reunification process.** Overall a great deal has happened, and there is great improvement on the side of the parents receiving children again. These are really promising signs that the reconciliation process is holding.

Attendance

The daily turnout of our beneficiaries to the centre reached its highest this month. Throughout this month, we had a daily attendance spanning 94 – 110 (78% - 92%). This turn-out has largely been as a result of the school support that has seen the earliest reunified children returned to school. Since this group resumed schooling at the commencement of the third term this April 20th & 28th, the morning attendance has been slightly affected as the students have to report to their schools. They however flock to the centre in the afternoon and join their peers for lunch and the rest of the day's activities.

Feeding

The hub of activity at the centre is still the feeding programme. Of course, with the motivation for the increase in attendance explained above, the kitchen had more mouths to feed this month. **The daily attendance of the unregistered children patronizing this activity stands at 20- 30.** The kitchen staff continue to work hard and the children are happy. With the feeding programme, the centre continues to be like a busy ant-hill.

Counseling

This on-going activity included a new trend/focus this month. There were two special group counseling sessions held for those beneficiaries preparing to enter the school system. This is in keeping with the promises we made to the schools authorities we visited last month to negotiate the children's return to school. These sessions were mainly on behavioral change, inculcating discipline and hard work, and living with others in the school setting.

There were also general sessions where behavioral change, purposeful living, confidence building and communicating one's feeling were the subjects. There were presentations from the social workers and discussions of which the latter proved the most effective and the children's minds are slowly but surely being re-conditioned again as they prepare to join their home and school communities.

After being encouraged to be bold to say their feelings in a quiet and constructive manner, two boys, Momodu and Unisa reported being saddled with domestic chores. Their concern was heightened by the fact that they were both going back to school. They were counseled privately to allay their fears as well as promised that discussions will be held with their caregivers.

With Trauma Counseling, the general focus was on how to help children rebuild their situation. The girls in particular received a lot of teachings and discussions on coping skills. In these, they were advised to:

- Accept their situation and be prepared to start anew
- Talk about their problems with someone they trust
- Receive advice especially from elders
- Be prepared and be willing to be subject to home discipline
- Do something that can make them useful (never be idle)
- Attach to religious institutions for spiritual advice

As a continuation, the girls discussed such topics as

“My Best Friend”

“The Person I Can Trust Most”

“The Most Important Event of My Life”.

Some spoke while others expressed their views in diagrams. They also sang and partook in role play situations.

Three of the girls needed personal tête-à-têtes:

FATMATA

She went away for four days; away from the centre and away from her caregiver. This greatly displeased the caregiver. At her return to the centre, she was counseled and taken home by the reunification officer who also counseled the caregiver before they were reunified again.

RUGIATU

Rugiatu is currently hospitalized at the Holy Spirit Hospital in Makeni apparently as a result of a shock she had in a dream. This was what her caregiver, Alice Conteh told us when we went to enquire about her absence. The trauma healing counselor and the project coordinator visited her and she is coping gradually. She has started counseling even when in the hospital.

AGNES

Agnes also went away from the centre just after her reunification. Upon contact, her elder sister complained bitterly about Agnes’s outing into the street at night again, never to return home. She was only brought back home by one of HANCI’s staff who met her at the lorry park. Her elder sister threatened to beat her up and so she ran away again but this time, to the centre. She is presently being counseled.

As the majority of our beneficiaries are now reunified, the dominant complain from them seems to be with caregivers. We are devising a plan to handle these complaints.

Medical

The medical team has also adopted the practice of giving health talks to our beneficiaries, adding to the provision of medication and liaising with other health facilitators. This month, the team gave talks on Family Planning (strictly for the girls) on April 7th and on Personal Hygiene on the 22nd. They discussed the topics to bring out all the necessary details and invited questions afterwards. They were very educational, the children certified.

As they seek to formalize their relationship with the referral hospitals in particular, arrangements are underway to develop a referral form, a laboratory form as well as MOU with other clinics and hospitals.

The clinic diagnosed and treated the following categories of ailments.

NO	DIAGNOSED CONDITION	# OF CASES	TREATMENT ADMINISTERED.
01	Burns	03	G.V. solution
02	Gastritis	04	Tabs Gelusil & Metronidazole
03	Laceration	07	Inj procaine penicillin, GV solution, Providone solution
04	Malaria	28	Inj. Chloroquine & Quinine, Inj B. complex, Tabs Panadol, Aspirin & Routine
05	Neuralgia	20	Inj. Novalgin, Tabs Brufen, tabs aspirin.
06	Otitis media	01	Tabs Metro, Caps Amoxicillin , Panadol
07	Respiratory tract infection	04	Tabs Amoxicillin, Tabs Septrin, Tabs Vit. C
08	Sexually transmitted diseases	07	Tabs Metro, Caps DCN, Inj PPF, Inj Gentamycin
09	Skin infection	03	Inj. Dexametagle, Benzoate
10	Stomatitis	01	Tabs Metro, Cap Amoxicillin
11	Toothache	01	Caps DCN, Tabs Brufen
12	Typhoid fever	01	Tab Choraphenicol & Routine
13	Worm infestation	04	Tab Mebendazole

All the treatments proved effective and we made no referrals.

II. Outreach, Reconciliation and Advocacy – Consultations with Street Children, Families and Community Leaders.

Having to do all we have done in the month requires a lot of advocacy and consultations. We had good doses of these.

1. Community Sensitization Meeting Held With CCRMGs

We brought all the three communities (Ropolon, Bangura Street and Campbell Street) we are working with to Campbell Street where we held this sensitization meeting for all the CCRMG members, the community leaders and stakeholders. It was held on 18th April. It had a recorded attendance of 124 including all the 27 CCRMG members and all the community leaders of the three named communities. There were also parents, teachers and other stakeholders.

After the project coordinator had shown the reason for the gathering, Isatu M. Kamara (a CCRMG member) from the Ropolon community spoke on **The Role of the Community in the Upbringing of Children.**

Mohamed S. Conteh (another CCRMG member) from Bangura Street spoke on **The Rights of the Child**; Mrs. Sento Kpukumu (of Ropolon) spoke on **The Different Forms of Abuse Children Face in the Communities**) while SCoSL Tracing and Reunification Officer spoke on **The Importance of Mediation and Reunification.**

The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Memunatu Bangurra of Campbell Street. The chiefs in particular lauded the organization's work and pledged their commitment to support its operations in their area. Many more vulnerable contributions were made.

In a separate development, the CCRMGs received the first set of support materials from the project coordinator and the staff of SCoSL on April 15. They gathered for this occasion at the centre where the project coordinator reminded them about their role and responsibility to their respective communities and to the project, in their capacity as CCRMG members. She further told them that they were constituted to complement the advocacy work of the staff, and that one day, they would be required to assume full responsibility of this role as the project phases out. In keeping with its promise to facilitate their work, the organization presented to each CCRMG member, **a notepad** and **a pen** for their individual record taking. At community level, each group received a **bicycle** and an eight battery-powered **megaphone** for use in their community sensitization programmes.

Mrs. Sento Kpukumu received the megaphone on behalf of the Ropolon community, **Nurse Aminata Kamara** for the Bangura Street community and **Ramatu Kamara** for the Campbell Street community.

For the bicycles, **Mohamed S. Kamara** received one for Bangura Street, **Gibrilla Bangura** and **Anthony Sesay** (Datman) also received one each for Ropolon and Campbell Street communities respectively. It was Isatu Kamara who thanked the

organization for doing all in its power to aid their work. She promised that these items will be well cared for and used for their intended purpose.

2. Meeting with Law Enforcement Officers

The national engagement in this month for the entire nation of Sierra Leone could only allow this meeting to be held on the 30th April. It brought together 30 participants that included Police Officers, Law Clerks, Prison Officers, FSU, MSWGCA, as well as a representative from Lawyers Centre for Legal Assistance (LawCLA). The participants were drawn from all the Police stations in and around the township. We also had CAHSEC, CDHR, DCI and MSWGCA to collaborate with in this activity.

The topics discussed were:

- i. International and Local Acts in Providing Services to Street Children. This was presented by Mr. Abass Kamara –Director Community Action for Human Security (CAHSEC).
- ii. UN Minimum Rules in the Administration of Justice to Juvenile in Conflict and Contact with the Law. Ahmed N. Sowa of DCI handled this topic.
- iii. The Role of the Law Enforcement Officers in Handling Street Children in Sierra Leone by Mr. A. Ansumana from Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (CDHR).
- iv. HANCI/SL and the Police collaboration in Protecting Children’s Right by HANCI’s Regional Coordinator North.

The meeting was very interactive and the presenters did a wonderful job. Everyone present benefited from their erudite presentations and the participants wished they could have such meetings at least once every quarter of the year. We are to follow-up on this meeting to develop a proper frame-work on how to collaboratively protect the children even when they are in conflict with the law, be they street children or otherwise.

3. Radio Discussion

Following the meeting with law enforcement officers on that very day, was an hour long radio panel discussion on the topic “HANCI and Police Collaboration in Protecting Children’s Rights”. It hosted Mr. Abdulai Sesay from LAWCLA, PC Iye Conteh from FSU, Mrs. Isha Kamara from Prisons Department and Mr. Abdulai Kamara from MSWGCA. They discussed the sub topics – Children and the Law, Juvenile Delinquency and The Role of HANCI and the Police in Protecting Children’s Rights. It was moderated by the Project Coordinator, Mrs. Tida Sesay and was aired on both the host station – Radio Mankneh FM95.1 and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service at FM 88 in Makeni. It was a discussion that went very well with the people of the township and the environs.

4. Follow-Up Visits

As we reunified, so we followed-up on the children to see how they were coping in their ‘new’ environments. Together with the trauma healing counselor, we visited 34 homes

twice. In other words we made two follow-up calls each for all the 34 children. As we went, we provided counseling where it was needed.

5. School Visitations and Meeting with Local Educational Authorities.

In preparation for the placement of our beneficiaries into learning institutions, we started last month with visitations to five secondary schools. This month, we visited the same five schools and added two more secondary schools, two technical and vocational institutions and two primary schools. These were school in which our beneficiaries wished to be placed. The focus of these visits still was, to facilitate the enrollment of these children into these institutions after they had gone through the necessary reintegration.

Prior to these visits, a meeting with local education authorities was held where head teachers, principals, and teachers from the said schools were in attendance. 40 of them came including a representative from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). Mr. B.S. Kargbo, Vice Principal of Birch Memorial Secondary School chaired the meeting.

HANCI laid bare their need and advocated for the children. The discussion before this appeal paved the way to the eventual success we reached, having discussed such topics as:

- The Role of Local Educational Authorities in the Development of the Street Child;
- How Can Educational Authorities Effectively Encourage Street Children to Concentrate on Education;
- How Can Educational Authorities Help Parents to Monitor the Progress of Their Children

The meeting resolved to:

- leave school doors open to accommodate these children
- prepare and present progress report for these children as long as they have been admitted in their institutions.
- encourage HANCI to coordinate with other agencies in order to get more children out of the street.
- pay particular attention to these children in order to come in handy to provide supervision, counseling and encouragement when necessary.

Such was the spirit on which the meeting ended.

6. Educational Support

Thirty-four (34) children benefited from educational support, the first to receive such a support in this project. This support saw all of them placed back to schools of their choice, a process which went through successfully as a result of the wholesome

cooperation we received for both the school authorities and officers of the Ministries of Education (MEST) and Social Welfare (MSWGCA). Twelve (12) children went to primary schools, nineteen (19) to secondary schools (18 junior and 1 senior) and three (3) to technical and vocational institutions.

The support provided for every child:

- School materials (pens, pencils, books, rulers, bags, uniform, shoes, socks and under vest)
- School fees.

This action has been widely hailed by all in the Makeni community: the parents were extremely happy and grateful, while the beneficiaries were stunned and expressed signs of happiness and bemusement. Those who never believed that the programme could come so far were the most shocked. Now all the other children are eagerly waiting for the day when it will be their turn to walk around proudly in their new school uniforms. Their hopes are now kindled and their expectations have really been raised.

III. Organizational Briefings

The Staff

April 2nd saw two new staff members added to the SCoSL team. Abu Sesay, a former social worker of HANCI came as a full-time staff and is assigned to the tracing and reunification unit, a unit whose responsibilities are so many to be handled by a single social worker. Indeed we are seeing the positive effect of this decision as the unit did so much this month.

Richard Dumbuya, another ex-HANCI staff came in as a caregiver at the Interim Care Centre. He works directly with the children in partnership with the psychosocial and trauma healing counselors. Having him permanently assigned with the children has brought relief to the other social workers who can now concentrate on other duties anytime they do not have direct work with the children.

We remain grateful for the taking of this crucial decision and we hope the intention for its implementation continues to be realized.

Partners in Makeni

We continued to enjoy the strong bond we had with our current partners. They have remained very supportive and as a result, our work remained credible, open and known to all who matter. Our collaborative approach in executing planned activities also proved very successful. As we seek to have more hands into the work, we are still extending our arms to any would-be partners. During this month, we happily worked with LAWCLA and MEST for the first time. These are potential partners and we will continue to lobby them until we get them fully involved in our project. It is a community project and we are very willing to work with any partner that can enhance the success of this project.

Challenges/Constraints

- Having a hundred parents of our beneficiaries turn out daily at the centre.
- Replacement or purchase of equipment for creative therapy in the centre
- The provision of footwear for playing ball games
- To intensify the tracing and reunification for the remaining twelve (12) beneficiaries.

In The Coming Month

These are some of the activities that will happen in the month of May.

- Hold meetings with Paramount Chiefs in order to have them help the monitoring of the project.
- Hold refresher training for CCRMG members on Child Right Issues and Positive Discipline.
- Hold annual meeting for street children on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Police and how they (the children) can access services available to them.
- Do regular monitoring
- The CCRMGs to hold community sensitization meetings
- Continue on our community outreach programme.

IV. Conclusion

April will go down in history as a water shed in the life of the project - the month when the first set of beneficiaries returned back to school,. The double waiver, the confidence builder and the time when dreams were fulfilled in us and in the beneficiaries. As for us, this is just the beginning, the motivator for harder work. It is particularly more rewarding and fulfilling when we see ourselves as part of the history makers, being part of the team that help a group of Sierra Leonean children rediscover their path to a meaningful and productive life. All other things aside, we see this as a blessed opportunity.

We are continually encouraged by the willing and trust-our partners continue to have for us. Everyone is ready to do his own little bit so that, together, everyone achieves more. This is belief of operations and the entire SCoSL team.

At the top of all this is your constant commitment to this project as is evident in your responses to the issues we raise as we strive forward, you resolve to change the lives of the Sierra Leone Child and the length to which you seem ready to go in relation to the time and resources; (human and material) you are willing to commit to this course.

May we stay ever committed to the success of this project.

Thanks **OPERATIONS.**