

**The Koinonia Trust Inc.
December Newsletter 2021**

Reflection from Momo

Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation

In such a time such as this when the world is going through the Covid-19 pandemic, we need to walk the path that is lit up by the presence of God. This is what The Koinonia Trust has been doing. He has been our daily presence in our everyday activities. Lives are being touched and changed, people are given hope and we are joyful as we serve in the community.

As an organization, there were times when we felt that the road was coming to a dead end, the dark cloud of trying to raise the necessary finances within the current situation, and also my own sickness; felt like it wouldn't clear. Here we are now! With deep gratitude and a thankful heart to all our supporters. Truly the LORD has been our light and salvation therefore we are thankful for His continued provisions.

General Update

- I am thankful to Frances for the care and support during my illness, thank God I am now on my feet
- Our funding proposal with the Irish Embassy was successful this year and it has greatly helped us with our core costs and project costs.
- Our funding proposal has successfully been approved by The Liberia Mercy Partners who have been a key ongoing support to our work here in Liberia. This will enable Frances to return and to start our building project in 2022.
- The Team of volunteers that is working alongside Momo is working well. Frances spent July/August training them one day a week. We now have a team of 11 volunteers besides ourselves
- Due to our engagement with the community, they are going to elect a new leadership this year December

Project Update

This year we carried out an extensive evaluation on our organization and projects to determine what was working well, what needed to change and what needed to be done better. It was a useful piece of work; though intense for Frances and the team to do. We conducted focus groups, one to one interviews with both participants, staff and the local community. However, it was so encouraging and the positives far outweighed some things that needed to be changed. It wasn't just the statistics and the numbers that we were engaging with but the impact it was making in bringing hope and change into people's life. I realize this may be a lot of text but I believe it is worth the read and will encourage your heart.

Here is a small snippet of some of the feedback, you can get the evaluation summary on our website

Trauma Healing Groups

159 participants have completed a Trauma Healing Group

Rationale for facilitating Trauma Healing Groups

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'*

*'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'.
(Participant's feedback)*



The Homework Club

Our homework classes with approx. 75 children are ongoing and the attendance has been excellent. We hope in the New Year to do a week-long trauma healing camp for some of the older children.

“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”

The Tailoring Class

The tailoring class has eleven vulnerable girls and women this year we hope to have our graduation from the tailoring class by mid-year 2022



The Koinonia Trust Football Club

The football club is doing great, they are taking part in the community league and are scoring, we are hoping to win this year community league trophy. The team is now qualified for the semi- final of the league. The team has been together now for 16 months and are under the supervision of one of our classroom supervisors. There are 25 young men involved between the age of 10 and 15. The majority of these young men are from 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, strengthening their emotional and social support.
- The team engages with a time of prayer and sharing before each practice and match strengthening their spiritual walk.
- The team is practicing on time, three times a week, winning games due to their commitment and practice. This is strengthening and supporting their physical and mental health
- 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. This encourages them to be outward thinking and generous with their own resources and time. We were able to donate a set of jerseys to this team as a way of encouraging them.



Important good news

We purchased land a number of years ago and we have always wanted to put down roots within the community and have a permanent base. Not only is this a more sustainable way of doing ministry but in the long term we will no longer be paying rental and maintaining someone else's property. Please do pray alongside us as we start this new venture. Our hope and prayer is that we can raise another 20,000 in 2022.

Prayers Point

- Pray that as we grow as a ministry that God will bring the right people to work alongside us so that we will be able to touch more lives
- Pray that God gives Momo wisdom and good health as he continues to lead the ministry
- Pray for Frances as she continues to obey the call of God to Liberia

- Pray for the upcoming children camp as we partner with SIM Liberia to host the children's camp in the new year
- Pray for the participants in our ongoing trauma healing group that they draw closer to God and find healing and resolution
- Pray for the kids in the study class not just their academic work but that they feel loved and valued by the team. Pray that the team continue to be good role models in these young lives.
- Pray that God will open financial doors for the work of the ministry so we can relocate to the land that was bought nearby.

Frances Reflection

Please do forgive the lack of a newsletter since the spring and we find ourselves completing one just before Christmas. This year I think for many of us has been a challenge one. One of the books I read this year had a quote in it that I wrote down

"Bravery is not the absence of fear but following God through the fear as you believe in Gods promises. It's holding unto the facts of our faith more tightly than to the fears of the future" Kristen Strong

The feeling behind whatever perspective you have on this pandemic has often been dominated by fear. It has dominated the news and is re shaping our life. Loss and isolation are now our new norm. Fear is a familiar feeling to me; I never thought it would be so dominant again around me since leaving the troubles of Northern Ireland as a young girl of 18. However, when I went to Liberia it was a recognizable emotional thread that connected the two countries. Once again it now has become the common thread between my home in Ireland and my home in Liberia. The fears might stem from different things, although I am even witnessing a similarity, we are no longer safe and secure, no longer able to access health services in the way we did before, our medical staff under immense pressure, stress and with inadequate facilities or equipment to deal with the workload. All too similar to Liberia however their circumstances have been driven by absolute poverty and not Covid.

This is the verse I have held unto since I was 18, *'Be strong and be of good courage, do not be afraid, I will be with you wherever you go'* Joshua 1:6-9. This newsletter is just a snippet of what God is doing despite the feelings of fear I have had or indeed Momo has had. We continue to pursue God despite the fear, we are learning to love others but lean on Him. We are learning to rise above the dark days and the feelings that come with them and simply obey Him. And it is hard. And sometimes we do have our pity parties. Some day's courage is just putting one foot in front of the other and getting out of bed...but still moving. Other days when we are strong it is the sound of a roaring lion protecting their territory from the enemy. This is the reality of life it is up and down but the important thing is that we know our faith in God is our constant. He is our unchangeable and unshakeable God. When I reflect on the progress of The Koinonia Trust and I have listened to the testimonies that people have given... how God has touched them even during this difficult time; I can only reflect on Zechariah 3:6 for it has not been by might, nor power but by His spirit and all I can do is marvel and say Amen. Our circumstances are heavy, things may not be well but let's show bravery even in the presence of fear, holding onto Gods promises.