

## March 2014 Newsletter

For those interested in more regular news about EducAid's activities, please refer to:  
[www.educaidsierraleone.blogspot.com](http://www.educaidsierraleone.blogspot.com) and [www.sierraleonegirls.blogspot.com](http://www.sierraleonegirls.blogspot.com) and  
the EducAid Sierra Leone Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/48572325218/>

**Catch up....** As ever, this has been a very busy and action packed 6 months:

The boys' house in Maronka is nearly finished: staff, students and local artisans have come together under the management of Peter Wilson who is guiding the project to a close. It will be a matter of weeks until we will have all the primary school boys sleeping in a building especially designed for them. This is significant, not only because the current sleeping arrangements on tarpaulins in the classrooms is far from ideal, but it is also key that the boys do not feel left behind when the girls are moving up in the world. Despite the suppression of women and girls for centuries, any slight improvement in their circumstances causes the men to feel that their status is in jeopardy. For now, we have the boys' support for the education of their sisters, but we certainly don't want that to change!

Around 20 new schools have joined the primary level training as the 'Quality Enhancement Programme in Maronka' (QEPM) goes into a new round. As training styles, and education in general, tend to be very formal and theoretical, most of these teachers have never found themselves accessing practical teaching skills before. They are so enthusiastic when they gain some new ideas and understanding about how to get their children to start being independent learners, thinkers, readers and writers. We have a super team of young teachers running the training sessions, it is incredibly encouraging to see what is possible when a little commitment and enthusiasm are applied. We have not always had such good relationships with representatives of the Ministry of Education, so it is very encouraging to now find that the Deputy Directors of the relevant Districts are all very keen to have their teachers participate!



Small groups of students have been working with Professor Emeritus Joel Marrant, an American volunteer, on various essay competitions with a view to accessing different study opportunities and foreign experiences - we await the results!

'Make it Happen,' having built four beautiful schools in the far north of Sierra Leone, have handed them over to EducAid to run (although they are happily still funded by them!). This means an addition of 25 staff to the EducAid team and 1000 more pupils within the family. 'Make it Happen' are also supporting EducAid in many other ways: the provision of a good office space with electricity and internet for the accounting team; the use of their vehicle when their director is out of the country; and financial support for various parts of our programme. We greatly appreciate the partnership that is developing.

11 junior staff joined the 22 members already enrolled on the 'Distance Higher Teachers' Certificate' training at the Port Loko Teachers' College. This means that while they serve EducAid during the term time they are able to improve their own qualifications during the holidays. The partnership with the college is also one that is developing; through this relationship we hope to provide support in the improvement of lecturing and teacher training across the country. The new acting principal is keen!

EducAid past pupils, and now University of Sierra Leone graduates, Amara Vandi and Juldeh Barrie, have joined the teaching team and are doing fantastic work building up the capacity of the science department under the direction of the hardworking and dynamic Gassim Sillah. It is wonderful to see the willingness to return to the EducAid and be part of improving the schools for those coming up in their wake.

Four of our senior staff, having acquired their teaching qualifications some years ago, are now undertaking part time and distance degrees. This requires not only an amazing amount of dedication on their part to keep up with their studies and school responsibilities, but also support from other staff who are facilitating their occasional absence from the various sites. This team spirit that makes everyone's advance possible will ensure that EducAid will do great things in the future.



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**Thank you** to all of you who continue to donate to EducAid. None of our activities are possible without your generosity. If you would like to sign up as a regular donor [e.g. **£15 per month** pays for education and food for one student] or make a one-off donation, please go to:

[http://educaid.org.uk/EducAid\\_Sierra\\_Leone/Donate\\_to\\_EducAid.html](http://educaid.org.uk/EducAid_Sierra_Leone/Donate_to_EducAid.html)



On the other hand, the difficult things over the last few months include the terrible reality of four needless deaths. Two young girls who were born and bred in the Magbeni area lost their lives in December; they had known the River Rokel since they were small children but misjudged its currents while jumping in and out of a boat while doing their laundry. One girl and one boy on separate occasions died of unusually severe sickle cell crises – children dying from what are totally survivable illnesses in the UK, but are our 2nd and 3rd cases in the last couple of years.

We always need to appeal for assistance for help to combat the causes and effects of very manageable diseases. There is no management of the disease here other than a few additional vitamins handed out to registered sufferers. We need warm clothes, significant painkillers and vitamins to help take care of our sickle cell sufferers. We need medicines and anti malaria and worms treatments for nearly all

our students. If you feel that you can contribute to help the education and medical treatment of our students, please do follow the links at the bottom.

Maybe not fatal, but nevertheless disturbingly dangerous, is the Minister of Education deciding that students must now undertake four not three years of senior secondary study. We can all see that the students sitting the senior exams are insufficiently prepared: 10% of candidates passing in the 2012 round of exams. The Ministry has proposed that students' eligibility will be proven by having successful 'BECE' (Basic Education Certificate Examination) results from 4 years preceding the senior exam. In EducAid we regularly have youngsters that only require two years in order to complete their senior studies, and it has previously been possible to enter them when they have proven themselves ready. Many of our current junior staff very successfully completed the junior and senior secondary courses in two years each. In the year when the nationwide pass rates were 10%, EducAid had, as usual, 100% pass rates. The difference is not for how long the youngsters study, but that the teachers are well trained and can confidently and competently deliver the whole syllabus in an environment where the students can access good quality learning materials that cover the whole syllabus. EducAid has five youngsters who have been refused entrance to the exams this year, but this number is set to increase. The change will particularly affect girls in the Women's Project who have not gone back through the whole system, re-joining primary school to go through all of the necessary hurdles to reach the senior exam. If they have to do it that way, many will give up long before they reach the end point. Being obliged as a teenager to go through all those stages (at least 7 years) because they were deprived of the opportunity when they were at an appropriate age is a ludicrous waste of time when the same effect can be achieved with suitable teaching in a couple of years instead.

The young people countrywide who are finding themselves marginalised and unable to make any progress with their lives are already very angry, and many incidents of flare-ups and violent disturbances have occurred across the country. This is horribly reminiscent of the sort of decisions taken by the government 25 years ago when President Momoh told the nation that 'education is a privilege and not a right'. The country suffered 11 years of very violent civil war the last time there were thousands of marginalised youth who were given no other way of expressing themselves. It was of course not the only factor but it was a significant one.

Within EducAid, we are seeking to find whatever ways we can to be part of improving the chances of vulnerable and marginalised youth to see themselves as having a role and a stake in peaceful, democratic society. We have over 50 young people who are our past pupils and who are serving as junior and now senior teachers in the schools. As EducAid expands, the opportunities for leadership and responsibility are growing with them. We have 12 coordinators and 12 deputy coordinators now. Each of these is mentoring others to take their place so they will be free to move up to other responsibilities when the opportunity arises. As a result, our students see themselves as part of not just a school but a growing movement and talk excitedly of the day when they will be junior staff and playing their part more and more.

Thank you to all our donors and supporters, and special appreciation to our volunteers both in the UK and here in Sierra Leone. Without your help, nothing is possible. While we see many lives being turned around, what we see every day shows what value we can bring to the lives of the people of Sierra Leone. With your help we can go on and help to transform more lives by improving the education and care that we provide, and by spreading the EducAid network further.

You can have your part in this too. By volunteering your time, organising a fundraising event or making a simple donation, you will be able to significantly transform more lives than you could imagine. Remember that only £180 provides food, shelter, water and a top quality education for an entire year. i.e. £15 per month to transform a life.