



Dear Friends

A belated Happy New Year to all the supporters of St Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired. The Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone has had a devastating effect and it was a difficult end to 2014 but there is now hope for 2015. The rate of infection is slowing and the government has announced that schools and colleges can reopen in March.

The fundraising page we set up to help Sister Mary relieve some of the suffering caused by the Ebola crisis has raised nearly £30,000. That is an incredible amount and has meant that we were able to send much needed medical supplies at a time when the international relief effort was slow to reach Makeni. We were also able to transport over 800 Christmas Gift boxes to allow Sister Mary to bring some cheer to the community. Part of the funds has also been used to train the carers from the school to counsel families severely affected by the virus and to provide them with food. This is how Sister describes this work:

"We choose to focus in on the families who are not yet receiving food, medical care or protection from stigma. We felt by filling the essentials to preserve life, until Government get their systems working, for widows, orphans and young girls and boys they are our priority. All are now carrying huge burdens with sometimes up to 10 persons depending on them to hold the family together and save their lives. 75 families were identified by carers in the various town areas where they live. The identified families come in groups of about 6 families per session".

Thank you to all who have donated to our appeal. None of this would have happened without you.



Sister Mary is busy making plans for the reopening of the school. She will be greatly assisted by Mercy who has been a volunteer with the University of Makeni for the last year. When the University was closed during the Ebola crisis Mercy moved into the guesthouse in St Joseph's School and helped Sister in many ways. She went home for the Christmas break and will be returning on 10th February. For the next 12 months Mercy will be dividing her time between the school and the University. You will hear more from her in future newsletters. A big welcome back to her.

Life will be very different in post Ebola Makeni and in the school as Sister describes here:

"We have to keep up all the protective habits we have been trained in for the past months....it is to be expected that there will continue to be pockets of infection especially if they continue to hide sick people and especially if they wash dead bodies and bury them secretly. Whole families have died over the months all because of the denials of sickness and the burials. Survivors are asked to refrain from sexual activity for 90 days. Quite a number of men have come back and infected their wives who were clear. The men will be jailed for failing to observe the 90 days. There is a lot of emphasis on keeping to the rules of not touching, and avoiding visits and crowds. Rough physical play is to be avoided. For our oversea experts/volunteers, there will be little risk to their safety. They will be taken from Lungi to Makeni in our own Toyota Hilux. The Guest House and school have all that is needed for health. Good food is hygienically prepared. Sanitisers are available"

There are new rules imposed by the government that have to be followed:

ID Cards for everyone have to be signed by the Registrar/Head of School. No business sellers are to enter the school compound. Unless the seller of food for lunch is checked out by health and hygiene committee each day no food will be allowed. The women will be registered and will sign a contract with the appointed registrar. No visitors to enter the school to contact anyone or to do business, take data or photos without permission and no interviews with children without parents.

Washing points are to be put in place. Toilets must have clean water, soap, chlorine, buckets, brooms, sanitizers, and rubber gloves, First Aid Kits have to be available in case illness or accidents occur. Supervision of toilets during break time needs to be with a teacher on duty. Washing of hands has to be enforced and monitored. (Maintenance plumbing – pump, taps and well begins first week of February. The House System may be reactivated with rewards to be earned for good health discipline).

Sister Mary, when asked what has been the worst crisis ever to hit Sierra Leone in her 42 years there, immediately said Ebola. She thought the rebel war was bad but *Ebola has caused much worse suffering, trauma, deaths & destruction.*

As you may have seen in previous newsletters, on our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/stjoskids>) or on our Twitter feed (Frnds_StJosKids), we are continuing to work with St Anselm's College in Birkenhead to support the older hearing impaired students at St Joseph's School as they make the difficult transition from school to employment. We are purchasing a container which will be shipped to Sierra Leone and will be placed at the front of the school where it

will be converted into a shop/workshop. This will give the carpentry, tailoring, catering, agriculture and art students an opportunity to learn the business skills needed to make a living selling the goods they have made or produced. We will provide all the necessary equipment to convert the container and pay for the shipping costs, transport to the school and the labour costs to convert it.

The container will also be filled with "leaver kits" for the students containing enough tools for them to start their own business. Tools and equipment will also be provided for those five school departments which will train the students in the vocational skills that will help them to become financially independent. This is a major project we have taken on at the request of Sister Mary and if you would like to help contribute towards the cost please go to the fundraising page which is still open at: www.virginmoneygiving.com/team/ebola4

The school's Guest House is an important income stream for the school. Sadly much of the equipment used is old and inefficient. It would be greatly helped by a number of large items: a washing machine, a microwave, a double fridge freezer, a drinks cooler, two electric irons, an ironing board, electric kettles and a kitchen blender. Unfortunately, due to the harsh climate and the vagaries of electricity supply, we have found that secondhand equipment fails too quickly. We need to send new, simple but robust machines. If anyone would like to purchase/donate money for one of these items to go in the container please email forthehearingimpaired@gmail.com or donate to the fundraising page with a brief message to say which item you would like your money to buy.

The other area where the hearing impaired students can excel is in IT. Six of the senior students are to travel to Freetown to undertake an intensive IT course with Dr Abdul Dumbuya of the Dorothy Springer Foundation. He has trained many disabled students in IT. One of the teachers at the school who is also hearing impaired will accompany them and participate in the course.

2015 will be an exciting but challenging year for Sister Mary and her team. Thank you for your continuing support which allows these disadvantaged children to have the best possible start in life.

All good wishes from Linda Freestone (Chair) and all the trustees

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