



NEWS LETTER

Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link

Issue No. 1 March 2021



Largest Schools Twinning Visit Ever

The Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link (HSLFL) has 13 partnerships between schools in Hastings UK and Hastings Sierra Leone. Supported by British Council grants, annual reciprocal visits are made by teachers, accompanied by other Link volunteers. In February 2020, 23 members of the UK Link visited Sierra Leone, the largest group ever to have travelled, thanks in part to British Council funding.

Nineteen of these were teachers. The visit was a great success. We explored the geography and culture of the Hastings area of Sierra Leone with the help of our wonderful colleagues. We visited Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone and met the head of the British Council, Kelly Ferguson. Mandy Hinxman organized an International Pupil Council Meeting and we had a community celebration. We spent time in our partner schools, teaching and learning, and attended workshops together with our partner teachers. Although workshops and training have become part of our normal exchange visit routine, it was the first time that we sat down together to share training, and everyone was enthusiastic about the outcome. Something we will definitely repeat when exchange visits can resume.

Other outcomes included teachers from 11 schools cementing their relationships with their partner schools and they continued to develop understanding of Global Citizenship with pupils in both countries.

Help raise funds with on-line shopping

We are all shopping on-line more since the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. You can raise funds for the Link with every penny you spend on line.

If you're an **Amazon** user you can sign up to <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/>
Sign up to **Give as You Live** for all of your on-line shopping . <https://www.giveasyoulive.com>
Alternatively you can sign up to **Easy Fund-raising** <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/hslfl/>

In each case, you just nominate the Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link (charity n° 1127137) as beneficiary. It is SO easy. It costs absolutely nothing for you as the customer and there is a popup that says how much is being donated.

From little acorns.....



While we were visiting Sierra Leone in February last year, we left some money for the schools to buy seeds to plant during the rainy season, money kindly donated by Battle Horticultural Society. This 'Seeds Challenge' was a huge success, with the equivalent of £9 per school. See page 2

Chairman's Welcome

As we approach the first anniversary of Covid-19 lockdown, its hard to believe that it is only just over a year ago that 23 of us were in Hastings Sierra Leone, busy working on a number of projects with the twinned schools and the community. Almost inevitably some of those projects have faltered or been delayed as a consequence. Others though are beginning to grow new shoots and blossom just like the natural world around us as we shrug off a very wet and gloomy winter. More about those projects later.

Fundraising has inevitably been hard hit by the pandemic and we have struggled to hold any of our traditional fundraising events, such as the Quizzes and Wine Tasting Evenings. My Fellow Trustees put on their thinking caps however and we managed to run an on-line auction, which was a huge success. More about this below.

News is that our friends in Sierra Leone have managed the Covid pandemic better than us . Worrying news recently though that Ebola may be knocking on the door from neighbouring Guinea. Looking ahead it is unclear when and if we will be able to return to Hastings, SL in the foreseeable future or whether the exchange teachers will be able to visit us. Even if we can't visit we can still work with them using social media and the internet and some of the items in this newsletter clearly demonstrate that we can still make a difference.

Every pound you help us raise and even your annual subscription can really change things, as you will see from the article on the exciting next phase of the School Farms project.

What is certain is that we are more reliant than ever on you as members of the Link for your support, for spreading the word about our work, helping to raise much-needed funds and encouraging your friends and family to join us as members and help with our fundraising.

Richard Homewood,
Chairman

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www.hastingshastings.org.uk
Hon Sec. Robin Gray
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Zero waste has been the target of a joint project across 26 schools in the UK and in Sierra Leone for the past 18 months.

All the schools have been working on this topic in their own ways, and we really feel we have raised the awareness of all children to the pollution which could destroy our world. Based on the mantra 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' activities have included community clear ups, collecting and sorting rubbish for recycling, cutting down on electricity use, especially in UK schools, and reusing wherever possible.

Zero Waste project across the continents



Plastic containers used as class bins and a compost area built at Edest

Hastings Health Centre—Providing Vital Care in Challenging Times

In normal times the Health Centre in Hastings, SL provides vital health and ante-and post-natal care in a country with one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. In recent years, added to this it has faced the challenges of Ebola and more recently Covid-19 on a shoestring budget.



Work to extend the TB unit

A full survey of the Health Centre was carried out during the February 2020 visit and plans drawn up for a much needed triage and isolation unit and an extension to the TB unit. Estimates were obtained and these improvements will cost around £19,000, way beyond our means given the challenges we face raising funds at the moment. Some work to repair the water supply pipes and the entrance road were funded during the February visit and work has started on the smaller project to extend the TB Unit.

Fundraising efforts will need to continue if we are to help fund the triage and isolation unit which is desperately needed given the current Covid-19 pandemic and the potential of ebola rearing its head again.



Existing triage and isolation unit

From little acorns..

(continued from page 1)

Each school grew large numbers of crops. The harvests were shared between teachers, pupils and the local community, sold to buy more seeds or sold to buy equipment for the school. Plans are in progress to continue with this project in 2021. (see page 4)



So.....with £200

- ◆ 21 schools received £9 to buy seeds
- ◆ Many large areas of crops were grown and harvested
- ◆ Many children, teachers, families, friends and schools benefitted from the harvest.
- ◆ Some crops were eaten, some were sold.
- ◆ New seeds were bought to plant a further crop.

Membership is the foundation and life-blood of the Link

Your continued Membership, help with fundraising and donations are vital if the work of the Link is to continue. No Membership fees were collected last year due to the lockdown and the annual membership fee has remained at £5 for many years. This year we have increased the membership fee to £10 (or £20 for Family Membership). The stories here show how just a small amount can make such a big difference to people's lives, so the extra fees will make a huge difference. Please renew your membership now, help make our projects a real success and change people's lives. Details of how to join can be found on our website <https://www.hastingshastings.org.uk/>

Schools Sanitation Project



Clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are essential for the survival and development of children. According to UNICEF, every day, over 800 children die, worldwide, from preventable diseases caused by the lack of these basic facilities. It is acknowledged that Sub Saharan Africa, which includes Sierra Leone, lags far behind other continents in addressing the problem. In Sierra Leone the lack of these basic facilities in our twinned schools is impacting on their education and their futures.

Children often miss out on education because they spend hours every day collecting water and are exhausted if and when they get to school. Many older girls have to miss school on a regular basis due to the lack of menstrual hygiene facilities. We realised that whilst we couldn't tackle the problem in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, we could improve the prospects for the future of children in the schools we are twinned with in Hastings, Sierra Leone by ensuring they have a sustainable water supply, good basic sanitation and hygiene facilities.

This is a huge project and we have been working with other established organisations in Sierra Leone and the individual schools to plan how we can improve the facilities and give the children a better chance for the future. A survey of the schools was undertaken to establish what facilities they currently had and didn't have.

Ahead of the visit in February 2020 funding was sent to four schools to enable them to start work on improving their water supplies.

At St Mulumba school a new water tower and piped connection to the well means that they now have a water supply!

Osman Kamara, head teacher at Kankalay School sped into action and took charge of the work to ensure it was carried out correctly. The water tower went up in record time and the new tank raised into position by an enthusiastic team.

At REC Hastings Adama Bengura supervised the refurbishment of the well and the additional security measures.

At REC Jui Upper Primary and Infants, men bravely climbed down into the well at REC Hastings to dig it deeper, to ensure a year round supply of water, whilst their colleagues repaired the pump and feed pipes. Certainly not a job for the faint hearted!



During the February 2020 visit all other twinned schools were visited to see what we need to do to ensure they have a sustainable water supply. The Covid pandemic and the difficulties with fundraising have delayed progress but we are hopeful that we can start to raise funds and make headway in the near future as we come out of lockdown. More information and Photos can be found at <https://www.hastingshastings.org.uk/current-projects/schools->



Two Orange Cryptic Quiz Sheets beat the lockdown blues

With our traditional Big Quiz and Music Quiz scuppered by lock-down there was only one thing left to keep us busy and help us through the lockdown. Our secretary, Robin Gray, ran an extra mid-year quiz sheet on the theme of Illnesses and Diseases (!) and the usual winter quiz, this time on Jobs.

We thank everyone who purchased a quiz sheet and especially the brave ones who struggled with it to the bitter end. There were lots who scored 70 out of 70 and it was extremely difficult to choose a winner based on the tie-breaker clues, but congratulations to Linda Golding and Harry MacDonald, who eventually reigned supreme.

The sheets raised over £800 between them (mainly thanks to Nola for shifting masses of the printed version in and around Hastings), and we have used it to help fund a much-needed extension to the TB unit in the Health Centre in Hastings SL

Sowing the seeds for the future

The Link Strategy has four key strands for development: Education, Health, Infrastructure and Livelihoods. Trustee David Lewis, leading on Creating Livelihoods, is proposing projects to support vocational training, provide local employment and create sustainable businesses. Following the success of last year's Seed Challenge, he and Isabel Hodger are working via Zoom with Jeitta Kanneh and Francis Mason, who have signed up over 20 schools for our Schools Farm Project 2021. See page 4 for more...

School Farms Project 2021

Following the fantastic success of the 2020 Seeds Challenge, Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link is setting up a School Farms Project for 2021. This new project aims to enable a self-sustaining annual harvest, build skills in agriculture and create opportunities for employment. The Schools and Livelihoods section of the Link are working together on this project.



Schools taking part in 2020 Seeds Challenge received monies, kindly donated by Battle Horticultural Society, to buy seeds for planting in school gardens. At the end of the growing season they were all sent a questionnaire in order to receive feedback on how the project had worked for them. Questions were designed to assess the impact it had on the school and the local community and gather any ideas for improving it in the future. From this, the 2021 aims evolved, and consideration for what funds were needed to sustain the project going forwards. It was agreed that each school would receive £20 this year to cover the cost of seeds, but also garden tools, fertilizer and maybe even fencing. Further funding will be made available for expenses including workshop and communication technology.

As it is important that our colleagues in Sierra Leone have ownership of this project, retired headteacher Jeitta Kanneh has been recruited as Local Project Manager, with Francis Mason acting as her support and mentor. There will be up to 22 schools involved in the project, and Jeitta's role will include running workshops, maintaining communications, visiting schools to monitor progress, receiving and writing reports and liaising with Hastings UK.

Jeitta has already visited over half the schools and their feedback suggests they are all very keen to join the project. On 28th February, Jeitta Kanneh, Francis Mason, David Lewis, Isabel Hodger and Roger Mitchell met through Zoom (thank goodness for modern technology) to discuss the project, the timetable, the details of the workshop and the finances required. A further meeting will take place before the first workshop.

The next step in the journey is a School Farms Project Workshop which will take place on Saturday 19th March. The project will be launched, commitments will be made and funding for this year will be distributed. Schools will then begin their own projects and Jeitta will be visiting them regularly to monitor progress. At the end of the growing



season, a further workshop will take place to record successes and further areas for development.

One of the aims for this project is that from 2022 schools will be able to continue the School Farms Project without further funding. The other very important aim is to develop pupil skills in agriculture that enables them to seek employment. To that end, schools will be encouraged to consider how these aims might be achieved, working with other schools and members of the community.

This is such an exciting project and we would like to thank everyone in Sierra Leone who worked so hard last year, and is so keen to make 2021 a success.



On-line Auction raises almost £1200

The on-line auction organised by the link in the run up to Christmas has raised an incredible £1165 to help fund its current projects in our Twin Town.

Patrons: Peter Penfold, former British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone, Michael J.Foster DL and Dain Jensen.

Chairman: Richard Homewood 07712 088648. Vice Chairman: Derek Tomblin 01424 753768.

Secretary: Robin Gray 07812 487378 Treasurer: Martin Copland 07890 407421. Membership Sec: Jacqui Homewood 07740 965198

Schools Liaison: Isabel Hodger 01424 201624. Roger Mitchell 01424 422299 Health Working Party: Christine Lane 07714 557037.

Creating Livelihoods: David Lewis 07412 538013 Fundraising: Nola McSweeney 01424 751295