



December 2018

Dear Supporters and Friends of St Joseph's

Thank you all for your patience while waiting for news and photos of the school. We're very aware it has been a number of months since you heard from us so we've produced a bumper edition which we hope you will find interesting.



This time of year is a busy one for Sister Mary. Just before Christmas the vulnerable families and people of Makeni and the surrounding area were invited to the school. More than 450 came and included polio and ebola survivors, those suffering from leprosy, those with special needs and amputees. They were all given a small bag of rice and a lollipop for the children. Such a contrast to the excessive materialism of the western world.



A Christmas Message from Sister Mary

“Happy Christmas to all my wonderful friends who despite my lack of communication keep helping, I really appreciate all you do for me and St Joseph's.

I give you the great news that I will have two helpers arriving in January. I am so relieved and looking forward to working with both of these highly qualified women. A miracle is about to happen! Please God when they are settled in, I will not be so neglectful of you all and will keep you updated about what is happening in St Joseph's. Sadly I just cannot find time to do all that I have to do so please forgive me!

You are in my thoughts and prayers at this special time of the year. God bless you and I wish you and your families a very happy and peaceful Christmas. We Cluny Sisters in Makeni will include you all in our prayers”.

Help is on its way

Trying to get help for Sister Mary has been a long slow task. At last it looks like two volunteers will go to Makeni in January 2019.

While Sister Mary was home in Ireland, she met up with Carmel at an interview in the VMM (International Development and Volunteering) office in Dublin. Carmel is

a retired Principal of a Special Needs School in Dublin with vast experience and has been to Uganda and South Africa as a volunteer. She is delighted and excited about joining the school as she feels she has a lot to offer St Joseph's and is very enthusiastic. She has applied for her visa and should get it at the beginning of January and will then book her flights. She plans to be there for a year. Sister Mary will provide a small apartment for her beside the Junior Secondary School.

The second volunteer is Thabile who is in the process of applying for her visa and plans to go to Makeni from South Africa at the end of January. She was in Ireland in November and did her two days training with Carmel in the VMM office.

It will be such a help and relief for Sister Mary to have both of these women in St Joseph's in January.

Question: When is a sabbatical not a sabbatical?

Answer: When Sister Mary goes home to Ireland for three months but still works tirelessly for the school.

Sister Mary travelled home from Sierra Leone in early July for three months. This is how her sister describes her homecoming and her return to Sierra Leone:

“Sister Mary was exhausted but delighted to be home. Sinead Walsh (see photo), former Irish Ambassador in Sierra Leone wrote a book with Dr Oliver Johnson “Getting to Zero” on their hard work and experiences while trying to organise the elimination of Ebola in Sierra Leone. Sister was invited to both book launches, one in Iveagh House, the beautiful building of Department of Foreign Affairs, which was formally Lord Iveagh's town house, founder of Guinness. The second launch was in the Royal College of Surgeons. Sinead is a great friend of Sister Mary's and is donating her half of the book profits to St Joseph's School for Hearing Impaired. Sinead is now European Ambassador in South Sudan.



Sister Mary enjoyed being home but is happy to be back with her pupils in St Joseph's and her Community in Makeni. She went back at the end of September. At long last, she is getting an Administrator to help her in the school, Thabile is South African and she will arrive in early January. Another Irish woman, Carmel, who is a retired Principal of a Special Needs School in Dublin is also going for a year to St Joseph's to work alongside Sister Mary in future planning for the school and working with the teachers. Sister Mary has been in Sierra Leone since 1972, and is still as driven as ever but needs help, particularly with IT. St Joseph's continues to do wonderful work with Hearing Impaired (HI) children, there are nearly 200 pupils there now, many of them boarders from the age of 4 upwards, others stay in homes in the town. They are receiving a great education and a chance in life that they would not have if it weren't for the HI school.

The Sisters also work with families who survived Ebola, supporting them in education, setting them up in trades, trading in the markets, hairdressing, and helping them financially to become independent again after all the loss of life and trauma they have suffered. They also work with amputees and their families, a result of the cruel civil war. Poverty is a huge problem in Sierra Leone, so many do not know where their next meal will come from. Thanks to all of you who do so much. Sister Mary and all the Sisters are most grateful for your help, which enable them to help the most deserving cases.

Akim, is the HI pupil who fell from a palm tree last year. Sadly he is now paraplegic but is doing well and is getting great care from the Loreto Clinic nurses who visit him daily. His bed sores are almost healed. A volunteer from Dungloe, Rosaleen, went out to the school some years ago and while there trained some of the HI pupils in massage. Two of those she trained work with Akim and he can now sit up with their assistance and is gaining some power in his upper body and arms. One of the HI past pupils is now training as a Physiotherapist and Sister Mary is told that he is one of the best students, so Rosaleen's generosity is still improving the lives of people in Makeni. A very generous Dublin woman, Rosemary, who has a son with Cerebral Palsy, has been fantastic in advising on Akim's needs and put us in touch with Conor, a man from Dundalk, who is sending a container to Sierra Leone soon and he has sourced a hoist, paraplegic wheelchair, a bed and other essential equipment for Akim. So many people have donated money for Akim, a million thanks to all".

Madeline Mitchell (Sister Mary's sister)
December 2018

Fund raising through the year.

None of this amazing work could happen without the generous support of everyone who cares about the commitment of Sister and all the staff at the school. Thank you to all who give of your time and money to ensure this work continues. Here are just a few of the ventures that took place in the name of the school this year.

Congratulations to Ben McWilliams and his team for successfully completing their climb of Mount Kilimanjaro. They raised more than £2,000 for the school! Such a fantastic achievement.



Charity Dinner: A huge thank you to everyone who came along to our fundraising dinner and extra thanks to all who couldn't make it but donated prizes or bought tickets anyway.

Art Exhibition: Three supporters recently exhibited at an art exhibition and donated the proceeds of the sales of their paintings to the school.



One of our trustees, Kate and her husband Dixon (and dog Susie) had a stall at Tynemouth Market selling fantastic things from the tailoring workshop, made by the older pupils. If you'd like to help the school by buying a St Joseph's bag, bow tie or tablecloth set, send us an email to forthehearingimpaired@gmail.com

We'd love to hear from anyone who might be keen to help through fundraising – however big or small, your donations really do make a huge difference, and we know that Sister Mary and everyone in the school would like to thank all those who so kindly and generously support the Friends of St Joseph's. If you would like to donate in any way please email us or go to www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/FriendsofStJosephs

Please note that if you donate to the school through the Virgin Money Giving website we are no longer able to acknowledge your kind donation personally unless you tick the consent to marketing box. Unless you do that Virgin will protect your privacy and will not release any of your details so we won't know your name or your email address. Alternatively you can email us to tell us you've made a donation.

We continue to support all the work at the school but over the last two or three years have been mainly (but not totally) concentrating on



refurbishing some of the main areas such as the sanitation block. The finishing touches have been put on that and the new dining room, and the amazing murals in these areas and



throughout the school have been painted by one of the older students.

Work has nearly finished on the two new visitor toilets and the disabled toilet and we hope to have some photos of these when we visit the school in February. Sister has been so busy over the past year without anyone to help her with all the administration work that we haven't finally prioritised the next major project we will support. That will be done when two of the trustees visit in February and we will send out another newsletter when they return. In addition to the refurbishment work we have paid for audiology equipment, science equipment, general school supplies, and hearing aids.

School report

You will have read in a previous newsletter, a report by Monica Tomlin, the school's educational audiologist. Monica has sent us the following updated report which goes into more detail about the history and development of the school.

Origins of the School

St Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired opened within Makeni Catholic Mission with a handful of deaf children in 1979. By 1991 when civil war broke out it was a well-established school under the direction of The Cluny Sisters and was accepting boarders from all over Sierra Leone. The violence spread to Makeni in 1998 when the rebels arrived and the sisters were forced to close the school and flee the country. The abandoned school was ransacked and largely destroyed by the rebels and later occupied as a store by the UN Troops.

Soon after peace was restored in 2001 the sisters and some of the school staff returned and slowly began to rebuild the school.

How I got involved

In July 2005 I responded to an appeal from the school director, Sister Mary Sweeney. She needed assistance in re-establishing the audiology department after the civil war and training new teachers. Twenty years earlier I had been a teacher at St John's Catholic School for the Deaf in Yorkshire. The retired principal of St John's had herself spent several weeks giving teacher training at St Joseph's in the 1980's and therefore was the person to whom Sister Mary had turned to for help. For the next 6 years I returned to Makeni twice a year for 2 weeks in October and February during school half-term breaks. I was usually accompanied by another former teacher of St John's who was training teachers of the deaf in Birmingham University. My main task was re-equipping the audiology department and fitting children with hearing aids whilst my colleague took the lead in training the teachers.

Now, since I retired in December 2011, I travel to Sierra Leone three times a year and spend from 7 to 10 weeks each term working in the school.

Teaching language

Before children can learn they need to have language. The language of education in Sierra Leone is English. (Fine for me: in my previous overseas experience, I had to speak Bengali!) However, it is not at all easy for the teachers and pupils at St Joseph's. If the students are to have any chance of gaining academic qualifications, they must learn to read and write in English. The children who cannot hear speech will naturally use gestures, signs and body language in order to make themselves understood in any way they can. In some schools for the deaf, only sign language is taught and no-one uses their



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voices at all. This severely limits the young persons' opportunities when they leave the school environment.

At St Joseph's the pupils are fitted with hearing aids and children are encouraged to listen and speak instead of relying solely on sign language. My responsibility is to assess what they can hear and fit the best hearing aids that I can get. All but a tiny minority receive some benefit from hearing aids even if it is only to hear their own voice. With good teaching, most can develop intelligible speech if they start early enough.

The teachers can use any means necessary to communicate with their class. They may use sign, finger spelling, gestures, drawing or writing but they must simultaneously use clear speech in correct English. This is likened to the way that a mother may speak to her baby or toddler before the child can actually speak itself and it is known as the Maternal Reflective Method.

Teacher training and the University of Makeni (UNIMAK)

UNIMAK is a newly emerging Catholic university which has only been conferring its own degrees for 8 years. All teachers at the school for the deaf first must complete an introductory certificate on teaching deaf children. This course is done through part-time in-service courses and teaching practice/supervision in the school. Once the teacher has gained the certificate and had a couple of years' experience they are encouraged to continue their studies. Through UNIMAK they can gain a diploma in the education of the deaf after two or three years of study.

Earlier this year two of the senior teachers were awarded a B.Ed. in special education. They are now able to take on much of the training to the other teachers.

A lot of my time in Sierra Leone is taken up with this training. I am assisted by a colleague who has experience as a lecturer in education of the deaf in UK. She comes to Makeni 2 or 3 times a year for a couple of weeks to deliver an intensive study week to the diploma and degree students.



School Structure 2017 - 2018

There are around 180 boys and girls aged from 4 to 25 years. Roughly half of them are boarders from all over Sierra Leone. The others attend daily. They are divided into the following sections:

- a) Nursery and First School: age range 4-8
- b) Middle School: age range 7-15
- c) Vocational Department: 16-24
- d) Junior Secondary Department: 12-19
- e) Senior Secondary School: 17-25

Nursery and First School

Last year there were 4 classes in this group with 6-8 children per class. In the next few weeks another 16 children in this age group will be admitted. Most will have been born deaf or been deafened in the first year of life. They will not have any

language at all. A few may have acquired the hearing loss at a later stage through malaria, measles, mumps, ebola or other reason. These new pupils should not be in classes of more than 6 so this coming year an additional two classes will be needed in the first school.

Comparing with the system in UK, the work done in the first school section is equivalent to nursery and reception curriculum.

Middle school. (9 classes)

As far as possible the middle school pupils are taught the normal class 1 to 5 curriculum and prepared for the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) which all children in Sierra Leone must sit at the end of primary in order to gain admission to Junior Secondary schools.

Last summer nine pupils sat the NPSE and are now joining a Junior Secondary class. Another smaller group are joining vocational sector rather than commencing an academic secondary course.

Junior Secondary Department (8 classes)

In Sierra Leone, students who have passed the NPSE exam go to a Junior Secondary School for 3 years prior to sitting the BECE (Basic Education Certificate Exam) which is administered by the West African Exam Board.

Because of the hearing loss, deaf children leaving primary school always have a much reduced vocabulary and level of literacy than normally hearing children. The only exceptions might be those who did not acquire the hearing loss until after they had already achieved a normal vocabulary or if they had received appropriate hearing aids before they reached a year old. (As is the target in UK following the introduction of the new born hearing screen). For this reason, the deaf students at St Joseph's take 4 or 5 years to prepare for the BECE exam. Some will not complete the secondary course and transfer to the vocational department.

A few students do not arrive at St Josephs until they are 16 years or more. They will either have been attending main stream primary school but struggled without success to succeed in a secondary school, or they may have previously attended a school for the deaf in Freetown which does not have any secondary department. This summer 7 boys and 2 girls aged between 18 and 21 sat the BECE exam. The results are not out yet out but we anticipate that 5 or 6 of them will be admitted to Senior Secondary School. They will then choose to study either sciences or commerce for a further 3-year course in preparation for the WASSCE exams. (West African Senior Secondary exams).

St Joseph's Senior Secondary School

This is a large senior school for girls within the Catholic Mission on a site which is adjacent to the school for the hearing impaired. The first 3 HI boys were admitted to the secondary school in 2013 and each year since then a few more joined them. The only exception was in 2015 when there was a gap due to the Ebola outbreak which closed all schools for almost a year. Now 6 HI boys are commencing their final year and will sit their WASSCE exams in 2019. These are tough exams and each student will be sitting for seven or eight subjects. There are 4 science and 2 commerce students.

The deaf boys are being taught in large classes of about 60 girls. After their lessons each day they come back to their study room in St Joseph's for extra teaching. They are taught mainly by the Junior Secondary teachers and I help them with maths and physics. Most weekends they also have teaching on Saturday mornings. This extra teaching is essential to help them understand the lessons they receive in the mainstream school.

Vocational lessons

During the last 2 years in middle school, both boys and girls have lessons timetabled in sewing, carpentry and IT. When they transfer to the Junior Secondary department they all study agriculture, IT and either tailoring or carpentry.

Vocational Department

Not every student has the ability or inclination to study for formal academic examinations. There are many opportunities for all students to gain critical skills that will help them be active members of society as adults. The students can choose carpentry, tailoring, catering, agriculture or hair-dressing. The school has well equipped carpentry and tailoring workshops, a computer room, and a school garden for cultivating vegetables. Last year 4 girls completed a hairdressing course at a local hair salon.

A shipping container has been converted into a café on the perimeter of the school where some older girls use the catering training to serve snacks to the public during the day. At St Joseph's working farm, located a couple of miles from the school, students training in agriculture learn to raise chickens and cultivate crops such as cassava, bananas, rice, pineapples and yams.

The Future?

School re-opened for the 2018-19 academic year on 17th September. I travelled to Makeni on 9th October to continue with my work with training the teachers, fitting hearing aids and teaching maths! I took with me audiology equipment, hearing aids, maths teaching aids and as much else that I can fit in my luggage.

Very many thanks for your generous donations and support without which the school would be unable to continue this valuable work.

Please pray that things will progress smoothly during the 2018-19 year.

Monica Tomlin September 2018

If you'd like to know any more about the work being done, or want to ask anything about the future projects we have planned at the school, please do get in touch by emailing: forthehearingimpaired@gmail.com. And like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/stjoskids or follow us on www.twitter.com/Frnds_StJosKids for all the up to date news.

Data Protection:

If you have received this email by mistake or no longer wish to subscribe just reply to it and you will be taken off the list. Do remember to tell us if you change your email address.

New legislation was introduced in May 2018 strengthening the rights of individuals to protection of their personal data held by organisations. We have prepared a privacy statement, which has been published on our website (www.friendsofstjosephskids.org) .

With all good wishes for 2019 from Linda Freestone and the trustees.