

One World Link

The friendship link between Bo District in Sierra Leone and Warwick District, UK

www.oneworldlink.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 700714

Youth Visit to Bo - "friendship is the fundamental part of the link"

Ben Wesson and JoAnne Fisher visited Bo recently to find out as much as possible about the youth groups that operate within the umbrella of One World Link and youth service provision in Bo in general.

Embracing Sierra Leonean life and culture was a fantastic experience for both of us. Not only did we learn a lot about the way of life in Sierra Leone, but we also discovered more about ourselves, and our own attitudes towards life.

Many people say the world is a small place but what became apparent to us whilst in Sierra Leone was that there are huge differences in the way we live our lives. The world is full of inequalities.

We take so many things for granted like access to clean water, leisure facilities and education. Yet, these people in Sierra Leone, a country with mass youth unemployment, still manage to remain motivated and are always hopeful that tomorrow will bring better things.

On our visits to primary and secondary schools we learnt about the education system and the problems facing the schools. Overcrowding is one of the main problems, many of the schools we visited were unable to take any more students, due to the size of the buildings and lack of basic furniture.

We made contact with Njala University Student Union President to try and forge links between Njala and Warwick University, unfortunately we learnt that at present all Student Union Activity has been suspended in Sierra Leone following various demonstrations at the end of the last academic year, we sincerely hope that

we can create some interest at this end, which may help the suppressed voices of students in Sierra Leone.



Sunrising Film Industry with two new members Ben Wesson and JoAnne Fisher

A talent extravaganza

We were lucky enough to witness two talent showcases put on by the various different youth groups with OWL, the first one being a welcome show with a specially composed welcome song, a comedian and a few short skits, one tackling the issue of corruption in schools which was staged by a group called Student Advocacy Network. The second was a talent extravaganza featuring, traditional Bundu dances, a "Romeo and Juliet" style play

centred around conflict between tribes and reconciliation, an absolutely brilliant comedy performed in Krio and various fantastic dancers and singers. It was an incredible evenings entertainment. The event was filmed and will soon be available for viewing. We also have original recordings from a number of artists which will be available for purchase over the coming weeks (in time for a Christmas gift!)

Throughout our visit, we noted that young people in the UK could certainly learn a thing or two from their brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone. Not only do the majority of these people live in extremely impoverished conditions, but they always seem happy to take advice and rarely have anything but a smile on their faces.

There's no doubt about it, friendship is the fundamental part of the link, and we hope that the personal friendships we have made will continue to blossom for years to come.

We met so many amazing young people with an incredible breadth of talent and enthusiasm for life. We feel that we have returned with a tough act to follow, but with our heads buzzing with ideas and excitement for the future. We now intend to see how best we can link youth groups with similar characteristics here with ones over in Bo - through various different projects. So, watch this space!"

Waste Management

It's been a quarter of mixed fortunes for the Warwickshire Bo / Makeni solid waste management project. On the positive side a JCB paid for through the project has been delivered to Bo and local staff trained in its use. It is used periodically on clean-up Saturdays and for other tasks in town. Bo city's small dump truck has been carrying city waste out to the landfill site but the JCB can't yet spread it on the landfill because of the seasonal rains.

Glenn Fleet and Derek Greedy of Warwickshire County Council travelled to Sierra Leone in August. They helped colleagues in Bo and Makeni to train stakeholders in preparation for the project. They also provided technical training to council staff.

Bo City Council have been preparing their citizens for the scheme with community meetings, radio panel discussions and jingles.

OWL faces some realities of international development project management

The full waste management service will only get into full swing when the new skips and a skip lorry reach Bo.

Left China .. Last seen in Senegal .. Maybe in Guinea ..

The skips and lorry were ordered by the UNDP (who are paying for them) from a Chinese supplier some months back and for a time they had been seen in Dakar, Senegal, and were held up in port in Guinea where civil strife is making things difficult. We have just heard that they may finally be landed and cleared before Christmas. The moment they do arrive in Bo the banners and t-shirts will be broken out and the launch party will begin in the way only the people in Bo know how — music, floats, dancing — one big party!

Eric Moosa, the Project Manager in Bo, is due to redeploy to Kailahun. We hope that he will

not move too soon as he has been a key local player in the project so far, and much time and effort have been invested in his training.

The project in Bo will break new ground for Sierra Leone by separating out the biodegradable waste. As in Leamington, the resulting compost will be available for use by the public, to improve soil quality for their crops.



The JCB on Clean-up Saturday

So, let's keep our fingers crossed for the speedy delivery of the lorry and skips (and an end to civil strife in Guinea).

Chairman's Notebook



Greetings!

The visit from Bo and the summer holidays behind us, we can look ahead with the energy gleaned from both. What a visit it was! What a fantastic trio they were! It was so good to have had the time to discuss fundamental aspects of OWL and the future, and to talk about issues such as climate change, education and poverty with them and to hear such measured and balanced opinion.



Ian Bayliss takes over as Treasurer

And now after the summer break, we welcome our new treasurer Ian Bayliss and wish him well with his new task, and we offer deep thanks to John McFarlane, the outgoing treasurer, who has done the job tirelessly and without complaint for many years. John has offered to become our Fundraising co-ordinator and we thank him for that too.

Since our last newsletter Glen Fleet and Derrick Greedy (national land-fill specialist) have been out in Sierra Leone to train those involved with the Waste Management scheme and as the equipment continues to arrive the scheme will gradually become more active.

I have just returned from a visit of just over a fortnight with Jane Knight, Judith Ellis, Ben Wesson and JoAnne Fisher; it was an exciting trip and we managed to see a number of influential officials in Freetown. Even more significantly, JoAnne and Ben went out as our first Youth Group representatives. This is very important, not only to show support to the very active Youth Group headed up by Alpha in Bo, but also as they represent the beginnings of a new generation of OWL members from the UK.

Chris King

Kenilworth School - Committed

Alan Moss and John Myers take Alpha Bah back to school

Whilst our visitors were with us in June we were invited into Kenilworth School to review their successful Africa Week. We met the Headteacher, Mr H. H. Abbott, who confirmed the school's commitment to their link with Bo Government School and Queen of the Rosary Girls School through the Dreams and Teams program. He also presented us with a cheque for £1,000 raised by the pupils during Africa Week to help equip the resources room in the Bo Community Centre.



Presentation of the cheque

Mohamed (Jaz) Nahal, the main organiser of Africa week, gave us a tour of the school and arranged for students to interview Alpha about life in Bo. Alpha was most impressed with the school's resources, especially the computers and all weather sports pitches. Kenilworth had been collecting sports equipment for their linked schools and Alpha was able to take some of this kit back with him to Bo.

We look forward to supporting Kenilworth school with their 2010 Africa week and also their future plans for the Dreams and Teams program.

Wanted - Exchange Visits Volunteers

- to carry out and monitor the exchange strategy, including assistance and advice on obtaining passports, visas, insurance, and making travel arrangements, and liaison with Bo OWL.
- to arrange suitable hosts for visitors, provide support to hosts, advise on guidance and report issues.

Contact: secretary@oneworldlink.org.uk

Tribute to the Late Moussa Conteh

We reported briefly in the last newsletter that a very great friend and supporter of the link Moussa Conteh died on the 26th May this year. 20 people responded, and their expressions of sympathy were passed on to his family. Comments were received such as "He was so lovely to me when I first went over and such a guiding light." "He was a very thoughtful person who seemed to take a great interest in anything and everything, and was fascinating to talk to." "I am honoured to have known him." "It was a real pleasure to meet someone with such depth of experience and conviction." "It is a big loss as he still had much to contribute." "Yes, Musa Conteh's death is sad news indeed."

Members may wish to look up the many mentions of him on the OWL website. These include sound recordings of his thoughts (Timeline - archive for 2007)

His laying out ceremony took place at The State Hall of Parliament Building Tower Hill Freetown on Friday 12th June 2009, and his funeral at St. Augustine's Methodist Church, Bo on the 14 June. His son Peter Moinina addressed the eminent congregation in Freetown on behalf of his family, and ended as follows "I will conclude this brief eulogy by asking you remember my father as a modern Mende man. Fully aware and proud of his origins, yet unafraid of asking questions that seemed at odd with traditional ways, my Father made his own choices. I ask you to remember Moussa Conteh as a son of Sierra Leone who contributed all he could to better his people and his country."

His daughter, Feimatta, joined her brother at their father's 40-day ceremonies in Bo on July 25th and 26th.

His long standing friend Jane Knight was with him just before he died. She writes "I have known Mussa Conteh since I first arrived in Bo in 1981. He was due to sing with his deep voice in a Methodist Church service. I was staying with Neil Trainer, a missionary related to a member of Dale St. Methodist Church. Throughout those first few weeks in Bo, Mussa discussed with me the various issues around the possibilities of setting up a friendship link between our two communities."



Graduation at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, in 1975

In that September he came to the UK with his young family, to study for a Masters in Agricultural Extension at Reading University and they all spent many days with us in Leamington promoting the link, but also urging caution and sensitivity.

It has been a great privilege to know such a visionary man with a heart of gold. He taught me so much about his culture and reflected endlessly on the injustices which held back his country, doing whatever he could to change things. Without him the link would not have had such a thoughtful and careful start. He worked hard for many years in the UK for Christian Aid and was a perfect ambassador for his people. Later after the war he returned to Sierra Leone to build up sports activities to rescue young people from the trauma of war. He was elected MP in the election which followed the end of the war.

Latterly, One World Link hoped that Mussa would be able to run the OWL resource centre in Bo. Sadly this was not to be. Prostate cancer took a hold and was not caught in time. Mussa fought to the bitter end telling well wishers he was fine when in fact his life was ebbing away. Typical of his caring nature, his last whispered words to me were "How are You?"

Our Visitors from Bo

EXCHANGE

EXERTION

EXHILARATION

John Myers reflects on the visit by Maada Fobay, Alpha Bah, and Catherine Kamara that has left a lasting impression.



Maada, Alpha and Catherine at the Away Day

Everyone who has ever gone on one of our exchange visits in either direction has had a wonderful, rewarding, and exciting time that they treasure. However, it has been earned in each case by hard work in preparation, during the visit, and on return to their own community.

These visits play a critical part in maintaining and developing a real partnership link; so we want to say a very big thank you to Maada Fobay, Alpha Bah, and Catherine Kamara, who worked their socks off during their 3 week visit in June, and to Chris King, JoAnne Fisher, Ben Wesson, and Jane Knight who have just returned from Bo. You will learn more about the latter visit at our AGM on 28th November. We would also like to say thank you to all of you who put yourselves out to meet with and entertain our visitors from Bo in many different ways. We are sure you will get something valuable from this, but that includes our gratitude.

Highlights Of Visit From Bo (among others)

- Interscholar concert for the International Day of the African Child 2009 on June 16.
- 6 linked schools each brought a song and 1 school brought drummers.
- Our visitors explained the meaning of the day. The Mayor opened the event.
- Communal singing led by a Salonian and the County Music Service.
- A simultaneous event in Bo addressed by the Mayor of Bo.



International Day of the African Child at Brookhurst School

One World Youth Group Film Show, Barbecue and World Music day

A showing of Sierra Leone Refugee All Stars documentary. A West African Barbecue. Visit by Sierra Leone Rap Star Bammy Boy. Lots of fun and community involvement on World Music Day.



World Music Day

One World Link Away Day

At the Sydni Centre in Leamington. Making sense of the present and planning our joint future. This was a very ambitious, hardworking, and satisfying day. A report of the day is available on request or online at: www.oneworldlink.org.uk/documents_1/archive_2009.htm

The Graft

Schools: many primary and secondary schools visited, one new partnership initiated. Joint planning meeting. Visit to TIDE and ISA Awards.

Women's group: joint discussions and planning, social events, visits.

Youth: joint planning meeting, Youth Parliament, visits to groups and activities, and key agencies.

Local Government: joint planning meetings, visit to Hull Link, Council Meeting, Civic Reception, visit to BUILD.

Community: community forum meeting, visits to community facilities and events.

Spin Offs

Attendance at a Transition Towns showing of Age of Stupid has resulted in a showing of Age of Stupid Global Premiers in Bo and led to a proposed Climate Change Awareness programme in Sierra Leone.



Contributing to the Away Day

Saving & Recycling - Women's Groups in Bo

Judith Ellis and JoAnne Fisher visited several women's groups during their recent time in Bo.

Sierra Leone is a country of small traders - everyone exists by buying from others. The Womens' Groups are no exception: they may be a small community of wives and mothers working collectively on soap-making and weaving or a group of women supplementing their jobs with roadside sales.

Dglom Women's Group

Joanne and I visited Dglom Womens Group late one afternoon. Mary, the group leader, had come from her work at the Provincial Government Office and set up her cold drinks stand on her property adjoining the school. Rosalie, a local teacher, was thinking of doing the same at her school. Of the other women present, one travels regularly to a dried fish market many miles away and sells on in Bo Central Market, one takes fried fish and plantain around the streets and offices at lunchtime, one sells rice and another prepares and sells cassava.

They have a savings scheme, whereby they each contribute a small weekly amount and in turn take 'the pot', giving them an amount for investment in goods. The Group

would like to work more collectively - selling firewood or buying palm oil when the price is low and saving it until the price rises, out of season - but would require more investment. We enjoyed our visit and the unexpected supper of fried fish and banana balls, before being escorted back to the main road for our walk home.



JoAnne with the Dglom Women's Group

Re-use, Recycle

Other groups who rely on craft products face a more difficult future - it is labour-intensive work and most other 'Saloneans' choose cheaper imported goods.

Recycling is evident, through necessity rather than conviction: wool sweaters are unpicked and reused in weaving country cloth, discarded metal is refashioned into farming tools, computer innards are sold at the roadside for spare parts (though only the businesses have computers, mainly cast-offs). Nothing is wasted if it can be re-used.

Saturday is Cleaning Day

The last Saturday of each month is the designated 'Cleaning Day' in Bo. No-one is allowed to go on to the streets before 10am, with the risk of being arrested and fined. All the fronts of the properties and the streets must be cleaned, with the rubbish being piled up ready to be collected by the refuse lorries. Even the Central Market, a warren of narrow dark alleys and open laden stalls, was eerily empty and quiet.

'Age of Stupid' Global Launch in Bo

On the eve of the UN General Assembly's climate session in September, The Age of Stupid was launched internationally at the biggest and greenest live film event the world has ever seen. Thanks to Bo OWL, Bo was one of the global launch locations. Maada Fobay sent these comments on the occasion:



The audience at the screening

"Please see my picture of audience during the Global Cinema event - Age of Stupid last night in Bo, Sierra Leone. Over 80 people across the society - Government officials, Councillors, Executive officers, Students, Journalists etc. were in attendance..."

"Oh! I can't imagine how I feel presently, the screening went on successfully, the turn out was brilliant..."

"Press men were there, it goes into National news tomorrow. Just to share my feeling..."

Visiting Our Links in Bo

Chris King describes a hectic and productive visit to Sierra Leone in October with JoAnne Fisher, Ben Wesson, Judith Ellis and Jane Knight.

JoAnne and Ben went out to vanguard our fledgling youth group, Judith went as Women's group representative and Jane came as general support, though she also spent time with Bishop Koroma in Kenema.

Before we got to Bo, Jane and I had to take care of matters in Freetown, meeting with DFID, the EU, World Bank, UNDP, the British Council and the British High Commission. What's very satisfying is that these organisations all know of us now. Our reputation is established and we seem to be respected and listened to; we have the sort of experience that they as individuals can never find... we've had 28 years without a change of direction and we always deliver.

Once in Bo, JoAnne and Ben took to the life like ducks to water. They were constantly sought after; their calendars were soon booked solid and they made many friends. They seemed to be just what the many of the Bo Youth groups had been waiting for and a wonderful time was had by all.

OWL matters are in rude health

There were many waiting to visit with Judith too. She has returned having garnered a wealth of information about women's issues: health, maternity, literacy, business and workshops; she turned no-one away and they came to show her their work, to talk and to share their experiences.



An IT presentation upstairs at the Centre. An introduction to Global Schools Partnerships

In the mean time, I joined forces with JoAnne and Ben and visited several schools; I had numerous meetings with City council members, including of course our good friend Wusu Sannoh the mayor, and Jo Pine, his deputy. We met for the first time William Alpha the new Chief Administrator, certainly a warm and very capable man, and caught up with Eric Moosa the environmental health officer. I visited the landfill site, the central dump, a soap making factory sited on the dump, the under-construction city mortuary, and the new council buildings.

So, in short, OWL matters are in rude health; the Community Centre is flourishing and in good financial order, we shared thoughts on the way forward, - their hopes and fears. The future looks good. We must recruit hard here, and not just for the Youth Group. They need us to reflect themselves, in energy and in age. There is still much to be done.



Ben and JoAnne with Mary Bakarr and her staff

Off the Shelf.....

Did you know that OWL has a library of books on a range of relevant subjects which members can borrow? **Nan Ellis** is our librarian, and she is in charge of the collection which, at present, contains just over 20 books. The OWL collection is located in the Leamington Library in the World History section. They can be borrowed from the Library in the usual way.

During October, Nan organised a display in the Library: 1) to explain the aims of One World Link, 2) to tell people about our activities both here and in Bo and 3) to encourage them to learn more about Sierra Leone by visiting the OWL collection in the library.



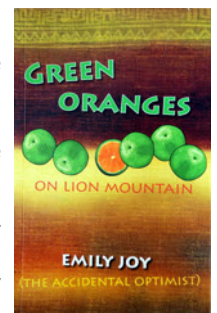
The OWL display at Leamington library

In each issue of the Newsletter, we plan to carry a short book review. If you have a book which you think OWL members would find useful or enjoyable, let us know by emailing annaellis@googlemail.com. For this issue, Nan herself provided this book review:

GREEN ORANGES ON LION MOUNTAIN

by Emily Joy

Emily Joy, a 27 year-old GP from York, wanting to "save lives" and "make a difference", volunteered to spend 2 years in Sierra Leone with VSO. In a very lively and personal style, Dr. Em "takes us on her journey from the one-week crash course in surgery before leaving the UK to the early years of the civil war, when she became Medical Supervisor of the Serabu Catholic Mission Hospital.



Despite having to battle with insects, snakes, lack of medicines, shortage of electricity and a civil war, she succeeded in saving many lives.

Dr. Em had many moments of self-doubt when she longed to go home but the indomitable spirit of the Sierra Leoneans kept her going and she rose to become a widely-respected doctor in the region.

Also on the OWL shelf: "Old Watering Holes - Mayo to Serabu" by Hilary Lyons, the earlier history of the Serabu Hospital.

If you want to know more about any of the projects or topics covered in this issue, you can always visit:

www.oneworldlink.org.uk