

## Street Child Makeni: Summary Report

MARCH 2009



### Twenty-five more families traced & close to re-unification

We have successfully traced families for 25 out of our target of 30 children this month. Convincing parents or relatives to accept back their children/ wards has proved to be extremely challenging, however the reunification process has begun and will continue over the coming weeks.

### School visitations kicked off with five schools visited

To prepare our reunified children for entry into the school system, we called on five secondary schools to ask for the acceptance of our children. In all the schools, the respondents found it impossible to say no to our request, however they feared that the coming students may introduce outlawed behaviour among their classmates and this may destroy or erode the schools' discipline. They therefore advised that we subject our children to some serious discipline before they come to school.

### Three new partners in Makeni

Marie Stopes, TIMAP for Justice and Community Action for Human Security (CAHSEC) are three organisations that have started collaborative work with us. The first two are very renown countrywide while the later is relatively new. We are hopeful that they all will help bring the required result in this project.

The Marie Stopes centre in Makeni is especially important in dealing with our teenage girls. They have offered to visit, give talks and to do whatever we wish them do that is within their reach. They visited the centre on March 23 and spoke on the issues of family planning and contraceptives.

### Community Child Rights Monitoring Groups

After the formation of the CCRMGS it was important to hold meetings in the communities to introduce the committees, its members and explain their responsibilities.

The first of these meetings which focus on child rights and abuse was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> March to an audience of 60 parents, 50 children, 24 CCRMG members and community members including chiefs. During the meeting community members raised their concern about the abolition of corporal punishment, forbidding children to do petty trading and involving children in decision making in the home. They saw all these as a threat into their societal traditions. However, the CCRMG members put their fears to rest and one of the sub chiefs was able to thank the organisation for such a brilliant intervention for the good of their children. This meeting has been replicated in other Communities where reception and reactions were very pleasing.

### Successful clothing distribution

All 120 beneficiaries benefited from clothing and footwear distributed this month. Mrs. Jestina M. Smart, one the Council Representatives advised the children not to sell these clothes, but to put them on as a mark of their appreciation of what SCoSL and HANCI-SL is doing to help them. Each child received 4 t-shirts, 2 pairs of trousers and a pair of shoes.

### Further radio discussions held

An hour long programme on *The Causes and the Effects of having Children in the Street* was held and aired at the Radio Maria, FM 101 in Makeni, on the 28<sup>th</sup> March. Issues that were discussed included "the causes that lead children to the street," "the abuse children suffer at home which causes them to cling to the street" and the "effects on the family, community and the state of having children living on the street." This radio station has one of the largest coverage areas in Sierra Leone, so the message of street children went far and wide.

### Counseling and other activities in the centre

This month we focused on the need for children to return home and stay with their families. Thirty children opted to begin the reconciliation process and special sessions were held for them. The focus here was on behavioral change and family bonding. They were taken through why the child must grow in a home, the effect of maintaining good rapport with family members and friends, as well as the promises the future hold for a well behaved child in a home.

Fighting and gambling is a continual problem. We were prompted to address the children's behaviour when we found them gambling in an unfinished building near the centre. They had a feud here and one of them set the whole area alight, almost burning a house. All SCoSL staff came together to talk with them and they promised to behave well. We reviewed all the original laws about behaviour and reinforced the power of their prefects. The coordinator stressed that anyone caught breaking any of these laws will be punished. Where it is due such children might even be thrown out of the programme.

### Visit from UK team

Emma, Peter and James spent a week in Sierra Leone following a comprehensive itinerary which included spending time at the street child project in Makeni, meeting staff, children and local community leaders and visiting HANCI-SL's other regional projects. They engaged themselves in art and drama sessions with the children, interviewing staff and making a promotional film for SCoSL.