

# **HELP A NEEDY CHILD IN SIERRA LEONE (HANCi-SL) & STREET CHILDREN OF SIERRA LEONE (SCOSL) PROJECT REPORT –**

## **STREET CHILD MAKENI - JANUARY 2009.**

### **Introduction:**

*In this second month of the first quarter of the project, the dust, in terms of fear of the future, and all its attendant uncertainties, is slowly settling down and our path and its realities are becoming clearer, building our confidence into the future. As we seek to meet the demands of the project, here is what happened during the month of January in 2009.*

### **Highlights**

- **24 children successfully re-united with their families.**
- **Contact established with a further 61 families.**
- **Ongoing counseling, feeding, medical care of 120+ children.**
- **High-levels of community support and interaction: 4 successful events.**
- **Completed recruitment of the project team (nurse, cook & cleaner all hired) & equipping of centre.**

### **I - Work, progress and challenges – The Street Children**

#### **Over-view**

Having completed the registration process in December, we are now working as closely as possible with our core beneficiary group of 120 children. There has been a lot of counseling sessions, and a lot of confidence building is taking place. There is also a lot of improvement in terms of comportment and general attitude/behaviour of the children.

#### **Registrations**

We have now registered a full case load of 120 beneficiaries (80% boys mainly aged 12-15 with a youngest of 10; 20% girls spread more evenly across a greater age range, 11-18) - the maximum this project really has scope to serve meaningfully. We will of course continue to try hard to offer as much service as possible to all other children who come to the centre and obviously need care.

#### **Attendance**

What we still face as a problem is having the children turn up regularly in the centre. Some of them may disappear for a day or two, and when they report back, come with varied excuses. The average daily turnout is 80 with Saturdays recording the highest numbers.

#### **Family tracing and reconciliation**

85 families were traced & contacted over this month. Of these 85 families, 24 children have and unified. The visits were prioritised throughout January and a lot of incorrect information given by the children was corrected. These included wrong address and contact names. With the reunification and counseling sessions held with some of these families, the 24 children are now unified with them. All these visits and activities were witnessed principally by the MSWGCA.

### Feeding

The feeding programme continues. It remains a very effective and successful strategy to get the children to report to the centre and stay active for the rest of the day. They continue to enjoy the daily meals according to the menu they themselves suggested. An average of 10 un-enrolled children still follow their peers to the centre and we continue to offer them this service and indeed all other general ones.

### Counseling

The counseling sessions are a critical part of the daily routine for the children in the centre. The group counseling sessions see groups of 25 children come together for ball games or drama to test their team spirit, ego and level of tolerance with one another. They engage in other activities like drawing and discussions on such drawings as well as on such issues as cleanliness. These have done a lot to raise their confidence levels as well as expose those areas where specific children require one-to-one counseling.

Out of this we have been able to identify three children who needed such personal sessions:

- **Francis** was wondering why he was such a deviate and misfit among his friends. He easily gets rude, confrontational and violent. When he was at his peak, no one could control him. He is presently receiving counseling.
- **Ibrahim** and **Alie** are all wishing to return home but felt threatened by their respective step mothers. Counseling session is going on simultaneously in their homes.

A total of eight girls are also going through individual trauma healing counseling for different problems.

### Medical

An average number of 15 children are also reporting daily at our clinic with various ailments. Among those reported this month are malaria, cold, amoebae, urinary tract infection and respiratory tract infection. None was referred to hospital, as all treatment proved effective. The table below sums it all.

No	Diagnosed Condition	# of Cases	Treatment Administered.
1	Amoebiasis	11	Tabs – metronidazole
2.	Malaria	28	Inj. – chloroquine & vit B complex, tabs – novalgin & fansider
3.	Respiratory tract infection	15	Inj – ampicillin, crystalline, tabs-amoxicillin, pen v.k and septrine.
4.	Urinary tract infection	20	Inj- procaine, penicillin, gentamycin, and tabs-ampicillin caps.

### Emergency interim foster placements

The three boys put in foster placement in December on account of their severe present sufferings in the street still continue to live with these three foster families. However to avoid long term burden with their foster families which may likely hinder reintegration, the boys were rotated between families after the six weeks.

Their family reunifications have not yet been achieved since their families are distances away from Makeni. This interim arrangement appears to be working well for both the children and families however.

The background on the boys is as follows;

- **Abu** actually lived in Makeni when he was at a very young age. They moved to Kambia in the far northern Sierra Leone where he went to school. According to him, the mother was a petty trader and had nothing to give to him as he attended school. It was in this situation that he met ‘a big boy’, who encouraged him and brought him to Makeni. There are rumors that, his father, a soldier is in Makeni Military Barracks, and will be a possible contact person to either unify him, or provide us with a link to the mother. However, Abu is not willing to stay with his step mother who is now living with his father. We are to contact the biological mother who he said still lives in Kambia.
- **Foday** was never been honest in telling us his origin. We only discovered that he comes from Shenge in southern Sierra Leone through a gentleman who sells at the lorry park in Makeni, but also hails from the same town. He even testified of knowing the parents. It was only then that Foday confirmed this was true and that they walked all the way to Makeni with another Friend. We hope to transfer his file to Bo and have the Bo team do the tracing for us.
- **Francis** has been confirmed to have come from Freetown were he stayed with an aunt named Alice Kargbo. He stole Le 35,000.00 from his aunt’s mate and ran away to Freetown. He has expressed a desire to go back to Freetown. We have the aunt’s address at Beccules Street and will contact her soon. Again, the team in Freetown will be contacted.

### II - Outreach, reconciliation & advocacy - Consultations with Street Children, Families and Community Leaders in Makeni.

Our work demands that we continue to hold consultations with the stakeholders in Makeni, in order to continue the assessment of the situation of children. These consultations have advanced considerably this month and we engaged the stakeholders and the entire residence of Makeni and its environs in the following 4 major events:

A. Consultative Meeting with Children and Their Parents - 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2009.

This event at HANCI's centre in Makeni was attended by 103 children and 86 parents, as well as -

- Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), who provided the chairperson in the person of Mrs. Millicent Bendu
- Defence for Children International (DCI) – NGO partner
- Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police
- Makeni City Council.
- Paramount Chief's representative
- Counselors
- Chiefs
- Community leaders including teachers.

The meeting focused on the status of children in Makeni and HANCI's intervention through the SCoSL project. The main points were:

- **A background to the SCoSL project,**
- **Why children are in the street**
- **Further contributions from the invited stakeholders (Paramount Chief, MSWGCA, DCI, FSU, the children and the parents).**

All these stakeholders spoke from the standpoints of their respective representations, but at the end of it all, every one of them agreed that the street is not a safe abode for any child, and that such who are in the street must be accepted back into their home. They all pledged, after acknowledging HANCI's effort towards stemming the plight of children in Sierra Leone, to lend their support so that the street children of Sierra Leone can be given a home and a future in their motherland.

The meeting made the following resolutions:

- That the government through the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender & Children's Affairs and Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) should conduct periodical surveys to ascertain the number of children living in the street in Makeni, as well as legislate to prevent children from being pushed into the street by any one.
- That the government enforces the compulsory free basic education (from class 1 to J.S.S 3) provision, to ensure that every child between ages 6 – 15 goes to school, and where any of them is to drop thereafter, they can take/learn any trade instead of going to the street.
- Families that have children in the street must be ready to accept them again, and once they are back, must do all in their power to protect and prevent these children from going back to the street.
- That parents are the best counselors for their children and that home is the best place for a child to grow.
- That parents should rethink the decision of giving their children to foster care / mehn pikin as this may expose the children to abuse(s) that might send them out to the streets.
- That children are children, and that parents must stop and protect them from all forms of abuse that may keep them away from home.

We see these resolutions as a very good guide to the work of the advocacy committee to see that all those concerned implement them. The Community Child Right Monitoring Groups (CCRMGs) will have to take up these resolutions with the support of HANCI/SL

B. Radio Discussion: ‘Why are children always in the street?’, Radio Mankneh - January 22

Radio Mankneh (F.M. 95.1) granted us airtime on January 22 to hold a panel discussion on the topic: ***Why Are Children Always in the Street.*** The panelists were drawn from MSWGCA, FSU, DCI, with HANCI/SL moderating. It was our first radio programme and it was meant to inform the listening public about the plight of children in Makeni, and what HANCI/SL was doing to help the situation. The panel discussed some reasons to this question, and they range from the very attitude of the children, their parents, the community (including both its members and leaders), and the laws of the land.

The programme was aired twice. The feedback we are getting is good as people appreciated the programme. Some parents are understanding for the first time that there are others who are observing them even as they look after their children, and that a time will come when someone can be taken to court for apparently neglecting his/her responsibility to their child/children. Some people are even suggesting that for subsequent programmes, we have time for responses from the public live (a phone-in programme, an idea we will pursue with phone companies in Makeni).

C. Formation of Advocacy Committee - January 23

When the stakeholders gathered again at the project’s Interim Care Centre on January 23, it was for the formation of the Advocacy Committee that will be responsible for the identification of issues affecting children in the community of Makeni and raising awareness on such issues. This meeting was chaired by SCoSL’s Salim Alim (the psychosocial counselor). Marie Conteh (the Advocacy & Trauma-Healing Counselor) explained the purpose of the meeting. After the audience had understood the purpose for the meeting, they thanked HANCI for her brilliant ideas and wasted no time in appointing the following to serve in the nine-man committee of the project.

1. Mrs. Millicent Bundu (MSWGCA) - Chairperson
2. Chief Ben Bella (Paramount Chief’s Rep.) - Vice Chairperson
3. Mrs. Kumba Williams (FSU) - Secretary
4. Mr. Mustapha Kieh (DCI) - Public Relations Officer
5. Mr. M. Mandigo (Makeni City Council) - Member
6. Mrs. Isatu Conteh (Parents’ Rep.) - Member
7. Mrs. Bomposeh Kamara (Society Head) - Member
8. Fatmata Kamara (Street-Children’s Rep.) - Member
9. Mrs. Rebecca Tida Sesay (Project Coordinator, SCoSL) - Member.

The first four names above agreed to serve as the executive members of the committee.

Every member appointed expressed delight in their appointment, and expressed their vowed commitment to work very hard in order to help the children of Sierra Leone in general and those in Makeni in particular.

D. “Family Awareness Raising Meeting on Reconciliation” for parents, January 27<sup>th</sup>.

The outcome of the child/parent consultative meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January necessitated this further awareness-raising meeting with the parents of the children after they had raised the need to reconcile with their children in that meeting.

This meeting, which was attended by 85 parents, was held with the theme, “Family Awareness Raising Meeting on Reconciliation”. It came on January 27<sup>th</sup> at the Interim Care Centre, where the following topics were discussed by the following people:

- **The Need For Reconciliation And The Role Of Parents In Sustaining Reunification & Reintegration Of Their Children**
  - Mr. Abdulai Kamara, Probation Officer, MSWGCA.
- **Identification of Abuses and Their Effects on Children**
  - Mrs. Kumba Williams of the FSU of the Sierra Leone Police.
- **The Role of Parents in Promoting and Sustaining Their Children’s Education**
  - Mr. Mustapha Kieh of DCI.
- **Parents as Role Models in the Development of Their Children**
  - Counselor Martha Karim.

At the end of the meeting, parent after parent expressed their willingness to accept back their children if only they were willing and ready to go back to them. They expressed gratitude to HANCI for the SCoSL project, which has come to bridge this winding gap between them and their once beloved children. Mrs. Millicent Bendu of the MSWGCA chaired the meeting.

We still look forward to meet with the local educational authorities in Makeni as we prepare for the next phase of the project.

### **III – Organisational news in brief:**

#### **Recruiting and Inducting Staff.**

- In January the project formally added a Cook, Cleaner & a Nurse to its staff in addition to the four social workers who were recruited last month. This completes the team for the time being.
- **The cook - Adama Koroma.** Previously worked for HANCI in Freetown before moving to Makeni for family reasons. In Makeni she has also helped HANCI's Teenage Mother Project so were very happy to offer her this role
- **The cleaner - Joseph G. Kargbo** had being a causal volunteer at the center in Makeni since the start of the street children's project. He has been an outstanding help with the boys and the kitchen so the team decided to offer him the formal cleaner role - with added responsibility of helping the staff when working with the children.
- **The nurse - Aminata E. Kamara.** A graduate with SRN from the department of nursing at the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences in Freetown. Currently a volunteer staff at the government hospital in Makeni. Very enthusiastic and committed, we hope she will great in this role – and also, on account of her relative youth (she is in her mid-20s) be an excellent role model for our children.

#### **Staff Capacity Building**

- Especially now the team is complete, ongoing staff capacity & support is a key issue. In January, we held one capacity building workshop for staff on how to deal with children living and working on the street. It went on for two days, January 29 & 30. All HANCI/SL Project Staff in Makeni together with the SCoSL staff, as well as the HANCI/SL Project Coordinator in Kamakwie attended and it turned out to be a very successful training session. It covered such topics as:
  - **Psycho-Social Care for Street Children**
    - lead by Mr. Bindi Saffa of Handicap International;
  - **Handling your Individual Job & other Issues**
    - by Kelfa; HANCI Operations Director
  - **Working with Parents of Street Children**
    - by Lois; HANCI Street Child Director
  - **Developing the Career Path of a Reunified Child**
    - by Lois; HANCI Street Child Director
  - **Reporting.**
    - by John B. Conteh a volunteer from the University (Lecturer)

#### **Equipping the centre**

- The centre is now fully equipped with both indoor and outdoor games - the latest being the just completed volleyball court which is now fully in use in addition to facilities we arranged in January for ludo, drafts, table football, football, & table tennis,
- The office space is now ready.
- The motor-bikes and mega phone with booster were purchased this month and are all in use currently.

### Partners

- So far, we have found our collaboration with the MSWGCA, DCI, FSU of the Sierra Leone Police, the Makeni City Council and the Local Authorities very helpful and effective. Though we are yet to develop formal MOUs with any of these, we have found them to be willing complementing institutions whose involvements in our activities have lend us enough credit and in a way, ease our work.
- We still look forward to contact with FAWE, RTP and Marie Stops International especially for continued collaboration in this project.

## **IV CONCLUSION**

This is how far we have gone into the project's activities after the second month: there is an office space, an interim care centre equipped with varied sporting & other facilities, a team of workers, a registered group of direct beneficiaries, an informed group of parents and stakeholders, an advocacy committee, 3 foster families for emergency placement and equipments for use by the project.

We see this as a good footing as we approach the second phase of this project. We still have to work hard this coming month though, in order to meet our targets. The January month was very busy as schedules were tight and the demands numerous, yet we have this much to report. We remain committed to work even harder as we continue to look forward to your continued partnership.

THANKS.

## **OPERATIONS, HANCI**

*(with edits & formatting, SCoSL)*