

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

STREET CHILD MAKENI – FEBRUARY 2009

1st March 2009

Introduction

We are now 3 months into the life span of this project, and slowly, its activities are gearing towards being wedged into the communal life of the people - into the homes of the beneficiaries, into the educational institutions in their localities, and eventually into their community structures.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Increased community involvement in the project -
 - a. Meetings begin to be held in the communities
 - b. Community Child Rights Monitoring Groups are formed and members inducted
2. 10 new successful reunifications – bringing the total to 34
3. 30 more families traced – bringing the total to 115
4. Increase in average attendance at the Interim Care Centre from 80 to 95 per day
5. Interim Care Centre successfully continues its activities

I. Work, Progress and Challenges – The Street Children

Overview

February has been a very busy month with the work focusing mainly on working with the communities to ensure a continuous peaceful reunification of the children - and their families in their communities. As the communities become more receptive to the project activities and their understanding of its goals increased, so they have become more accommodating by hosting some of its activities.

In the centre, more unregistered children showed up this month, and the ugly scare of unwanted behavior again showed its head. It called for more and more counseling. It was and still is a great challenge.

Attendance

Attendance rose from the 80 (75%) of last month, to 95 (79%) on the average this month. Though still below the registered 120, the increase is welcome development. This can be attributed, perhaps, to the facilities available in the centre. They (the activities) seem very attractive and satisfying, and are really keeping the children busy. The non-registered children (i.e. additional to our core registered case-load of 120) continue to be attracted and their tally has also increased from the 10 last month, to 18 this month.

Feeding

This still stands as the main bait and the children's rally call to the centre. There have been days in this month when we record 110 beneficiaries and over 15 unregistered children. In the

entire month, there was never a day when we received less than a 100 in the centre, and all of them seem to agree that the key stimulant is the food. We continue to pay special attention to the food preparation process to ensure that what is served is the best in the circumstance. To this end, the kitchen is doing a great job.

Family Tracing and Reconciliation

A total of 30 new families were traced and 10 children unified this month. This brings the total number of families traced to 115 with a total number of 34 children reunified. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MSWGCA) continues to be our main collaborating institution in this activity, and were represented in all our reunifications. Our Tracing & unification officer is working very hard to conquer every huddle lining the tracing and reunification process. At first contact, most parents reject outright the coming home of such 'belligerent' children after what they claim some of them did before they departed into the street. This situation was especially common with children that have spent 2 & more years in the street.

An example is Saidu who stayed with her grandmother. She loathed Saidu's return home and was only convinced to accept him back at the added intervention of the boy's uncle who agreed through and through with HANCI's mediation and convictions.

The challenge is big but we are making positive strides in our reunification drive.

Counseling

As a crucial component to the success of the entire project, this activity continues with an ever-greater determination. This month, we had the child to family counseling sessions. It involves moving to and from the child and the family, after we have realized that **most children went out of their homes due to problems with parents or guardians**. Such was how we went about the case of Saidu mentioned above. We reason with both parties for them to have a clear understanding of what their rights, roles and responsibilities are; as well as for the parents to understand some behaviors in their children especially when on the transitional stages in their growth and biological development (as in childhood to adolescence). We also help them understand that, the accepted children are coming with a lot of unwholesome behavior learned on the street which will require tolerance and patience before the complete 'snail-paced' change comes. **This situation has proved tougher with children who are to be reunified with people other than their biological parents**. Some parents are really proving unwilling to renege, but with our counseling tools and reasoning, we too will not easily accept defeat either.

As we continued in the one to one counseling, we had six cases requiring behavioral change which are worth noting here.

- ***Francis***

This boy is proving to be the most challenging case to deal with. He still continues to fight and on February 13, he fought with Joseph and cut him seriously on the arm with a razor. When he was removed from the scene, he ran out of the centre and started stoning

the buildings within. On attempting to bring him back, he fled away and only returned on the 17th. As he was counseled, he fought with another boy, Foday, on that very day of his return, after a quarrel he purposefully started. Being younger, he used a steel knife and was going to stab Foday on his stomach had not the Psychosocial counselor entered and intervened directly. His counseling continues but yielding very little as he is still unwilling to open up.

- ***Abu & Maconi***

These two are friends. On February 1, they stole an iron rod that was kept in the ceiling of the centre's hall. The Regional Coordinator noticed the missing rod and immediately informed the Psychosocial Counselor. Upon investigation, these two were named as the suspects, but they denied vehemently. Only eventually did Maconi, the younger, confess to having sold the rod, without admitting whom the buyer was. In consonance with the centre rules, which they all agreed to, they, were suspended for a week and on their return, are going through counseling.

- ***Hassan***

Hassan is the oldest boy on the project, aged 19+ - he was accepted into the programme because of the seeming command he holds over the younger boys. He stole a cell phone from a police officer at a school's sports meeting. Hassan was charged to court and sent to prison on remand, before we got the news. The many representations made by the Project's Coordinator and Regional Coordinator only saw the matter been taken by DCI as Hassan is due in Court on March 10.

- ***Mohamed & Foday***

These two together with a group of unregistered boys were caught with the stolen cell phone of the HANCI project coordinator in Kamakwie, Mr. John Momodu when on a visit in Makeni. Mr. Momodu left his phone on the table as he spoke to the children. He was called away for a brief while and on his return, the phone was gone. He raised the alarm and the other boys identified them (Mohamed & Foday). They were questioned and then produced the phone. The two showed remorse and are continuing in the counseling after appropriate punishment.

There are plans to hold counseling sessions for the non-registered children coming to the centre beginning in March.

Our vigilance in counseling and general monitoring have helped us seize from the children a number of dangerous items like razor blades, scissors, pen-knives, needles, pliers, cutters, rice for catching fowls and punches.

Another counseling area worth mentioning here is the trauma healing. This month saw five peculiar cases unearthed and confronted. The specifics are thus:

- ***Alimatu***

She had always been withdrawn and seemed lost in thoughts. Our interaction revealed that she strongly missed her entire family from which she was taken when she was just

a toddler by a friend of her mother and taken to neighbouring Guinea. While in Guinea, she was subjected to a life of servitude and was never sent to school. When she saw this as being no longer bearable, she decided to find her way back to Sierra Leone where she has never been able to locate any of her family members. The street became her home ever since her return. The sight of others with their family members brings these sad memories in her. Alima, as she is commonly known, is gradually improving as her counseling progresses.

- ***Adamsay***

She is an orphan who lost her parents during the war. She was left in the hands of her elder sister who maltreated her. She missed her parents and could not cope with her ‘irritating’ sister. She dashed to the street where HANCI/SL met her. She is undergoing the counseling process.

- ***Adama***

Adama attributes all of what she has been through to the neglect of her father who abandoned her. Her hatred for the male is so glaring and the signs it is showing are ominous. This is why she is currently being counseled.

- ***Fatmata***

Worrisome looks have become Fatmata’s identity all because her entire family is very poor. She wants to return to school again, but poverty cruelly blocks her way.

- ***Zainab***

At 18, Zainab has become the sole breadwinner for a whole family of six, where she is the eldest. She is not only confronted by the challenge of providing food for her younger siblings, but also to provide food and care for two very old parents. She seems to be a very difficult case, but we are facing the challenge.

Medical

More children reported to the clinic this month. Though malaria remains the dominant health condition, new ailments were diagnosed. The table gives the picture for the street children -

No.	Diagnosed Condition	# of cases	Treatment Administered
1	Diarrhoea	12	ORS, Metronidazole and Fluids
2	Lacet	14	Proc Penicillin Inj., Poridin, Paradoxide, Gauze, Plasters and Bandages.
3	Malaria	39	Inj. Chloroquine and B Complex, Tabs. Novalgin,& Fansider
4	Neuralgia	21	Novalgin Inj., Dichofen, Baraguine, Brufen, Panadol & Aspirin
5	Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)	40	Proc Penicillin Inj., Gentamycin, Caps Ampicilin, Ampiclox & Amoxicillin.
6	Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)	13	Proc Penicillin Inj., Metronidazole Tabs & Doxycillin.

The increase and the infections seen may just be ‘the marks of street life’, but we are happy to say that no hospital referrals were made, and there is yet no major complaint to worry about.

Emergency Interim Foster Placements

The three boys in this situation exhausted their planned six weeks stay in their respective foster homes before their families could be traced. Thus they were swapped among the three homes, while the search for their families be intensified. By the close of the month, the families of Abu & Foday had been found and contacted and preparation for reunification has already begun. We believe we are very close to doing the same for Francis.

Games & Sports

They continue to be one main inlet into our beneficiaries’ inner selves. Apart from this, games are not only good for training in discipline, team spirit and collective responsibility; they have also been proved to be a good source of respite from stress.

In this month, we had competitions in ‘ludo’ and ‘draught’ for girls & boys respectively. Each side had two groups of four very interested and skillful players each. The champion from each group met for the grand finals. Zainab Kabia emerged as champion for the girls, while Foday Kargbo won in the boys.

Also, the majority of the boys are now engaged in serious soccer practices, after they have been divided into four groups. They will enter into a gala competition in March. It is gathering to be a great event.

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

As we approach the threshold of exiting the first (emergency) phase of the project, February saw us engaged in activities that further gives the communities more hold in the programme, especially so in the area of advocacy and the facilitation of complete reunification of the children with both their families and communities. We held three different activities in this stead.

1. The Formation of Community Child Right Monitoring Groups (Feb 14, 17 & 19)

The CCRMG is a core component group of the project, teaming up as the main community advocacy group. Its responsibilities are essentially two-fold:

1. To raise awareness within their communities on child rights & protection issues - with the aim of reducing the incidences of child abuses.
2. To document and report child abuse cases in their communities for the purpose of law enforcement & learning.

Three (3) communities from where a good number of our project beneficiaries came (suggesting that these communities in particular required great assistance in caring for their

children) from were selected to establish the CCRMGs in. From these, three members each were carefully chosen to form a nine man strong committee. These people were selected after we noticed their interest in our programme when we started the outreach visits to these communities. This, coupled with the good recommendations we received from the community leaders about the conduct of such persons, and the possibility as well as suitability in serving in such a committee, saw them appointed.

Orientation was held on the 14th February, where they went through their roles and responsibilities (as stated above), as well as what to expect from HANCI/SL to help them carry out their work. After emphasizing that they are not employees but volunteers, Operations, which facilitated the meeting, explained that HANCI would empower them by:

- Training them on child protection
- Training them on how to document child abuses
- Providing logistics such as;
 1. Stationery,
 2. Form(s) of mobility (when and where necessary),
 3. Incentives – tangible or intangible,
 4. Forms of identification.
- Including them in related HANCI/SL programmes/activities.

The committee members are:

1. Mrs. Aminata Kpukuma Housewife
2. Mrs. Kadiatu Jalloh Teacher
3. Anthony Sesay (Datman)Ghetto Leader
4. Ramatu Sowe Market Trader
5. Isatu Jalloh Head Teacher
6. Santos J. Koroma Student
7. Sahid Nixon Fornah Student
8. Mohamed P. Kargbo Student
9. Gibrilla Bangura Government Worker

However, at the completion of the orientation, it was agreed that the group be expanded to nine members per community, to enable each community carry out its tasks independent of the other. Also, to have the numbers uniform with other HANCI/SL projects with similar committees.

On the 17th, we had the first workshop and the facilitators and topics covered were:

- Mr. Abdulai Kamara of MSWGCA – The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Mr. Ahmed Nasie of DCI – The Child Right Act
- Police Officer Conteh Iye of FSU – Common Forms of Abuse Meted on Children
- Salim Alim (Psychosocial Counselor, SCoSL) – HANCI’s Interventions in Child Protection.

The CCRMGs members were formally inducted on the 19th February.

2. Family Group Work to Support Successful Reunification of Children (Feb 12th)

When we sensed the unwillingness of some parents/ guardians to accept back home their children/wards, we saw the need for a special meeting with all the parents, where we could come to discuss the issue, as well as have parents to encourage one another into accepting the facts and status of their children, as they come back home.

This meeting was held on February 12 with 96 people in attendance, and drew speakers from MSWGCA, DCI (Defence for Children International – DCI), Police Family Support Unit (FSU), and the chiefdom council to address the audience. #

The topics discussed were:

1. The Effects of Street Children on the Family and Community
- Ahmed Nasie Sowa of DCI
2. The Role of the Community in the Reintegration and Reunification of their Children
- Police Officer Iye Conteh of FSU
3. HANCi/SL intervention on Child Protection Issues within the Makeni Township
- Mr. Abdul Kamara of the MSWGCA.
4. Chief Ben Bella advised parents on why they should appreciate HANCi/SL' and seize the opportunity they now have to reconcile and better the lots of their children.

The discussions were so frank and (sometimes) emotional. We are hoping very strongly that parents/guardians will now be more willing to accept their children back.

3. Community Mediation Visits

As we continued our outreach, we visited three communities: Campbell Street, Ropolon and Panlap. These are the communities from where we formed our CCRMGS. After separate sensitization meetings held in their respective communities, we brought all of them to a single meeting held on the 17th February at Savage Square, a more central location. It was well attended by all the CCRMG members. There was also the host chief, parents and community members. The turn out came to 50 people.

After the Project Coordinator, Mrs. Tida Sesay spoke about the project and its current status, she then encouraged them to embrace their children back into their homes and communities where it was best for them to grow in.

Salim Alim of SCoSL (HANCi) stressed the Rights and Responsibilities of Children and parents alike, and then called on all present to team up with HANCi and the CCRMGS to educate others on children's issues, especially so as they have to do with child protection.

The area chief, Pa Osman Kamara, pledge his commitment after he lauded the work of HANCi especially in this intervention in the life of their very future- their children. All those who came had similar convictions and resolve.

III. Organizational Briefings

The Staff

We now have the intended staff intake and we are all working to ensure that the project succeeds. The Nurse is getting settled and she appears to be coping well. Everybody else is doing his/her own bit in their separate areas of responsibilities.

Staff Capacity Building

The Operations team was in Makeni on February 13 & 14 when we held two different sessions: one for staff and another for the CCRMG members. We went through the concept of CCRMG, their roles and responsibilities, how they (CCRMG members) can execute these and how far HANCI/SL can go to help them perform these roles. Other Projects staff also benefited from this.

The first day was for the staff, and the second was for the CCRMG members. All had a very good understanding by the time we parted.

Partners

Our collaboration with MSWGCA, DCI, FSU, the Makeni City Council, and the Local Authorities continues to yield very good fruits. Their sustained interest and commitment to this project is proof enough to show that this SCoSL project was no mistake, and that it is only through collaborative work that such a social malaise can be curbed. We continue to enjoy their confidence.

As the demand for medical attention increases with the flow of children in the centre it is necessary that we broaden our partnership with other child protection agencies that can provide specific services to the children. In this case, the Marie Stopes clinic has been identified to provide contraceptives for the girls. It is now a very high priority, and we are committed to have it accomplished in March.

Key Challenges/Constraints

1. We are beginning to be highly convinced that Street Child Makeni needs more staff. The duties in and out of the centre appear too many for just the current staff.
2. We are also faced with the challenge of helping the children retain the clothing we have given them they have while they remain based in the street. Many of the clothes distributed only last for a few weeks before they get stolen by other street boys.
3. We still have the challenge of further improving the daily attendance of the children to the maximum,
4. The challenge of stemming the scourge of violence and thieving remains too.
5. Finally, we see the responsibility of convincing some parents to accept their children/wards as one of our greatest challenges.

Additional thoughts

1. We would like to provide additional footwear for playing ball games.
2. Ideally, we need a photocopier to help produce our documents and disseminate information.

In the Coming Month

In March, we look forward to:

1. Receiving the first external visitors to the project
 2. Distributing more clothing and footwear
 3. Holding the first soccer competition for the boys
 4. Holding more radio discussions and follow up visits
 5. Continuing tracing and reunification
 6. Collaborating with more partners
-

IV. Conclusion

Coming through the challenges what we have seen so far has not been easy. There appear to be many more. The Biblical '*... harvest is plenty but the labourers are few ...*' seems to be our greatest challenge. However, one good thing that we have is our willingness and commitment to success. It is a strength that we believe we can use in order to reach our goal.

As we look forward to having many more children reunified this coming March, we remain prepared to go the whole hog in meeting our part in the project's responsibilities, in readiness for the next phase.

Many, Many Thanks,

HANCi/SL Operation.

Compiled by: HANCi/SL Operation.

(Minor edits: SCoSL)

