

November 2013 Newsletter

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

The 1st National Primary School Examination (NPSE) candidates from Maronka

In the darkness, long before the sun came up, all the Maronka exam candidates were up and about, excited and proud. Dressed in their Kings' Hall smart shirts, uniformed especially for their exam, they were ready quickly. 22 youngsters had been prepared by Cobra and Alusine as the first group from Maronka to go and sit the NPSE and off we all set, the whole class squished into the EducAid vehicle.

We had warned them that bad things sometimes happen in the exams and to ignore it and do their own work, no matter what the supervising staff from other schools suggested. It was fortunate that we had spoken to them because, as we had feared, their invigilators attempted to take money from them in exchange for standing in the middle of the room and reading out the multiple choice answers. Tragic that they are faced so young with the realities of corruption but excellent that they were ready to resist. In due course their results arrived and as per expectation, we had 100% pass rate.

Well done to all Maronkans involved!



Before the exam all lined up with all the other NPSE candidates from all schools in Port Loko



The whole class crammed into the EducAid vehicle, everyone shiny and ready before the exam.

Seeds for Africa, EducAid Partnership

After a good 18 months of work on bids and proposals, we were, in April, awarded a grant to work with Seeds for Africa on a significant agriculture for schools project. Endeavouring to work ethically and in an environmentally sound way, we have adopted the principles of the Slow Food movement, introduced by an enthusiastic volunteer.

With this help, students are learning in practice (they all study agricultural science) how to grow the majority of the food they need. We have planted rice, cassava, beans, peppers, groundnuts, corn and more.

In addition, through the Slow Food approach, they are being thinking about the environment and its protection; learning about the debates within agriculture about modified varieties versus traditional varieties; learning some basic research principles through their relationships with the Ministry of Agriculture and Njala University who are also partnering with us on this but most importantly, they are learning independence and not to just keep looking for where the next handout is. This is empowering and dignifying.

*"If your plan is for one year, plant rice.
If your plan is for ten years, plant trees.
If your plan is for one hundred years, educate children."
- Confucius*



Left: Vehicle full of cassava sticks ready for planting - hopefully that will keep us going for some time!

Right: Ishmael inspecting his cassava plantation after a few weeks.

**Most land in Sierra Leone is very rewarding to grow on!
Everything flourishes and in no time at all.**



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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

Where are we going?

While we are really proud of the regular successes achieved by so many of our youngsters, we know there is so much more to do. We have approximately 2000 young people attending our schools now and the teacher training programmes are enabling us to help over 10,000 children across nearly 40 partner schools.

In our secondary and primary school work, we are very aware that we do excellently within the current framework but are significantly constrained by an exam system that is just not fit for the 21st century either in Sierra Leone or elsewhere. It measures achievement in knowledge regurgitation but provides no possible openings for the assessment of 21st century skills.

Under the influence of some great education thinkers, such as Paolo Freire and Sir Ken Robinson, we are looking at how we can start evolving models that can influence policy and practice. We also want to ensure that we provide an education informed strongly by values that will enable our youngsters to stand against the corruption, nepotism and elitism that are so crippling to Sierra Leone's economy.

We are working now with the University of Makeni towards the establishment of our own university credit course in Leadership Skills. This is the first step towards establishing our own tertiary institution.

We anticipate a fair degree of resistance to any change - those currently agitating for reform only want to return to 'the good old days' of when they were young.

However, these are exciting times and we are positioning ourselves: 4 senior staff with teaching qualifications have signed up for distance bachelors' degrees. 20 staff have just finished teacher training and 18 more are mid way through their own. Others are investigating distance Masters and PhD options so that when we start pushing for change more widely, we have the appropriate academic weight to be taken seriously and to achieve our goal.

African Gifted Foundation - Summer School in Accra, Ghana

Earlier this year, eight EducAid students entered and won an essay competition. The prize: a place on the AGF summer school in Accra. This summer school gathers bright under 16s from across English speaking Africa and aims to inspire and encourage them on their paths towards excellence.

Most other participants came from relatively privileged backgrounds and knowing the situation of our students, the organisers not only financed every detail of the trip but also provided clothes, shoes and pocket money for them. They had a fantastic time, mixing with others from across the continent, seeing some of how a more developed African country can operate and what it has to offer and having their eyes opened in ways that only travel can achieve. The group represented EducAid well and ensured that we will be welcome on any future venture. They are inspired and enthused and ready to apply themselves to achieve ever greater heights as are their colleagues.



A small section of the colourful Rolal mural. 'Love and do as you will' is the EducAid motto



Returnees from Accra - beaming smiles and chatting ten to the dozen about their experiences

Fantastic Volunteers

EducAid has been fortunate to attract some really high quality volunteers over the years. Working behind the scenes, mostly in the UK, we have Anne Hewlett who organises Miriam's UK fundraising timetable and Mike Ruse who sends out the newsletter among other things. Some of our recent visitors to Sierra Leone who worked with staff and students include: experienced Biology teacher, Ken Hall, building staff capacity; English student, Myah Jeffers, working on creative writing; experienced primary teacher, Sean Bennett, who worked on maths and sports; senior researcher and psychologist, Dr Rebecca Horn, who set up our Monitoring & Evaluation system; newly qualified teacher, James Burnford, for his 3rd visit, who worked on literacy skills; very experienced Head of English, author and poet, Roland Howard who worked on writing skills; enthusiastic young artist, Polly Wilson, who produced fantastic colourful murals; young agriculture enthusiast, Francesca Brkic, who helped start our 'Slow Food' project.

On their way soon are: amazing supporter and volunteer, Ann Beatty, who started up the Maronka Girls' Safe House; experienced chemistry teacher, Richard Heyes; long term supporter, Alex Ehegartner and his friend; very experienced English and Special Needs teacher, Patrick Horn; experienced primary teacher, Daphne Morris and her husband Bill and so the list goes on. We are extremely grateful to all of them for their time, energy and commitment to supporting us in our endeavours to destroy poverty through education.