

Queensmill School

International Outreach



Context

Queensmill is an outstanding school for autism located in West London. It follows child-centred approaches and philosophies and believes in an eclectic model of autism support to meet the needs of complex and profoundly disabled young people and ensure progressed towards improved lived experiences using each individual's needs as the starting point.

The school routinely is praised for its approach, progressive methods and success and has been awarded the highest accolades from a number of independent bodies including: Ofsted, NAS (National Autistic Society), IQM (Inclusion Quality Mark) and the Princess Royal Training Award.

Queensmill operates a well-established model of outreach support across a number of West London local authorities. In the past five years it has directly supported over 400 young people with models of support ranging from the provision and modelling of autism specific strategies, to the maintaining of effective school placement and attendance at educational tribunals to determine appropriate school placement.

We are aware that not only is our expertise needed in our local and national communities but also internationally. Recently we have introduced a number of projects focused on international support focused on a range of issues including:

- **Sierra Leone** (read the attached case study for further information)
- **China** – supporting the development of the first autism-specific provision in Beijing through strategy and direction with senior leaders, modelling, specific resourcing, delivering of specific training programmes
- **Malta & Finland** – partnership and professional exchanges through Erasmus funding
- **Poland** – direct training on TEACCH, as specific approach to autism education
- **Latvia** – hosting educational visits to UK to inform policy and practice
- **St Helena** - supporting the development first autism-specific provision in through strategy and direction with senior leaders, modelling, specific resourcing, delivering of specific training programmes
- **France** – hosting trainee teacher visits to the UK to inform teaching practices in French mainstream school

Autism and Disability Inclusion in Sierra Leone



The context

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Currently it is ranked 184 out of 189 on the UN Human Development Index. In recent times it has experienced a savage civil war and Ebola epidemic. When asked to think of Sierra Leone most picture illicit diamond smuggling and immense hardship. Whilst some of this context is accurate Sierra Leone is a beautiful country filled with wonderful people, it has recently elected new local and national government and is committed to sustainable and impactful development. The government has committed 20% of its GDP towards education, a figure which has never be replicated elsewhere, let alone in a country with such little infrastructure, welfare and economic development.

Given the context in Sierra Leone the experiences and outcomes for disabled people are bleak. There is minimal infrastructure to support access to education or medical support and many families living with disability live in poverty. Traditional beliefs associated with witchcraft and alternative treatment are common and many disabled people and their families experience extreme levels of stigma and vilification. This is further hampered by the lack of global policies and agenda on disability the often narrow focus of INGOs and international organisations associated with development.

Partner Organisations:

- Sierra Leone Autistic Society (SLAS)
- Browne-Penn School, Freetown
- Junior's Place of Hope (JPOH), Bo
- Sierra Leone Ministries of Education & Social Welfare
- Freetown City Council (FCC)
- University of Makeni
- Disability Africa
- Sierra Leone Inclusion Project (SLIP), Makeni
- Queensmill School
- The British Council & British High Commission, Sierra Leone



What has been achieved so far?

Over the past 24 months staff from Queensmill school have travelled to Sierra Leone four times to engage local communities and local and national government in raising autism awareness and realising the rights of disabled young people to be included and valued in societies and education. This has been achieved through a number of avenues:

- Attendance, and delivery of a talk and workshop, at a Pan-African conference on Autism, Freetown, December 2017
- The training of Browne-Penn, JPOH and SLIP staff on understanding autism, effective communication, low-cost – high-impact resourcing and perspectives and values around disability
- Walks and conversations with local community groups on autism and disability inclusion
- Meetings with FCC and national ministries

- The Minister for Education visited Queensmill School during a visit to England
- Developing a research concept with University of Makeni to assess the impact of a disability inclusion project on the number of families and young people supported and changes in culture and perceptions associated with autism



General Next steps:

- Continued engagement with local and national government on the need to realise the rights of disabled people, to provide access to infrastructure and services and to create and maintain policy and frameworks which supported disabled people and their families.
- Continued engagement with community leaders and members to challenge traditional perceptions and approaches to disability.
- Support FCC with its Transform Freetown Agenda and objective of training 50% of FCC teachers on disability agenda and education by 2022.
- Support the development of a second SLIP in Lumely, Freetown.
- Continued engagement with head-teachers in Makeni, through teacher training, learning resource support and curriculum development to provide pathways for SLIP, Makeni young people into education.
- The development of individual play-schemes and play-based, inclusive curriculums in partner schools.
- Collaboration with University Makeni on conducting research into the impact of inclusion based programmes on families and young people reached and cultural approaches to disability.

Developing 'core values' training through Connecting Classrooms in Sierra Leone



Rationale

For the past five years professionals at Queensmill School have been working with partners at the Sierra Leone Autistic Society and British Council, Sierra Leone to improve outcomes and experiences for disabled young people. This has taken many forms, ranging from community awareness campaigns to specific staff training and meetings with senior local and national government members to raise awareness and progress issues. Throughout the British Council have supported and championed the work and often conversations have focused on what more can be done.

In May 2019 a series of workshops were run for professionals in Freetown and Makeni centred on discussion of values, ethics and approaches to impairment and disability in low-income contexts. In addition to this the Mayor of Freetown proposed the training of 50% of FCC teachers in special education by 2020. Whilst the mayor's plans were over ambitious, the impact of the training and local government discussions led all involved to think about how further values and vision training may be delivered and the low-cost-high-impact outcomes it could achieve.

Whilst the SDGs form the focus of international development work, they are flawed. There is no SDG which address disability. Whilst it could be argued that disabled communities would benefit from work towards the SDGs, often their needs are unique, underappreciated and marginalised. Put simply, disabled young people in low-income countries are some of the most stigmatised and disenfranchised globally.

Through the development of high quality 'core values' training all involved feel positive steps would be made towards improving lived experiences and outcomes for disabled young people.



Key Partners

- Mary Penn-Timothy & Alice Brown – Sierra Leone Autistic Society (Browne-Penn School, Freetown and Sierra Leone Inclusion Project, Makeni)
- Kelly Ferguson – British Council in-country director, Sierra Leone
- Andy Nowak – Deputy-Head, Queensmill School, UK
- Other notable supporters include: Disability Africa, Simon Mustard (British High Commission, Sierra Leone), Tony Reilly (now in-country director, Morocco), Sierra Leone ministries of Education and Social Welfare



Core principles of the project

The training is designed around 'train the trainer' principles (partners in the UK and Sierra Leone would be responsible for designing the content, with UK partners delivering the initial training and supervision before handing all responsibility to empowered Sierra Leoneans and offering remote guidance and advice).

Empowerment and change of perception are the main goals. The narrative and view of and around disabled young people must be changed to allow for real change in lived experiences and outcomes.

Where-ever possible costs associated with design and delivery will be shouldered by key individuals at Queensmill School who hold a deep professional and personal passion for changing lived experiences for disabled young people in Sierra Leone.

It is hoped that this project and training programme will serve as a case-study for what can be achieved through sustainable partnerships in low-income contexts and could be replicated in other West African countries.



Draft Timeline

Phase 1 – development of training materials and content (through remote UK-SL partnership)

Phase 2 – initial, intensive, 'train the trainer' training (approx. one week, UK partners travelling to SL)

Phase 3 – (6-12 months after Phase 2) supervision and revising/editing of programme where needed (UK partners travelling to SL)

Phase 4 – remote ongoing supervision and guidance between partners – if possible some SL partners to travel to UK

Phase 5 – hand over of all materials and ownership to empowered SL/British Council practitioners and development using SL programme as a case study for success across SSA region

Content

6 stand-alone 1 hour training sessions, professionals could complete one session, however they would be encouraged to complete all of the sessions and receive differing levels of accreditation (3 sessions = intermediate, 6 sessions = advanced)

The sessions would be constructed around the following themes:

- Perceptions of disability
- Values and ethics
- The lived experience of disabled young people
- Communication as a tool to removing barriers

- Empowerment and advocacy
- Practical change and solutions (developing a tool kit)
- Community engagement and difficult conversations
- Models of disability
- Individual visions of inclusion

Learning and development would be delivered through facilitated discussion, questioning, the use of case-studies and video, practical theory and guidance/advice from our existing 'in-context' partners

