



April 2021

Dear Friends,

Easter Greetings to all our amazing supporters. As the new term comes to an end we asked Sister Amala to give you all a summary of the first school term in 2021. Here is her report:

“We send you all greetings from a very hot St. Joseph’s school. We are doing well but at present are facing extreme heat during this month. For eight days we had a power cut with no power at all including the internet and were reliant on our ancient generator which is expensive to run.

On 4th January we re-opened the School with several new admissions. First of all, I want to thank our dear Monica Tomlin for her five months stay in St. Joseph’s. We all appreciated her hard work managing the audiology department and fitting the children with hearing aids, training the teachers and teaching the students at the school, and teaching the HTC (Higher Teacher Certificate) and B. Ed Students at UNIMAK (the University of Makeni). In her spare time she fitted hearing aids for children and adults from all over Sierra Leone (!)



Due to Joe Manning’s tireless effort last month we received news from Trocaire, Ireland, that they were sending €12,000 for us to develop our present farm. Trocaire in Freetown, sent an expert in agriculture to visit the site and to discuss with us the better development of the farm and with a view to extending the poultry.

As I mentioned in my last update six of our students are now in Universities. Five of them are in UNIMAK and four of those are doing IT and one student is doing Public Health. The sixth student is in EBK (Ernest Bai Koroma University) doing Accounting and Finance. They are coping well with their studies. *(Sister Amala omits to say that she worked hard lobbying the University Senate to waive the mandatory requirement of English Language which is impossible for hearing impaired students to achieve mainly due to the oral component of the exam)*

In 2018, seven students were sent to the Opportunity Industrial Centre in Sierra Leone (OICSL) to learn different skills. Four students were doing tailoring and three were doing carpentry. It is a two years programme, but due to the outbreak of COVID 19 that was delayed. Thankfully they were able to complete and graduated in January 2021 *(see also Monica’s report below)*

Presently, there are fourteen students in class 6 of the Primary School who will be taking the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) in May. There are eight students in class 3 of the Junior Secondary School who will be taking the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE) in July. There are

four students who will be taking their West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (WASSCE) in April and May.

We are still having problems with the Government not paying all our teachers which is a further drain on our limited resources.

We are very grateful to God for blessing us with this New Year 2021 with sound health of body and mind.

Sr. Amala & Staff''

Monica Tomlin returned back to the UK from the school earlier this month. We asked her if she would give us an overview of the academic and vocational training of the students but with emphasis on the latter:

Education for Life

One of the main aims of the school is to prepare the children for life. From the very beginning they are expected to do some domestic chores. Depending on their ages, they are expected to help with sweeping the compound, tidying the classroom; washing their bowls and cutlery after the meal and so on. Older students assist the younger ones to wash and dress before school. At the weekend, the boarders give the school a thorough clean and do their own laundry. Older students assist the younger ones to braid their hair and dress well for Sunday Mass. It is heart-warming to see how the older students help with the younger ones.

The School Curriculum

First School: reception: ages 4/5 to 7/8 (Four classes: FS1a, FS1b, FS2a, FS2b)

The school curriculum is based on the Sierra Leonean National Curriculum for mainstream primary and secondary schools. However, SJHIS is a Special School and different teaching methods and a modified curriculum are needed for children who cannot hear and often cannot speak. These children will need three or four years in the First School with trained teachers of the deaf in order to learn to communicate. With the aid of hearing aids, many children can acquire intelligible speech but others with profound hearing loss will need the assistance of sign language and finger spelling.

Middle School: approximate age range 7/8 to 12/15 (Seven classes: MS1a, MS1b, MS2a, MS2b, MS3a, MS3b, Class 6 (NPSE exam))

When they are ready, children will be moved into the Middle School. This is where the teachers will begin to teach the normal primary curriculum. Classes are small with no



more than eight children. For easy conversation, every child must see the teacher's face clearly and be close enough to hear as well as possible. The photos show teacher Ali with MS1 Maths Class and class MS3a sitting close to the teacher, Kadiatu.

Children do not all progress at the same rate but most pupils will be in the middle school for four or five years before being ready to join the Year 6 class and prepare for the NPSE (National Primary School Exam).

End of Primary School

Most pupils finish their primary education at about 13 years of age but they can be any age between 11 and 17. It will depend on their academic ability, their degree of hearing loss and on the age at which they started school. Unfortunately some children do not start school until they are 8+ years old.

At this stage the decision has to be made about what type of curriculum each student should follow. If they pass the NPSE exam and are still relatively young most will join the Junior Secondary Department. Less academic and older students are more likely to follow a more practical vocational curriculum. Those who do join a junior secondary course can transfer at any time to a vocational course if appropriate.

Vocational department



Students with their new vocational uniforms: Christiana (tailoring teacher) , Yeabu Kanu, Bobson (teaching assistant), Mariana Sesay, Aminata Kamara, Abu Bakar Kamara, Mabinty Conteh, Adamsay Kargbo ,Rosetta Falah, Abdul Tholley

Teachers of vocational subjects begin to teach some sewing, carpentry and IT to the older middle school students. In JS1 and JS2 the students all have practical classes in tailoring, carpentry, IT and agriculture. At the end of JS2 more decisions are taken and some students decide to leave the academic stream and join the

vocational department full-time.

JS3 students have to concentrate on working for their BECE and do not have carpentry or tailoring classes. However, they all have to take the BECE exam in agriculture and home economics as well as having regular IT classes.

Tailoring: The school has a spacious well-equipped sewing room where the older vocational students learn tailoring. It has a large number of used donated sewing machines (provided by Friends of St Joseph's School and St Anselm's College). On leaving the tailoring department the girl or boy is given a sewing machine to help them set up their own business.



Carpentry:

Both girls and boys are given some experience in woodwork but up until now no girls have chosen to continue. The carpenters learn the basic skills and also make benches and tables which are sold to other schools.

Catering and housekeeping:

The Garden Café is now being run by Marian Harding who is an ex-student of SJHIS. She is training two of the girls in catering. Normally some of the vocational girls help with housekeeping in the Guest Accommodation. However, this year there have been very few guests due to the coronavirus pandemic. The photo shows Mabinty and Salamatu preparing meals for the Garden Café. This is the refurbished Container Café which was originally made possible by the generous donations of the Friends of St Joseph's, Irish Aid and St Anselm's College.



Hairdressing

No students are doing hairdressing at the moment. The last group received their certificates 18 months ago and are now working in hairdressing. However, it is expected that two or three girls will soon start training in the Salon in Makeni.

The **OICSL** college in Makeni trains young people in various trades and occupations. Over the past few years a number of deaf students have gained certificates in carpentry, masonry, tailoring and other occupations. Each course is for two years after which the student receives a trade certificate which is a considerable help in gaining paid employment. Seven students from St Joseph's received certificates recently.



(Photo: Awarding OIC certificates: 11.01.2021. Sr Amala: Frances Sesay; Brima Kargbo, Osman Mansaray, Mr Andrew Dumbuya_(headmaster) Alusine Bangura, Sembu Tarawalie, Paul Conteh, Christiana_(tailoring teacher) ,Amara Koroma and Mr Lavalie (carpentry teacher)

Academic Department

Junior Secondary School: age range 13-18; (Six classes; JS1a, JS1b, JS2a, JS2b, JS3a, JS3b (BECE exam))

In Sierra Leone students spend three years in Junior Secondary schools before they sit for the BECE. However, the hearing impaired students normally require a longer period of study and most students will take at least 4 years.

Even if deaf students gain a high grade in NPSE they are still very ill prepared for secondary work. Their language, vocabulary and general knowledge is invariably too weak for JS1 work.

In SJHIS the JS1 students are given a course aiming to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school work. They may spend one or two years in J1 before being ready to join JS2 and begin to follow the national Junior Secondary curriculum.

The JS3a and 3b students who are preparing for BECE have extra tuition on Saturday mornings and an extra class each day from 3 to 4pm. The photos show the BECE students taking their exam and afterwards.



Senior Secondary School

In Sierra Leone Senior Secondary Schools provide three year academic courses in the WASSCE (West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exam).

Any hearing impaired girl or boy who gets good BECE results can transfer to St Joseph's Secondary School for Girls to study for their WASSCE. Some students who have been boarders do choose to leave Makeni, re-join their families and go to a secondary school near their home.

The girl's school is adjacent to the hearing impaired school and the students receive continued support from the specialised teachers of the deaf. They choose to specialize in Science, Home Economics or Commerce subjects. Extra teaching is given in SJHIS on Saturday mornings and from 3 to 4pm on Mondays to Thursdays.

University

For the first time six students from SJHIS have been accepted for university courses. Siddikie Gbla, Abdulai Gbla, Michael Turay , Adbul Turay and Abass Conteh with Monica at the UNIMAK (University of Makeni) matriculation ceremony. Abdulai is studying health science and the others are doing information technology



The sixth student, John Koroma, is doing Accounting and Finance at the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology.(EBK)

The Irish Link Continues!

You will remember from previous newsletters that Joe Manning, the Honorary Consul for Sierra Leone in Ireland has become a supporter of the school and we have asked him to give you all an update on his work with Sister Amala and various donors:

"I have been involved with St Joseph's now for a little over a year.

As time has progressed the issues have, to me at any rate, become clearer, so these are my observations after one year.

The core activity, training and education, is going well, thanks mainly to Sister Amala and Monica Tomlin.

St Joseph's needs an experienced administrator, initially the thinking was for a retired principal but now perhaps a business background might be more appropriate. This person would be responsible for the overall financial control of the school, initiate best practice such as weekly management meetings with minutes and progress reports. They would also take responsibility for donor relations. At present we are awaiting the go-ahead from Sister Catherine to apply to Irish Aid for funding for the administrator.

The school has considerable assets that could contribute to the running of the school and in doing so enhance their vocational value to the students. However, there is considerable room for efficiencies, the farm being the most obvious. In February Trocaire completed the first draft of a report on the farm. Their main conclusion was that the farm is not achieving anything approaching its potential and have made a list of actions to rectify this. There are similar opportunities for the dressmaking and tailoring and the joinery workshop.

I approached an Austrian NGO, MIVA, who initially indicated they would pay 50% of a new vehicle for the school provided the Friends of St Joseph's raised the other 50%. The Friends raised that amount from generous supporters and I made a formal application to MIVA on that basis. MIVA have sent their recommendation to their board for approval. They have not told us what their recommendation is but, ever the optimist, I would take that as a positive sign, but I do wish they would hurry up!

Joe Manning

22 March 2021

The Generosity of Donors

A big thank you to all you generous donors who responded to our appeal for a new school vehicle. We achieved our target of 50% but as you can see from above we are still waiting for MIVA to confirm that they are prepared to match this funding. It is very frustrating as the school vehicle has broken down at least three times this year on its journey to Freetown and causes unnecessary expense to a stretched school budget. There are other agencies we can apply to but we are hoping for a favourable response from MIVA in the very near future.

In the meantime if you have been inspired by the work of Sister Amala, Monica Tomlin, and all the staff at the school who work tirelessly to give the hearing impaired students a bright future please consider making a donation, however small by following this link:

www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/friendsofstjosephs

With all good wishes for a safe and peaceful Easter from Linda Freestone (Chair) and the Trustees.

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