

Sowing a Seed in Sierra Leone

In December 2006, Benji Kamara traveled back home to distribute funds raised in partnership with One Sky to support children to go to school in Sierra Leone. Fundraising events were held in Smithers leading up to Christmas, and donations poured in from the Bulkley Valley – and beyond. All together an amazing \$7,376.65 was raised, resulting in 450 children in Sierra Leone benefiting from the project!

Benji, born and raised in Freetown, Sierra Leone, used his knowledge of the community and culture to make sure that the funds were used to help those who needed it most – supplying a blend of textbooks, exercise books, school supplies, paying school fees and providing uniforms. Benji met with school teachers and principals to determine which children most needed assistance. As well, he connected with families in his community where he knew children weren't going to school because of financial pressures. Most of the children that have benefited from the project are girls. In Benji's words, "I think about the girlchild first because in some families they send the boys to go to school and the girls will stay at home to help out with house work... in doing so, so many girls have become impregnated". Future opportunities are even more limited for teenage mothers, so the project also helped a number of teen mothers get back to school.

Along the way, Benji also applied strategies to ensure that the impacts of this fundraiser created even larger ripples – uniforms were bought from local traders, sewn by local tailors and books bought from local booksellers. Our amazing volunteers in Freetown – Ralph, Nurudeen, Med, Mohammed, Kathryn and Bonamin – helped with the logistics of distributing funding and materials, and the Freetown community jumped in with their own assistance. The booksellers greatly reduced the price of books bought for the project and a local carver donated a sign thanking children at Muheim and Walnut Park elementary schools in Smithers who had fundraised for the project.

Sierra Leoneans who heard about the project were proud of the efforts of Benji, someone from their own community who had returned to give back to his people. The pride and spirit were palpable – Benji could hardly walk through the streets of Freetown without school children, parents, teachers, tailors, traders and other community members thanking him from their hearts for the impact of the project.

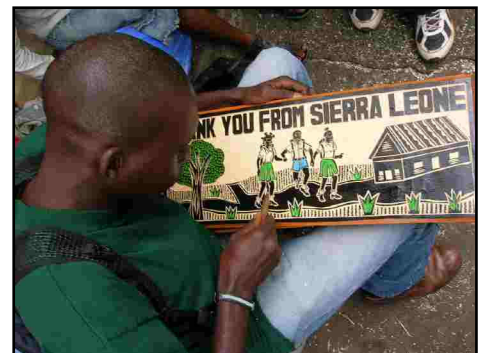
As Benji said at the start of this project, "A child's education is like sowing a seed. The seed needs to be taken care of in order for it to grow and flourish." Thank-you all for helping to sow seeds of education and community in Sierra Leone.



Kids at UMC Ginger Hall Primary showing off their new textbooks.



Benji, kids at Cathedral Primary school and head teacher Mrs. Koroma (Benji's former grade 6 teacher!)



Mohammed, a carver, makes a present to thank children in Smithers who fundraised for the project.

The project in numbers

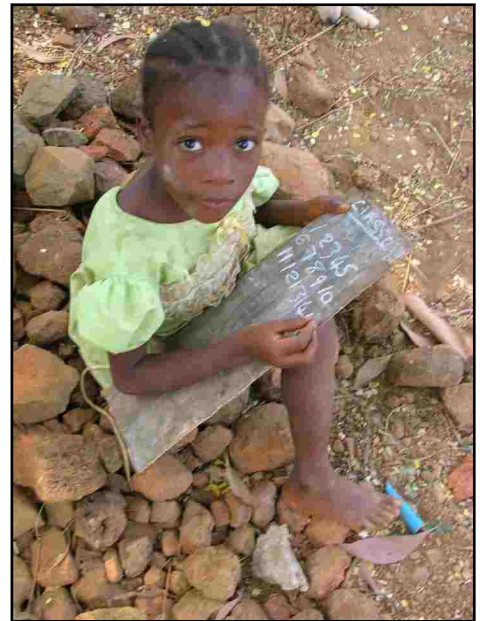
- Amount raised: \$7,376.65
- How many kids benefited in total: 450
- Textbooks, exercise books and other school supplies for 243 children at the United Methodist Church primary school in Eastern Freetown.
- Books, learning materials for one class (57 children) at Cathedral Primary.
- Reading materials for one class (60 children) at St. Joseph's Elementary.
- One full package of school books for 40 primary school kids.
- Uniforms for 43 primary school kids.
- Registered 27 primary school kids and re-registered 15 high school girls.
- Paid school fees for 50 Junior secondary school students, mainly girls.
- One full package of books for 6 Junior secondary school kids.
- School fees for 40 Senior Secondary School kids.
- Full package of books for 8 Senior Secondary School kids.

Appreciation

This project was an entirely volunteer run effort. Many, many thanks to the organizing committee of Armel, Sarah and Craig; our plant growers, Ben and Jessica; volunteers who helped out at craft sales; the 10,000 Villages organizers for their donations; Russell Maier and Alpine Plant World for donations and to Anne-Marie and Donna and the kids at Muheim, Walnut Park and St. Joseph's Elementary schools for their fundraising efforts.

In Freetown, much love and appreciation to trusty volunteers Ralph (Judah), Mohammed (Toesman), Med, Bonamin, Kathryn and Nurudean for their many volunteer hours, to Supercaps and the other booksellers for their donations, to Mohammed for the beautiful carvings, and to all the principals and teachers who helped out.

Finally, thanks to each and every one of you who donated to this project – you have made 450 children in Sierra Leone very happy! We couldn't have done it without you.



Catherine, a grade two student supported by the project, shows off her counting skills.



Awanatu, a Secondary School student, poses with her Aunty. Awanatu's mother is disabled and unable to pay for her school fees.