

ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED MAKENI



BACKGROUND OF THE SCHOOL

The St. Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired is situated in Makeni, one of the main cities in the northern part of Sierra Leone in West Africa. The school has presently 210 pupils from all over the country. Pupils are admitted to the school regardless their race, tribe, religion or sex. The school has boarding facilities for 70 pupils who are from far away areas and do not have family or other caretakers in Makeni or its surroundings.

The school was set up in 1979 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny and in terms of personnel since then supported by the Cluny Sisters. Currently the school is directed by Sr. Mary Sweeney from Ireland and Sr. Romaine Ketekou from Togo, who heads the boarding department and the school safety and security program.

Although its location is based on historic decisions and mainly the consequence of the fact that the school was set up by the Cluny Sisters who work with the Catholic Mission in Makeni, it is well situated in the centre of the country, with a good infrastructure in terms of roads to the capital city Freetown and to the other regions in the country.

The St. Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired children is the only school in Sierra Leone or in West Africa offering primary education and language acquisition according to the so called Maternal Reflective Method (MRM) in combination with sign language.

This allows children to learn to speak, write and read in any language, makes them more capable of functioning in society, taking up official jobs or preparing them for further studies in secondary education or in University. The school is not the only institution in the country that offers primary education to hearing impaired children. The use of the Maternal Reflective Method makes the Makeni school a unique institution not only in the country, but in the whole of West Africa.



Like in many other developing societies, disabled children are often marginalized and socially not accepted. Although St. Joseph's School has contributed significantly to the acceptance of hearing impaired children by their parents and the wider society, there is still a lot of ignorance about these children, especially in terms of access to education, employability and participation in social activities. It is part of the mission of the school to continue fighting for these children to give them their rightful place by offering them adequate education and prepare them for a profession, involve their parents in the education of their children and to sensitize the people of Sierra Leone by all means at their disposal.

St. Joseph's School is not only supported by the Catholic Church, but also by the Government of Sierra Leone through the payment of salaries, the Dutch co-financing agency for development and relief called Cordaid, smaller donations from a few other donor organizations and small private donations. Through this support the school has managed to sustain itself for over 25 years in which more than one thousand children have gone through.



HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

The following is a brief overview of the history of the St. Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired children in chronological order. Only main events that have affected the school significantly are listed down.

- 1979 The school was created by Sisters of St. Joseph's of Cluny working in the catholic Diocese of Makeni. Bishop Azzolini was Bishop at that time. The objective of the school was to offer a shelter and basic education to hearing impaired children in Sierra Leone. The school started with 8 pupils and 2 teachers. From the beginning the school was run by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny who are still involved in the day to day running of the school together with a staff of 48 Sierra Leoneans (Peace Corps and VSO volunteers were the first teachers).
- 1979 The Friends of the Deaf Association in Ireland offered a scholarship to train one of the Sisters in the school in Deaf Education.
- 1982 The school was approved by the Ministry of Education and from that time they took the responsibility for the payment of most of the teachers' salaries and sometimes took part in partly financing the running costs of the school. Through the help of Brother Ludwin Speth from Sint Michielsgestel and Malawi a programme was planned for the overall development of the

school. Sierra Leonean teachers were trained in special education and Cebemo gave their first support to the school.

- 1983 The Deputy Head, at that time, went to Ireland with sponsorship from Friends of the Deaf Association and later in the 1980's they helped two more teachers complete the Higher Diploma Teachers of the Deaf in University College Dublin.
- 1984 2 teachers went to The Netherlands for the Three Month International Course at Instituut voor Doven, Sint Michielsgestel, based on MRM method, sponsored by Cebemo
- 1985 Another 2 teachers went to Sint Michielsgestel sponsored by Cebemo for the same International Course.
- 1986 The Boarding Department opened with 15 girls and 20 boys. VSO volunteers came to train and work with a local financial Administrator over the years 1986 to 1993.
- 1987 The School received support from Cebemo to build ten classrooms pre-primary school for hearing impaired children. This school offered the possibility of identifying and assisting hearing impaired children at a younger age, which is important to their education and the development of their language acquisition skills. The School was evaluated by two experts from Sint Michielsgestel who gave training in the Maternal Reflective Method.
- 1989 A six week training course on the Maternal Reflective Method was conducted by experts from Netherlands and England to all teachers including teachers from Freetown and the Gambia Deaf Schools. Cebemo sponsored it.
Christoffel Blinden Mission supported the school with an institutional grant from this time until they withdrew in 1998. We believe the reason was they brought in a new policy that was Community orientated and entailed leaving children in their local villages for education. This was not feasible in Sierra Leone.
- 1990 Dr. Franz Coninx from Sint Michielsgestel came to evaluate the school with the intention of choosing a pilot school for International training. Vietnam was chosen as it had more facilities to offer than Sierra Leone. Franz gave a short course in Audiology during his ten days visit
- 1991 Outbreak of the rebel war which lasted for eleven years. In 1998 Makeni became a principal base from where the rebels operated in order to control the rural areas of Sierra Leone and to attack Freetown. For some time, the

St. Joseph's School had managed to continue her activities on a low scale, but soon the situation became too dangerous.

- 1992 The Deputy Head went to Birmingham University to do B.A. Phil Special Ed. For Hearing Impaired Degree sponsored by British Council.
- 1995 The School Farm was bought and Piggery, Poultry, Palm Tree Plantation to support the feeding of the Boarding Department.
- 1998 Makeni attacked by the Rebels and the school destroyed
- 2001 The school re-opened as a Displaced School in Freetown. Officially the rebel war ended with the Lome' Peace Agreement. From the main buildings of the school in Makeni only the walls had survived the war.
- 2002 The Catholic Diocese opened their services again and the Cluny Sisters returned to re-open the Hearing Impaired School in Makeni. The rehabilitation of the buildings began on their return with financial support from Irish Aid, Trocaire and Cordaid.
- 2003 The school entered into a long term engagement with Cordaid through an institutional grant to run the school. The financial support mainly focused on the running costs of the school including staff incentives and salaries of support staffs and caretakers, school maintenance, materials and equipment. Since then, Cordaid has remained the main donor of the school.
- 2004 With the assistance of Cordaid, the management team of the school received expert support from Dr. Lieke de Leeuw, who is an expert in education for multiple disabled children. This school development plan is based on her findings and recommendations. The school received also support from I/C Consult (Netherlands) for organization assessment and the elaboration of the plan. The school also benefited from expert support by two education expert from UK, Mrs. Ruth McAree and Monica Tomlin who have significantly contributed and are still contributing to the professional development of the teaching staff.
- 2005 Start of the development of the School Development Plan for the period 2007 to 2010. The plan will guide the school's development in order to upgrade the quality of its education and to expand its services to the hearing impaired children and their parents. The School was instrumental in lobbying for a Special Education Department to be part of the newly established Fatima Institute, Makeni. The Special Education (Hearing Impaired) Diploma, Degree Course began in the Fatima Institute, Makeni. Four members of Staff are taking this Course. The School enables the students to do their practice placements. The Director and Head Teacher, with three overseas experts designed the Course and run the Department.

2005 The school has now enrolled 210 pupils of whom 70 are in the boarding. The school counts 29 teaching staff, 11 Carers in the boarding department and 4 support staff.
6 teachers take evening classes.
The Staff began the Certificate Course in Special Education (Hearing Impaired)
The 4 teachers studying at the Fatima Institute sit the Diploma exam in May 2007.



ORGANISATION

The St. Joseph School for hearing impaired children provides education to children at the pre-primary and primary level and basic vocational training. The school follows the National Curriculum of Sierra Leone and the medium of instruction is English. In both, the pre-primary and primary education all subjects are taught, such as language arts, mathematics, social studies, music and movement. The particular program offered to the children is an integrated educational program through professional care and skills to meet the children's special education needs. The method of teaching language acquisition is according to the Reflective Maternal Method (MRM). This method is chosen in order to prepare them to communicate by speech reading and spoken language with parents, family members and people in the community. Special attention is given to reading and writing skills. The RMR requires the provision of hearing aids based on audio logical

assessment and teaching auditory education in order to make the best possible use of the child's residual hearing.



Vocational training focuses mainly on carpentry, agriculture and gardening, piggery, sewing, weaving and “tie and dye” activities. The school has a residential setting for the children who have no relatives in town and come from long distance and for a two children who need shelter for other urgent reasons.



VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision

We believe that it is the right of all children to have access to quality education that is appropriate to their needs to enable them to take their rightful place in society. It is our aim to make St. Joseph's School a safe place where all children experience the love of God and of people.

Mission

Based on our beliefs and values we aim to provide knowledge and skills to hearing impaired children in partnership with their parents and in collaboration with their communities and Government authorities. Our approach to effective language acquisition is the Maternal Reflective Method to enable the children in our school to participate actively in society. Early intervention in identifying and diagnosing hearing disabilities with young children is our priority to ensure that the children have the maximum opportunity to learn how to communicate effectively.

Values

In educating the Hearing-Impaired we treasure the following values:

- Faith in God;
- Dignity of the individual;
- Love and respect for one other;
- Devotion to our work;
- Respect for our environment



Aims

- Raise awareness in the Sierra Leonean society that all children have the right to quality education. The Government of Sierra Leone has the duty to ensure that less able children have equal access to the full national curriculum.
- Encourage our pupils to become responsible citizens taking their rightful place in society.
- Involve parents, family members and care takers in the education of the hearing impaired child through meetings and other gatherings to share information and ideas and to get their support.
- Promote the integration of hearing impaired children in the society through the organization of sports events and social activities with non-disabled children and liaisons with social and religious institutions at all layers in society.
- Promote the inclusion of special education in the programs of the teacher training colleges so that all teachers will be sensitive to the special needs of disabled children in schools.
- Turn the St. Joseph's School for hearing impaired children into a well managed institution providing effective services in an efficient way, without selling out its ideas and principles regarding its believes, values and methodologies used.

