



# Summary of an Evaluation Report

August

2021

This is a summary of findings from an evaluation report  
from the work of The Koinonia Trust January 2019- August  
2021

Frances Swaray

## Forward

Many years ago I heard this quote from Nelson Mandela and it had a profound effect on me. ***‘Education is the most powerful weapon and one that can change a nation’***. This one sentence became a catalyst for the change of direction in my life. I returned to education at the age of 38 after leaving it at the age of 16. It was with the determination of ensuring I received knowledge that would have an impact on the nation God had called me to serve. God is the healer of broken hearts, broken lives, and broken communities. He can heal broken relationships and just as a medical doctor can help heal a physical wound, God can also use others to heal the wounds of the heart that can render us powerless and hopeless. He can help us forgive the unforgivable, lead us to reconciliation or at the very least to live at peace with all men.

The Koinonia Trust was envisioned and has been operational since 2018 and this is the second evaluation undertaken by the Trust. It has been an encouraging experience to facilitate feedback from participants and volunteers. This evaluation has been very informative, clearly showing what is working well and what needs to change. It is a learning evaluation and one that reflects that The Koinonia Trust is continuing to lay a strong foundation, evolving and adapting as an organization. They are supporting education from a community setting especially for the younger generation. It will be this generation that will eventually lead the nation. However unfortunately it is this generation that continues to be without employment or further educational opportunities. They are committed to them by bringing hope, healing, and resilience by building their capacity in order for their hearts to heal. To contribute to them to become the men and women God called them to be fulfilling His purpose and plan for their lives.

***‘Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart’, 2 Corinthians 4:1.***

Frances Swaray

Founder and Consultant

## **Introduction**

Monrovia is heavily populated with few basic resources, making everyday life incredibly difficult for the city dwellers. Their direct community block in Caldwell is made up of 400 houses with at least five people in each home. But most homes have multiple families living in each house renting one room per family. This leads to a dense population in a small space, the estimation is possibly between 15,000 and 20,000. The majority of the population is under 25 years of age. There are many young people living with no guardians. Some homes have no access to electricity, none have running water, and some have no sanitation. There is no access to rubbish/garbage/waste disposable.

Frances has made a lifelong commitment to the people of Liberia and this was the inspiration for the setting up of The Koinonia Trust in 2018. Alongside a few committed people including a local Liberian they formed a small Board of Directors drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds and skills who oversee the direction of the project. The day-to-day operations of The Koinonia Trust are currently carried out by a local Liberian who is President of the organization. This is supported by the founder Frances Swaray who acts as a consultant to the project and a small team of volunteers from the local community which include four part-time classroom supervisors and one part-time tailoring tutor.

The overall focus of The Koinonia Trust is to support the healing, build the resilience and capacity of people who have experienced trauma and brokenness. The key aim is to deliver a program of activities in a safe supportive environment that will in the long term build spiritual, emotional, mental, physical and social health with individuals and families that will support community development and in return increase social capital. What works well in favor of the organization is that the team are living and working from the one compound in the Caldwell community and The Koinonia Trust are in a position to have direct engagement with the community on a daily basis, building relationships and moving towards building a sustainable community in the long term.

## **Methodology**

This evaluation is based on the objectives named in the action plan for 2018/19 and the recommendations from the initial evaluation carried out in December 2018. It is also based on the feedback collected after workshops, focus groups and individual interviews from the volunteers, the participants, the local leaders and the wider community (2019-2021).

## **WHAT IS WORKING WELL**

### **Location**

1. *Living and working onsite amongst neighbors in one compound stimulates both community engagement and ownership*
- Sitting alongside the community dwellers under the mango tree in the evening has nurtured conversations that have led to meaningful relationships and has offered further opportunities for engagement. Working in this way, albeit unique, has been

the right choice for them. It is in keeping with Liberian tradition and culture of living and working within the community. The Koinonia Trust has now learnt that no matter where they locate, living and working in the same location is essential for the practical part of the work. Working and living together though at times challenging has provided a unique opportunity to grow steadily with better engagement with and support from the local community.

2. *Conversely, The Koinonia Trust has come to know that when it comes to organizational training and The Trauma Healing Groups location is not an issue as they travel to various parts of Liberia when requested*

- This feedback was from a workshop carried out in Gbarnga  
*'Thank you, Lord, for your love in bringing someone alongside me this month who loves and cares about people with wounded hearts. Her counsel this week helped my heart wounds and I can feel the healing of my losses and comfort that God is giving me little by little. Her counsel helped me to know that someone who is going through pain needs special care from other believers'.*

## **Social Action Outcome**

1. *Social actions emerging from the Community Leadership Structure*

- As a result of a facilitated process, the community has set up a community leadership structure and two of our classroom supervisors are directly involved, one as a secretary and the other as a Sports Coordinator. This structure which is in the form of a committee is directly responsible for the community governance, making decisions when it comes to advocating for services, planning whether it is for homes or services. They are also responsible for settling small disputes and are directly responsible for bringing the bigger community issues up to the next level of governance. The Koinonia Trust has provided the committee with practical support e.g. stationary and helping them to draft the constitution for the community.

*"The organization (TKT) has been helpful by helping to organize the community leadership and the TRUST has donated stationary for the working of the leadership which is a good thing"*

*"It has helped to bring peace and resolve community problems"*

(Some direct quotes from the local leaders)

- Maintaining a neutral position has allowed the Koinonia Trust to be instrumental in helping the community resolve both familial and community issues through the provision of a neutral and safe space and access to skilled communicators and mediators.

2. *Positive health benefits due to the installation of a much needed well and water pump*

- The Koinonia Trust secured the funding from Liberia Mercy Partners for a much needed well and pump to combat the high incidence of typhoid, malaria and gastro complaints. Prior to this there had only been one hand pump for 400 houses with

multiple families. In the current COVID-19 crisis there is an essential need for clean water for hand washing, cooking, bathing and domestic chores.

- Before and during the COVID-19 pandemic The Koinonia Trust continued to work within the community in promoting best practice in hygiene (washing hands, keeping the community and home clean, wearing of face masks and keeping social distances).
- 3. *7 trained clinic staff in emotional and mental well-being*
  - In 2019 seven of the local clinic staff participated in training delivered to them over 4 weeks which focused on emotional and mental wellbeing.
- 4. *Leadership/Organizational skills training for young people*
  - In 2020 The Koinonia Trust facilitated training in leadership and organization skills for a local youth group who volunteer in their community.
- 5. *Support for local social economy*
  - In 2019 using their community current The Koinonia Trust supplied light in the evening to the outside of their compound where local women run a small market.
- 6. *Environmental Improvements*
  - Regular community litter clean ups now take place.
  - In 2020 The Koinonia Trust advocated for the main electricity line to be brought into the community and the repairing of the potholes throughout the community. This work commenced early 2021.

## **Funding**

1. *Partnership development*
  - Core funding has continued to come from established partnerships such as Donegal Presbyterian Church and from individual gifts
  - Project funding has come from The Mandala Trust in the UK
  - Project funding has come from the Irish Embassy /Irish Aid
  - Core funding and project funding has come from Liberia Mercy Partners
  - A social media presence with a website, face book and an Instagram page as a way of promoting the work being undertaken has also been established. This has led to several monthly donations and individuals undertaking fundraisers.

## Trauma Healing Groups

### 1. 159 participants who have completed a Trauma Healing Group

#### Background

Liberia has gone through multiple traumas with civil war, Ebola and recently covid 19. They are in a constant state of economic poverty. For many people there has been a loss of family, identity, opportunities for education or work. There is often a lack of parenting skills, a lack of concern and care which has left many people emotionally and mentally vulnerable. This can be observed in behavior for example some people are easily triggered responding in anger, aggression, violence and at times on the street it can easily escalate into a mob mentality. These things have led to core family values and norms changing within Liberia. Children are often left unattended at home while parents try to make enough money to put food on the table and pay school fees. Young people have become displaced as they are sent from the rural areas to make their own way in the world. This often leads to them being homeless – living on the streets or moving from place to place. Opportunistic crime has increased greatly especially in the towns and cities.

Within the workplace there are challenges. In general wages are very poor and do not provide for even the basic necessities. Furthermore, the inadequate infrastructures create difficulties for people trying to get to work. People have to wait for long periods for overcrowded taxis and buses and navigate the poor road conditions which all add additional stress to a normal working day. Within Monrovia people can rise at 4am to get ready for work and by the time they are home it could be between 6-8pm and this is for six days a week. This itself can lead to frustration, exhaustion, fatigue and poor mental health which can contribute to a lack of effectiveness or efficiency in the workforce.

- In reviewing the feedback from the Trauma Healing groups and their own workshops they are received with real gratitude, as people are given a safe space to discuss those areas that have brought deep pain often for the first time. Emotions are the language of what we are feeling inside. If we do not know how to acknowledge and recognize them, we will not know how to express or manage them. They will eventually come out in the way we behave. Within Liberia in general people do not express how they feel and in talking with them they find it difficult to discuss how they are really feeling. *“I am fine”* is the most used term. These workshops give people an opportunity to reflect on their own life. It gives them the skills to process emotion, to acknowledge pain, to understand that emotional health is very important and is linked to all the other aspects of health (spiritual, mental, physical and social). It brings a deeper understanding of how it affects behavior, why they are triggered and how to manage those triggers and their stress levels.
- Liberia is a spiritual nation and God is included in each part of the day. However most often people acknowledge they have one foot in their cultural beliefs and one foot in their Christianity or Islamic beliefs. This can cause real confusion and is compounded by a lack in general of good biblical teaching. The Trauma Healing Groups in particular allow people to discover what the Bible says for example about God’s love, suffering, pain, grief, rape, addiction, domestic abuse and unforgiveness. When reviewing feedback, participants

have always experienced some sense of relief at the end of the sessions. In particular feedback on the sessions on caring for a heart wound, the grieving journey and the one on what forgiveness is and what forgiveness is not is particularly positive. In providing a safe space to discuss things, in contributing to their knowledge and understanding people have been helped to process their pain and grief. This has also led to discussions regarding cultural or traditional beliefs that may not be helpful when grieving or can reinforce someone holding onto resentment and unforgiveness.

*'Thank God for the teaching. This week I have been thinking a lot about myself. Going through the teaching I am starting to listen to God, my heart is getting opened to listen to him. To forgive others that have shamed me'.*

*'Through the teaching this week, God has been healing me'.*

*'I was really angry with God. The workshop helped me to control my anger and to really name, acknowledge and manage my emotions'*

*'It was really hard to forgive; I have learned how to go through the process'*

*I learned what real forgiveness is. I know that God will take my unforgiveness away'*

*(Participant's feedback)*

## **Building Resilience in a Trauma Affected Community Workshops**

1. *To date 8 workshops have been facilitated for other organizations and individuals increasing their knowledge of God's word and building their resilience skills. There is an increase in understanding of oneself, of behavior and of the things that impact on a person's well-being.*
  - As an organization God's love is at the core of the Trust's work. Most importantly the teaching brings hope and a sense of value, a sense of being loved and a sense of equality no matter a person's gender or background. These workshops have been developed through a holistic lens. This takes into account their spiritual, emotional, mental, physical and social health. They also look at the wider social determinants that impact the environment, the economy, the political will of the government, of the people and the general living conditions that shape Liberians lives.

Some participant's feedback

*'The workshop has been interesting and helpful for me personally. I work and live in Liberia and the workshop has given me an insight that I can use to get a better understanding of myself and the culture I work and live in. I will recommend this workshop as a good opportunity to work with yourself and get a deeper understanding on how to approach and understand traumas in your own life and how to get useful tools to work with. The workshop has helped me to move forward'.*

2. *A captive audience*

- These projects already provide a 'captive audience' to facilitate our workshops for young people who not only want to gain new skills but to make healthier choices when it comes to health protective behavior. They want to grow in resilience as they are living in a harsh environment, to be empowered to have a voice that will contribute to a better environment to live in.

3. *Qualified Pastoral/Health Practitioners for facilitating and follow up*
  - A positive outcome is the ongoing provision in the community of a safe space with both a Pastor and a health/community development practitioner. Their background and their own journey of healing enables them to understand that behavior change takes time and there are many small steps along the way.
1. *Workshops that are being Liberian led*
  - Workshops are Liberian led, with a local committed Liberian team (other than the founder who is Irish). They lead from personal experience - by understanding the complexities of war, the cycle of poverty, the shame of abuse or the neglect of parents and guardians. It is an important observation to state, as this has underpinned the team's passion to persevere through the challenges and to be the best they can be for all they engage with. They continue to grow as a team determined to improve the quality of life of those they seek to serve.

## **Support and Mentoring to the Koinonia Trust Team**

1. *4 classroom assistants benefiting and accessing third level education or employment opportunities*
  - Due to the stipend payment made to the classroom assistants it has encouraged them to continue to develop their education, employment opportunities and social enterprise. One has graduated as a qualified electrician from a vocational training college. He is now attending University of Liberia and doing a degree in electrical engineering. Another is currently also attending the University studying to be a civil engineer. In 2020 he also became a teacher in a local school. Another has opened a small social enterprise outside the compound which has encouraged other community women to create small markets. Another is now working alongside an uncle in business.
2. *Upskilling of the volunteers*
  - Further training has been facilitated in child protection policy, the organization procedures, classroom preparation, classroom management, creative discipline, lesson preparation and communication, child development, using self-reflection to develop best work practices, communication skills and organizational roles.
  - 11 volunteers have completed workshops on Building Resilience in a Trauma Affected Community.
  - Continuous one to one training from 2018 to the present provided by Frances to Momo included communication skills, staff support and supervision, mentoring skills and emotional intelligence within the workplace, community development and conflict resolution.



### 3. *Mentoring of young people into leadership roles*

- There have been several young people whom the leaders have spent time encouraging and mentoring who are now getting more involved in the organization. One young man is now the homework club/choir/football team supervisor and another young woman is being trained as an apprentice trauma healing group facilitator. Three are now involved in leadership roles in the local community.

## **Education**

1. *The educational project has been the catalyst for other meaningful opportunities with other young people and adults.*
2. *Between 62-92 children engaged with the homework club three times a week*
  - Children were able to remain in school due to the encouragement of the study class
  - Reading and writing skills improved and they had a better understanding of their notes
  - Children's grades improved and several of the children were promoted into the next grade

Some feedback from parents of participants

*"The study classes have improved my children's grade and their understanding of their lessons"*

*"The study classes have kept my child out of the street"*

## **Social Enterprise**

1. *The ground is not yet fertile enough for a social economy project due to the continuing economic situation in Liberia. The up-skilling of individuals to set up their own small enterprise has been proven to be a more successful and more cost-effective approach.*
  - 11 young people are now learning the skills around tailoring working with an experienced tailor and her assistant. The initial start date had to be put back due to COVID-19 but started in September 2020. By June 2021 some participants were already tailoring both their own and other family member's clothes.

## **The Koinonia Trust Football Club**

The team has been together 12 months and under the supervision of one of our classroom supervisors has done extremely well. There are 25 young men involved between the age of 10 and 15. The majority of these young men are from the rural areas and are without parents or guardians in Monrovia. They tend to move from place to place, as they find somewhere safe to stay often in unstable environments.

- One of the most positive feedbacks from the participants is that the football club has provided a reason for the young men to stay together in the same area. They are meeting and supporting one another outside of the club. It has become like their family.
- The team is practicing on time, three times a week.
- The team is winning games due to their commitment and practice.
- The team is gathering a group of fans who are engaging with them.
- The coach himself is playing on a newly formed team for young men between the ages of 18-26. They are now nurturing and supporting that team in a small way.

## **The Koinonia Trust Choir**

The Koinonia Trust attempted to start the youth choir in 2019. However, it struggled as they found it difficult to get the commitment of someone to lead and supervise it. In October 2021 it is hoped that the youth choir will recommence and they have two local young people who are going to lead it. These young people are already active in a church youth choir.

## **Recommendations**

### **Role Identity**

- There is a need to go back and revisit the constitution and amend it due to The Koinonia Trust functioning more as a ministry rather than an NGO.

### **Location**

- There is a need to put down roots and provide a stable place for both the organizational activities and a dwelling place for the key people. This could contribute to long term sustainability. It is recommended that the land that was already purchased is developed for this.
- The benefits of living and working in the same environment are numerous. One of the key opportunities that presented was for community dwellers to access skilled mediators and pastoral care workers. However adequate records are needed in order to capture this piece of work. It is recommended that an attendance ledger is kept.

### **Funding**

- Existing funding partnerships would be strengthened by regular reports and newsletters.
- The work of The Koinonia Trust would be shared with a wider audience through networking opportunities. There is a need to secure monthly donors

### **Trauma Healing Groups**

- A budget is needed in order to equip others to facilitate Trauma Healing Groups, resources for the groups and transport to the groups.

### **Building Resilience in a Trauma Affected Community Workshops**

- The workshop manual needs completed and a train the trainer program needs developed and implemented

### **Volunteers**

- The staff support and supervision needs to be consistent when the founder is not on the ground.
- Ongoing training and team building through different approaches is essential for team cohesiveness.
- The disciplinary policy needs to be implemented when necessary.
- Adequate recording of attendance by volunteers who receive a stipend payment
- Continuous encouragement for the volunteers to progress and to engage with the wider community.
- Continuous encouragement for the volunteers to actively participate in civil society.
- Training and supporting the volunteers to self-reflect and critically analyze in order to make healthier life choices. This strengthens health protective behavior.

### **Education**

- Classroom management and preparation is essential and needs to be implemented
- The code of conduct needs to be implemented
- There needs to be a cap on how many students to each classroom assistant
- There is a need for a separate overall supervisor for this project
- There is a need for an additional classroom assistant
- There needs to be adequate funding for stipend payments provided for the volunteers

### **Tailoring Project**

- There needs to be a proper educational cycle for participants starting in September with them graduating in June.
- A commitment put in place that they will attend regularly or lose their place to someone else.
- A clear accountability when it comes to the resources provided for materials and the maintenance of the sewing machines.

### **The Koinonia Trust Football Club**

- There needs to be a more holistic approach to this project focusing on the spiritual, emotional and mental health of the participants. They are to be invited to participate in devotions twice a month and to participate in workshops that they are facilitating including a Trauma Healing Group.
- Continued strengthening of the link between the coaches and the Ambassador's for Soccer in Northern Ireland.

- An assistant to the football coach is needed. A small stipend payment is needed to compensate them.
- There needs to be a budget that covers the cost to maintain the club.

#### **The Koinonia Trust Youth Choir**

- There is a need to secure committed people to lead and supervise the choir and provide a stipend payment for them.

#### **Constraints/Challenges**

- The biggest challenge is raising funds and having a stable income. The overall budget for the activities and administration year to year is approx. 24-25,000 USD.
- There is a need for more qualified facilitators to be available to facilitate trauma healing groups or workshops in the wider community. If sufficient funding was available The Koinonia Trust could train local facilitators to deliver the training in their local areas.