

# Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link Annual General Meeting 2017/18

## February 2018 visit Report on support for mudslide victims - Yvonne Johnson

Following the devastating mudslide in 2017 the Link and the Church of the Good Shepherd, in Romford launched fundraising appeals to help victims. Some funds were sent soon after the mudslide through a partner charity, Build on Books, who had staff on the ground in Sierra Leone. Lorri Spragg, of Build on Books was also able to visit and deal first hand with the distribution of those funds.

The February visit enabled The Link to visit the organisations working to support the victims and for Yvonne to see first-hand the impact the mudslide had had on the community and what support was being provided. Yvonne was then able to distribute the remaining funds raised on behalf of the Link and the Church of the Good Shepherd. This is her report on her experiences.

### **1. How are the survivors of the mudslide getting on?**

At the moment most of the people that were displaced have been given temporary accommodation although some are still not been housed. Life is slowly returning to normal. Although this community appeared to be cheerfully getting on with life, many of those who live here are still traumatized by what happened.

### **2. How has the money we sent been able to help them?**

Just few examples of the direct help given by funds raised by the Link and the Church of the Good Shepherd:

- A builder was able to buy tools to start work again after losing all of his tools in the mudslide.
- A seamstress was able to buy a sewing machine and begin to make clothes to sell once more.
- A group of farmers were given tools to help with the restoration of their plantation.

I also visited several organisations who were helping the mudslide victims in February

Don Bosco, which is a charitable organisation, takes in kids and teenagers from the streets they also monitor the victims that were in their camp that have been re-housed. They try to find out what their needs are - whether being food, clothing or medical so they are sure the money spent on them is spent wisely.

Some of these victims cannot even afford one square meal a day, so a centre like this feeds about three hundred people a day.

They also give scholarships to children that cannot afford to pay their school fees and buy uniforms for some of these children so they can continue with their education.

They are involved in tracing lost families and reuniting families together

Another charity we helped was the Ivor Leigh Memorial School. They also give scholarship to some children as some of the parents cannot afford to send their children to school. Because of the mud slide most of the crop farming that they use to do has to stop which was their living.

Another charity was the orphanage in Grafton. They look after most of the abandoned children. Some adults used to live there too, but have been given temporary accommodation.

Some of them were given cash advance to start a small business like petty trading, farming and poultry and dress making.

### **3. What impacted you the most on this visit?**

Meeting with the community and seeing the displaced children, and when you look into the eyes of some of these children. Even though they barely have anything you can see how grateful they were for the little they have and see their faces light up

The boy on the swing is completely disabled. He is dumb; deaf paralysed and cannot do anything. We were told that when he was found no one believes he will live because his condition was so bad, but thank God for places like this who help these kids

It gives me a closer connection to the local community and this has taught me how to be appreciative for what we have and how so little can change the lives of these people.

### **4. What difference does the link with Hastings UK make to the people of Hastings in Sierra Leone?**

The link Connect two towns together. It makes such a great difference in the sense that when the teachers go out there they take with them the British way of teaching and when the teachers come over from Sierra Leone they do likewise and also bring their culture.

Sharing these experiences with the children in the UK on their return helps them realise how fortunate they are as the children back at Hastings Sierra Leone have to make do with whatever little they have.

The Partnerships in International Medical Education bring together those involved in medical and nursing education in Hastings UK to share expertise and resources with partners in Sierra Leone.

### **5. Anything else you'd like to add in conclusion?**

As long as there is life I will go the length of the earth to be of help to this nation and anywhere else the Lord leads me. It is my calling and passion as much as hospitality is.