



A photograph of a man and children in a village setting. The man, on the left, is wearing a red patterned shirt and is smiling. He is holding a large blue bowl filled with green fruit. Two young girls are in the foreground, smiling and holding a bunch of yellow corn cobs. In the background, there are more children, some carrying baskets of fruit on their heads, and traditional thatched-roof huts.

# BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE



# Building the future of Sierra Leone

ABDULAI’S VILLAGE WAS DESTROYED BY CIVIL WAR. HE VOWED TO HELP REBUILD HIS NATION.

In Abdulai Sumaila’s home village of Bumpeh, a small town in the southern province of Sierra Leone, most families survive on subsistence farming, as they have for decades. Farming is the mainstay of rural families who mostly grow rice and cassava for their own consumption (Source: USAID.) In Bumpeh, school was not a high priority for children, who are needed to help in the fields. Abdulai and his five siblings enjoyed a simple life with their parents, who augmented their meager farming income by teaching and petty trading.

When the chaos of the civil war came to Bumpeh, Abdulai and his siblings were separated from their parents, leaving them to be raised by various relatives who used them for farm labor. “I would wake up at 4 AM and go to the farm,” Abdulai remembers, “I could only return back home in the evening.” During that desperate time, the family was focused solely on survival. School was out of the question for the children. Eventually the siblings learned that their parents had died, and their uncle and grandmother took sole responsibility for them.

When the war finally ended in 2002, a field supervisor from the newly launched Child Rescue Centre (CRC) who had an affiliation with Bumpeh came there to investigate the welfare of the children. Most of the villagers were desperately poor and wanted their children to go to the CRC, where they believed they would have a chance at a better life and the opportunity to go to school. “In the village there were a lot of children in need. The only chance I had over the rest of the children is that they saw potential in me,” Abdulai says.

Abdulai has worked on a number of engineering projects, both paid and as a volunteer. In 2018, he contributed to the design and construction of cargo lines and an underground tunnel for LEONCO, a Sierra Leonean oil and gas company.



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After many meetings with the village chieftains, it was decided that seven children from the neediest families would go live in the CRC’s residential program, including 10-year-old Abdulai, who was the youngest in his family.

Abdulai’s uncle vehemently opposed his admission to the CRC. But Abdulai’s grandmother wanted him to go to school and her will prevailed. Abdulai became one of the original 40 children taken in as residents at the CRC.

In spite of missing several years of school, he skipped

ahead to Class 3, then skipped again to Class 5. After passing the National Primary School Examination with a high score, Abdulai was admitted to the prestigious Christ the King College, an all-boys school near the CRC, along with several other CRC boys.

In many ways, Abdulai loved his new life in the residential centre, and his memories are mostly happy. “Growing up at the CRC my life was full of curiosity and innovation,” Abdulai says. But he missed his family and the warmth of the village community. “The lifestyle [at the CRC] was

very different,” he says. “A lot of the things I enjoyed with my family weren’t available, like gari (cassava meal) and kanya (peanut sweets.)”

More than anything or anyone else, he missed his grandmother, the one who always believed in him. “My grandma was the only one I felt close to and she couldn’t afford to come to the city,” he says regretfully. Sadly, she died four years ago. “I’m very sad that she’s not alive to enjoy the benefits of me going to the CRC. What my family thought was evil turned out to be for good.”

Abdulai is grateful for the opportunity he was given to get an education and pursue his dream, something he doesn’t feel would have been possible if he had stayed in Bumpeh village. “If I stayed with my family, I would have had no opportunities. My family lives far from civilization. And at the CRC, I got the opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ.”

Of the six children in his family, he is the only one that went to school beyond the primary grades. “All of them quit by class 5 or 6 and ended up in farming or trading or mining,” he says.

Growing up in the residential centre, Abdulai was aware that he was different from the other kids at his school, and he felt a keen obligation to become someone who could make a difference for his village of Bumpeh. “I felt a lot

# I told my family I would become an engineer so I could help rebuild.

of responsibility. I got to visit my hometown and observed things that were very hurtful--the structure my family lived in, the famous bridge destroyed by the rebels in the civil war. The beautiful houses burned down. It made me think ‘who is going to rebuild these?’ The bridge in my home town was so dilapidated, residents can only use the boats to cross the water, and I’m a person who is very afraid of water! I told my family I would become an engineer, so I could help rebuild.”

Propelled by that dream, Abdulai earned a scholarship to study civil engineering at Fourah Bay College in Freetown. Moving to the big city of Freetown was a major culture shock for Abdulai. “I was not too acquainted with the lifestyle or location. I had no clue where I was going. Everything must be planned and executed by me alone.



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Waking up early, cooking, doing laundry, and managing my own time. I was forced to embrace hard living outside the CRC," he says ruefully.

Abdulai met his wife, Aminata, through Navigators Christian Club at university. She graduated from Fourah Bay College with a degree in philosophy and law. They were married in 2019 and this year welcomed a baby girl to their family.

"After graduating university, in Sierra Leone culture I became the head of my family," Abdulai says. "I am holding to my dream to continue to provide quality professionalism in every task I am involved in, for the benefit of my country. I have worked as a supervisor on construction projects like hospitals, schools, commercial and residential structures on both a voluntary and paid basis. I hope one day I can be in a top national position, where I can use my technical skills and spiritual insights to transform the lives of others in Sierra Leone."

Abdulai wants to be a role model for young Sierra Leoneans, with this advice for the next generation: "Young people should believe in their dreams and work hard to see those dreams fulfilled. Know the Lord Jesus, be humble, and respect the older generation," he says. His grandmother would no doubt be very proud of her grandson the engineer, who is helping rebuild Sierra Leone.



Abdulai and Aminata were married in 2019 at Charles Davies United Methodist Church in Freetown, above. His groomsmen included fellow CRC alumnus Dr. Aruna Stevens, below right. (Read Aruna's story in our Summer 2020 Magazine and Impact Statement.)



## HOW DO WE HELP RURAL VILLAGES MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

### VILLAGE PARTNERSHIP IS HELPING BREAK THE POVERTY CYCLE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Sierra Leone's rural dirt roads become nearly impassable during the rainy seasons, leaving villages isolated from the market economy and services they desperately need to thrive. Unable to access the education, health care, and sanitation that would lift the community up, village economies languish in a vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy. In the urban areas of Sierra Leone, the proportion of poor children significantly declined by about 24 percentage points between 2010 and 2017, while child poverty increased slightly in rural areas, from 85 per cent to 87 per cent. ([www.statistics.sl](http://www.statistics.sl)).

Helping Children Worldwide is helping the villages served by Mercy Hospital and the CRC to break out of the poverty cycle, by partnering with these communities to establish sustainable hygiene systems, access to health care, and improvements in education. Community mapping surveys are conducted to determine which improvements the residents want, and what will be the most effective in lifting the community out of poverty. A three year plan is established to implement the improvements, which may include family empowerment programs, micro-finance training, sanitation, clean water sources, school development, and improved infrastructure. Village Partnership encourages local control and ownership of issues, ultimately building stronger families that are self-sufficient and working together for the good of the community. Learn how you can partner with a village by visiting us online at [www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/village](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/village) or scan the qr code at right.



**Rural poverty is 86.3% compared to 37% in urban areas.**

**25% of school-aged children living in villages do not attend school.**

**48% of village residents do not have access to safe drinking water.**

**Food insecurity affects nearly 60% of rural households.**

\* Statistics from International Fund for Agricultural Development, a specialized agency of the United Nations.



## ALLEN & PATTY MORELL

*During the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015, Patty and Allen Morell, long time missionaries and partner church representatives for Osterville UMC, stayed with the children in the residential program to shepherd them through a very dark time. Here, the Morells share the scriptural principles that kept them going.*

The times in which we are living may feel very strange to most Americans. We got a good taste of how it feels to be quarantined for months at a time back in 2014 and 2015 during the Ebola Virus outbreak in Sierra Leone. When many international volunteers, NGOs, as well as some Sierra Leoneans themselves were leaving the country in fear of Ebola, we felt we could not desert our Child Rescue Centre family in Bo. We made a very prayerful and conscious decision to stay in Sierra Leone. In August 2014 with the blessing of the Sierra Leone UMC Bishop John Yambasu and Helping Children Worldwide, we went into lockdown with 44 Child Rescue Centre resident children, and 9 CRC staff plus 5 security guards, all who volunteered and committed to live inside the compound 24 hours per day, not knowing how long the Ebola Virus might be active in Sierra Leone.

How did the CRC keep 60 people in lockdown for eight months safe and healthy, keep up everyone's spirits, as well as prevent boredom? It was accomplished in ten very intentional ways.

- 1. Safety First** "The wise man looks ahead." Proverbs 14:8 The CRC clinic was enhanced with supplies, medicines, and malaria test kits. Physical contact with people outside was not allowed. Temperature checks of every child and adult were done each morning and recorded by the CRC nurse. Hand washing stations were always kept full throughout the compound. Anyone who came down with a fever was isolated until it could be determined that he/she had malaria or another malady – not Ebola. We ensured everyone got plenty of sleep under bed nets, ate well balanced meals, and had lots of opportunities for exercise.
- 2. Teamwork Makes the Dream Work** "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function . . . each member belongs to all the others." Romans 12:4 Everyone was divided into five different family groups

that shared chores including preparing, serving, and cleaning up after meals, working in the garden, keeping the buildings and compound clean, leading devotions and vespers, and so much more. The CRC staff members who could not commit to living inside the compound were key to providing supplies, food, and support, doing errands, as well as keeping in touch with three hundred CRC children and their families who lived in the community.

- 3. Regular Schedule and Routine** "He made the moon to mark the months, and the sun sets according to a regular schedule" Psalm 104:19 It was really important to stick to a regular schedule with opportunities for the children to participate in some elective activities, and for the adults to lead activities in their own areas of interest. It was also necessary for the adults to get at least

**How did the CRC keep 60 people safe and healthy in lockdown for eight months, keep up everyone's spirits, as well as prevent boredom? It was accomplished in ten very intentional ways.**

one day off each week, even though they had to stay inside the compound. CRC Aunties were given the option to spend time at the Missionary Training Centre next door on their days off where there were special treats for them and plenty of comfy beds. (MTC staff were outside the walls.)

- 4. Continually Learning** "Practice these things. Devote your life to them so that everyone can see your progress." 1 Timothy 4:15 When schools closed all over the country due to the virus, the CRC created the School of Champions, which included an Electronic Classroom. Classes focused on math, language arts, phonics, and reading, with electives in the afternoons.



Patty Morell (back row, waving) and Allen Morell (not pictured, as he is taking the photo) served as interim leaders of the Child Rescue Centre (now Child Reintegration Centre) during the Ebola crisis of 2014-2015 that infected more than 14,000 people and claimed the lives of nearly 4,000.

During Advent the Language Arts Classes for grades 5, 6 and JSS participated in daily devotions called "Adverbs of Advent." There were many opportunities to bake cakes with the children. Reading, math, and science were integrated into this fun class. The cakes were shared with all 60 people on special occasions. All of the children took part in small group counseling activities once a week and more often as needed. Saturday night was designated Game Night when staff and children could do puzzles, play cards, play familiar board games, or learn new ones.

- 5. Frequent Celebrations** "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 There were daily celebrations, some days more special than others. Every School of Champions day began with celebratory singing and dancing. Pharrell Williams' song "Happy" became the theme song during the lockdown. One of the younger CRC boys was dubbed, "Kid President" after inspirational American child actor, Robby Novak. Awards and small prizes were given out for fitness achievements each week at Friday Film Show Night. Those who celebrated birthdays that week passed out sweets to the audience. There were extra special activities to intentionally mark milestones like

100 and 200 Days in Lock-Down. And of course, there were meaningful ways to spend the season of Advent, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Palm Sunday and Easter. The kids were so excited about Christmas! It was a simple, yet unforgettable Christmas, focused entirely on the birth of Jesus. Children hand made lovely decorations, acted in pageants, sang beautiful Christmas songs and hymns, created a nativity scene, and kept us all entertained.

- 6. Sharing Space with Non-humans** "But ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the air they will tell you." Job 12:7 This kept things interesting, and kept us humans alert: puppies and kittens were born; learning firsthand how to attend to a scorpion bite; bats in the attic; competing with rats for rice; security guards always on the lookout at night for snakes; and beautiful actual night owls watching over us while we slept.
- 7. Staying Connected** "I am eager to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. In this way, each of us will be a blessing to the other." Romans 1:12 We were intentional about staying connected to the outside world. The children reached out to friends in the community by calling them





Allen Morell (right) with CRC staff members and alumni, including Dr. Aruna Stevens (third from left), Mohamed Nabieu (fifth from left), Rosa Saffa (fifth from right) and Abdulai Sumaila (second from right), featured in this magazine. Aruna, Mohamed, Rosa, and Abdulai served as house parents at the CRC residence during the Ebola outbreak.

on a shared CRC mobile phone on a rotational schedule so that everyone had their turn. Staff spoke with their families. On Wednesday nights before bedtime we all met in the Great Hall in pjs to watch and listen to prerecorded Bedtime Stories read by friends from partner churches in the US. Everyone looked forward to that special time!

To stay connected to the CRC students who lived in the community, the CRC started a radio program called CARES. This program also benefited all students in the Bo region. The content consisted of all good news with school lessons for primary school, junior secondary, and senior secondary school students. There were always academic contest questions during the radio program. The CRC staff living in town made sure that the contest winners received their prizes.

8. **Having Fun** “So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.” **Ecclesiastes 8:15** While we may have been in lock down, we were not locked up! It was very busy inside the CRC compound

and we always tried to have fun. On Friday Fitness Days the final activity was a race among the Aunties, including Patty. One time the women planned a walking race while carrying buckets of water on their heads. The kids could hardly contain their excitement! On your mark, get set, GO! As the women got about one third of the way to the finish line, they stopped, took the buckets off their heads, and quickly threw the water at the children. There were screams of surprise and delight!

There were also times when we would give all of the Aunties the afternoon off from cooking and instead we would cook with some of the older kids. One time we decided to introduce gumbo to the CRC since Sierra Leoneans seem to like all of the ingredients, especially okra. We had great fun cooking dinner with the older children. After we ate, we went around to each table in the CRC dining hall and asked the children how they liked the gumbo. At one table one of the youngest boys gave this review. “I didn’t love it. Please don’t make it again.” (When we were preparing to leave the country months later, some of the children waved to us and said, “Goodbye Gumbo!”)

9. **Focusing on Others** “The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” **Matthew 25:40** On a daily basis we were all intentionally praying for: those who were sick, those who were grieving, the community outside the walls of the CRC, the country, and the end of Ebola. The CRC children participated in outreach by putting together baskets containing homemade cards, small Bibles, rice, spices, soap, toothpaste, candles, and other essentials. Recipients of the baskets were identified by local church pastors who delivered the baskets.

10. **Staying Strong in Body and Faith** “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong.” **Acts 3:16** The children and staff helped plan daily devotions and prayers, evening vespers, Wednesday Afternoon Devotions, Sunday Church with a well-practiced CRC choir, and Sunday Evening Bible studies. There were sports competitions for football (soccer), volleyball, and stone ball. Jump roping and bike riding were favorite outdoor activities. There was a Fitness Program every Friday afternoon where children and staff were encouraged to improve on their personal best. There were fun races and even a race for the security guards.

When the lock down ended on April 22nd, 2015, after the entire country had gone through 42 consecutive days (2 cycles) of no new cases of Ebola, the CRC gates were enthusiastically opened and all of the staff returned that day for Wednesday Afternoon Devotions. Together we celebrated this joyous, long anticipated occasion! We all sang a song called, “Together Again.” There was not a dry eye in the Great Hall. The next day all of the CRC Aunties left the compound for the first time in eight months, to go home to their own families. Other CRC women staff volunteered to stay with the children that night.

The commitment of the devoted CRC staff and security guards was remarkable and totally selfless. The CRC children and staff, and all Sierra Leoneans who lived through the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and 2015, have an amazing testimony to share. While the Ebola crisis was tragic on so many levels, we will always remember that time spent with our CRC family with great fondness.

# EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO LIVE.



EVERY CHILD IS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. The Child Reintegration Centre provides education, medical care, spiritual mentoring, and family support for nearly 600 extremely vulnerable children and youth, so they can achieve their amazing God-given potential. Learn how you can help a child survive and thrive by scanning the qr code at right, or visit us online at [www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/sponsor-a-child](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/sponsor-a-child). **Sponsor a child today!**





# Attachment Theory: helping vulnerable families become healthy and strong

The Servant Heart Research Collaborative, a project of the University of Maine Honors College, developed a six-part series of workshops on attachment theory for caregivers of displaced, orphaned, and extremely vulnerable children. The following panel discussion with Dr. Laura Horvath, UMaine alumna Patty Morell, and the members of the SHRC details the history, development and implementation of the attachment theory workshop series, and how it is impacting vulnerable families in Sierra Leone.

Of the many family strengthening workshops and programs provided by the Child Reintegration Centre (CRC), the jewel in the crown of the series is the Attachment Theory Workshop and Self-Paced Refresher Training, or AT Workshop. This six-module series is taught to caregivers whose children are enrolled in the CRC programs and in similar programs in the Kono District, and helps caregivers understand the impact of trauma on children and how it can affect their behavior. Each module provides practical tools that help caregivers form loving, healthy, and lasting relationships with their children.

Over three years, the AT Workshop has evolved and expanded to serve a widening pool of caregivers seeking to provide excellent care for children in their home. The workshop began as a tool to help train six CRC residential aunts to bond with the children living in the orphanage. Through the work of the students and faculty of UMaine’s Honors College, it has grown with the needs of the

program and transformed into a curriculum that teaches parents and caregivers how to bond with the children being reintegrated into their families. It is also being used as a tool for parents whose children have never been separated from them to teach them how to bond better, and has been offered to over 200 caregivers in Bo alone. When the success of the initial AT Workshop was published, it sparked conversations among child welfare organizations all over the world, expanding first to other locations in Sierra Leone, including four areas in the Kono District (Ngaiya Town, Jesus Town, Sukudu, and Koidu), training an additional 160 caregivers in this region, and then beyond. The AT Workshop is being adapted for use by child welfare organizations around the world, who are hoping to pilot the workshop in their own organizations and locations.

## History

In December of 2015, University of Maine alumni and long-time supporters of Helping Children Worldwide

UMaine Servant Heart Research Collaborative team members, CRC case managers, and caregivers who completed the inaugural AT Workshop trainings proudly display their completion certificates.



(HCW), Patty and Allen Morell reached out to Helping Children Worldwide’s Director at that time, Ginny Wagner, with a request to develop a list of projects that could help address needs at the CRC. These projects would be undertaken by a group of undergraduate students at UMaine’s Honors College, guided by faculty mentors. Alli DellaMattera, one of the undergraduate students who created the AT Workshop, now leads the efforts of the Servant Heart Collaborative at UMaine that is continuing to work on curriculum development for use in the cultural context of other countries. UMaine students Grace, Alli, and Alex each used their work on the AT project in their final Honor’s theses.

Giving these students the opportunity to see themselves as powerful agents of change was equally important to the Morells. Of seven ideas proposed, one was to research and “develop a year-long (6-12 lessons) curriculum (for a resource scarce environment) to teach caregivers” to establish healthy bonds with their children who’d suffered trauma. Lessons would include theory and application, with role playing as a key component of skill building, and were initially conceived to train the residential staff of the CRC orphanage.

**Patty Morell:** Allen and I are quite active as alumni on different projects that connect and encourage both students and faculty to get involved with volunteerism, including research and projects that produce solutions that meet challenges locally, nationally and internationally. We [felt] it [was] key that students understand volunteering their time, talent and resources is an important part of university life and becoming a valuable member of society. Because of our own long-time commitment to the CRC, it was a natural progression that we wanted to connect the University of Maine with Sierra Leone in meaningful ways.

**Dr. Melissa Ladenheim:** When I first met with Patty and Allen, they communicated that their desire to partner with UMaine was fundamentally driven by two motivations: 1) to bring the capacities and resources of UMaine to help Sierra Leone solve some of its problems, and 2) to enable undergraduate students to understand their privilege and their own capacity to be powerful agents of change. Most importantly, Patty and Allen wanted me to know that the Sierra Leoneans themselves understood good solutions, but lacked resources and sufficient bandwidth (literally and figuratively) to implement them.

Servant Heart Research Collaborative - Attachment Theory Workshop Team	
<b>Julie DellaMattera</b> <i>Director, School of Educational Leadership, Higher Education and Human Development</i> <i>Associate Professor of Early Childhood Development and Education</i>	<b>Alex Reppond</b> <i>Major: Psychology Minor: Business Administration</i> <i>Graduated May 2019</i>
<b>Melissa Landeheim</b> <i>Associate Dean, Honors College</i>	<b>Alli DellaMattera</b> <i>Major (double): Sociology and Spanish</i> <i>Graduated May 2018</i>
<b>Patricia Morell</b> <i>University of Maine Alumna</i> <i>Sierra Leone Cultural Advisor</i>	<b>Grace Pouliot</b> <i>Major: Elementary Education</i> <i>Graduated May 2019</i>
	<b>Kim Crowley</b> <i>Major: English Minor: Marketing</i> <i>Graduated May 2019</i>



CRC case managers Deborah Kanneh and Amie Nallo teaching the Attachment Theory iWorkshop to CRC parents and caregivers and their children.



I was approached to meet with Patty and Allen because of my history of social justice work with UMaine students. I was interested in hearing about the Morell's work because of that, and also because I had been a founding member and mentor in another successful research collaborative in the Honors College, so I had experience and confidence in this model. As well, I felt that Honors, with its interdisciplinary body of students and faculty, with its curriculum that asks students to grapple with big questions (such as: What are our obligations to others? How should we live? How do we create a just world?), and its goal of cultivating critical thinkers and informed citizens, was a perfect home for this partnership.

Once the Morells shared the list from HCW, I undertook recruiting students and faculty to the projects. I didn't select the AT Workshop from the list; in the end that choice arose in some ways serendipitously from the interests and skills of the students I recruited along with what seemed most possible for us to accomplish. I pulled Julie in fairly early in the process.

**Julie Dellamattera:** I feel so incredibly fortunate that Melissa thought of me once the AT project was decided upon. I remember sitting in her office as she started her "pitch" for a faculty mentor. She was only about 2 minutes in, when I remember thinking to myself, "Yes! Oh, please

let me be a part of this!" The idea of supporting students to be part of something bigger than themselves was so appealing. And the topic was right up my alley both professionally and personally. I teach aspiring educators and those who want to work in agencies supporting kids and families. The cornerstone of what I espouse is attachment and respect and to be able to help undergrads from a variety of backgrounds and majors spread that message was something I couldn't say no to.

**Dr. Laura Horvath:** From the HCW/CRC perspective, the selection of the AT Workshop was ideal for that point in the life of the CRC. We knew that the children living in the orphanage had suffered trauma; becoming separated from parental care is itself a trauma, but these children had suffered additional traumas - that's what led them to placement in the CRC programs to begin with. We understood that teaching the staff how to form healthy bonds with the children would help heal some of that trauma.

**Melissa:** From the UMaine perspective, we had multiple goals and outcomes in mind as we embarked on this project. We wanted students to work on meaningful projects, that the work they did would be empowering and their contributions valued, that they would see what they could contribute and the implications of that work,

that it could potentially lead to a thesis project (which it has for three students who worked on AT), that they learn about working on and being part of a team, and that there was an appreciation for the contributions of a number of different perspectives and disciplines in problem solving.

The workshop was originally created as a training for the orphanage staff working directly with the children living in the orphanage. When a decision was made in Sierra Leone to transition the orphanage program to a family-based model that would reintegrate all of the children living there back into family-based care, a change in the approach to the workshop design became necessary.

**Melissa:** The changes at the CRC from a residential facility to a family-based one had an impact on what we were doing, and so learning to be flexible and how to pivot strategically also turned out to be good lessons. As well, it became clear part way into the work that the best course of action for our team would be to build our own training based on research and best practices as reported in the literature, and I think this was absolutely pivotal for this project.

**Laura:** When the decision was made to reintegrate children who had lived for years in the orphanage back into families, we knew that there would be a gap in the caregivers' capacity to form healthy attachments with the children they were receiving into their homes. The research is clear that children grow and thrive better in loving, permanent families, but it's not a simple matter of just placing a child with a family. Families have to be prepared for reintegration, and parents and caregivers of children suffering from trauma need training and tools for how to relate to each other and build healthy attachments. Parents needed to understand why their child might behave in certain ways, and children who'd never formed a long-term attachment to a primary caregiver need to be helped to do that. It was important to equip the parents.

**Melissa:** The pivot was pretty seamless in some ways because the basic idea of offering support to a caregiver was fundamental, pretty much regardless of the setting for the caregiving.

**Laura:** Right - the caregiver was either the orphanage staff/Auntie, or it was the parent. Same principles apply.

**Melissa:** There were additional considerations, of course, as the Aunties, by virtue of working for the CRC, came with a set of experiences, skills, and knowledge that could not

be assumed in the family-based settings, so really thinking about who these people are and what they were bringing to the table did influence (to greater and lesser degrees depending on the concept and action step) the word choice and activities of the workshop as we adapted to this new audience. We had to imagine a range of literacy skills, for example.

**Laura:** This has turned out to be one of the workshop's greatest strengths, in my opinion. In HCW's global advocacy work, we're connected to many programs around the world, lots of them have trauma-informed training similar to the workshop. The difference is that the vast majority of them are designed for staff - social workers - who are mostly literate. The AT Workshop is the only one I know of that is designed for caregivers who don't need to be literate at all. Additionally, rather than training social workers, the focus is on equipping the caregivers and parents whose children have suffered from trauma, to empower them to parent their children well. This builds not only the capacity of the caregivers, but empowers entire families.

**Melissa:** There are some key points that are fundamental to the success of the AT project, and perhaps the most important one, to my mind, is the intentional creation of partnerships in Sierra Leone. When I first spoke with the Morells and better understood their role/relationship to the CRC, we agreed on the importance of also having community partners in Sierra Leone whose insider knowledge and cultural competencies were absolutely essential to our success.

**Laura:** And this is another of the workshop's greatest strengths. The process you used to work collaboratively and iteratively with the CRC staff on the ground to create something that is grounded in research and best practice but also incorporates the skills and knowledge of the CRC staff who helped create and use it, with a deep cultural understanding is huge. Even down to the tiniest detail - that the photos in the presentation look like the people in the audience, it really helps participants to 'see themselves' in the workshop, and feel like the concepts it teaches apply to their lives.

**Julie:** We realized early on that as many of the adults speak and read only basic English that the photos were even more important. The photos are in essence visual touch points for remembering key concepts. If the photo resonates with the caregivers then, even if they cannot



# Helping families become stronger.

**CHILDREN BELONG IN FAMILIES** but sometimes families need help. As the Child Reintegration Centre reunites orphaned and abandoned children with families, they are helping these families become stable and self-sufficient, by providing them with mentoring, skills training, and case management, in addition to the support for education and health care extended to all children and youth in a CRC program. You can help a vulnerable family become strong through sponsorship. Learn more by scanning the qr code or visit [www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/sponsor-a-family](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/sponsor-a-family).



read the information, they can connect with the information visually.

**Alli:** The CRC staff were an integral part of developing a workshop that really spoke to, and was relatable, to the caregivers that the training was intended for. To put it simply, we are not experts on Sierra Leone nor it's people and despite the numerous hours of research we did to educate ourselves on daily life in Sierra Leone, cultural values, historic and present day traumas, etc., we knew the best people to give input, feedback, and suggestions on the AT Workshop were going to be Sierra Leoneans themselves.

**Julie:** As a faculty mentor, it was amazing to see that the student team immediately realized that not only were they not experts on Sierra Leone, but also that they did not want to impose their privileged, white view about how best to raise children upon people from a culture very different than ours. This self-awareness and, dare I say, very mature view, set the foundation for deeply appreciating the collaborations and partnerships created in Sierra Leone.

**Melissa:** The iterative nature of the work is one of the most important pieces here in my mind as it speaks to the value of partnerships with all the stakeholders represented. Being able to work with David, Amie, and Deborah (CRC Case Managers), and later others on the CRC staff, and get their input strengthened the quality and effectiveness of the training, and ensured they were a good fit for the audience.

**Laura:** And now the curriculum is traveling outside of the borders of Sierra Leone. Pilot projects are underway in Haiti and Uganda, and interest continues to grow. The best part of watching these take off is that you continue to apply this deeply collaborative, iterative approach with new partners. Photos, terms and vocabulary from the existing CRC version are currently being adapted so that Haitian and Ugandan caregivers can see themselves in the materials. I have such deep respect for how closely your team works with these new partners to incorporate their thoughts and culture into their version of the AT Workshop, while still preserving its integrity.

**Melissa:** The curriculum continues to evolve and be refined in an ongoing, iterative process that engages all of the members of the AT team, both in the US and in the local communities in Sierra Leone using the curriculum. The AT team completed a revision of the curriculum being used by the CRC just this spring, and we're excited to be

partnering with Helping Haitian Angels, and potentially other organizations working to reintegrate children from their orphanages back home with their families. **Alli:** When organizations are expressing a potential interest in the AT Workshop, I think it is so important for them to understand that we want honest, upfront, and raw feedback from their team based in-country so we can make the necessary changes in order for their participants to get as much as they possibly can from participating in the training. A goal of this training is to build better, healthier relationships between a child and their caregiver; and we are willing to make edits to the modules to ensure the best opportunity to reach this goal.

**Julie:** Another part of the feedback process is that we are not only editing and refining the training but we are hoping to help answer the call of "we want more!" that we are hearing from parents and caregivers. The team is in the process of creating an at-home component to the training. We are currently working on a handout that attendees could take home at the end of each session with activities that could be practiced at home with the children and other family members. Some of these might simply be reminders for how to behave like, "Remember to breath and wait until you are calm to talk with your child" and others will be actual activities that will promote collaboration and attachment among family members.

**Laura:** It's amazing to me that this elegant and simple solution to meet a need at the CRC has grown and continues to grow. The AT Workshop continues to pivot to meet the needs of an expanding population beyond what any of us could have imagined.

**Julie:** This entire project has taken us all completely by surprise, on so many levels. I know I had no idea the profound effect this would have on me and my life. We've been fortunate to go to Sierra Leone and meet the people whose lives have been changed by our training. As we sat at tables and listened to their stories of family transformation, as they grabbed our hands and thanked us, as we met smiling children - we cried tears of joy. And the crying has not stopped. Every time the AT team meets with Laura we all end up in tears; crying because we are so moved and happy and feeling blessed to be a part of something that has changed families in Sierra Leone and has the potential to change the lives of children everywhere. The impact our training can and may have is exponentially bigger than anything we could have foreseen or dreamed of. It takes my breath away. ❤️



# WE ARE HELPING CHILDREN WORLDWIDE

## CHILD REINTEGRATION CENTRE

**Child Support Program** supports nearly 600 vulnerable children and youth, providing for their education, health care, and spiritual mentoring. The CRC is transforming lives, developing leaders, strengthening families, and unlocking potential for a better Sierra Leone.

**Family Reintegration and Strengthening** With the endorsement of the Sierra Leone government, Helping Children Worldwide and the CRC have initiated a national and regional effort to advocate and educate a shift from a residential care model for children to family-based models that reunify families and ensure permanence for all children. HCW and CRC have become recognized leaders in the global movement to move orphaned and abandoned children out of institutional care and into caring families. The CRC provides opportunities for parents and children to participate in workshops, special events, and mentoring to strengthen the attachment of children to caregivers, and the newly launched Transition Coaching and Mentoring Department provides training for child welfare leaders across West Africa to learn how to change their model of care from orphanages to family-based programs. Through various HCW/CRC activities that include HCW's Rising Tides conference, the CRC's 2day Family Reunification Workshop, and our ongoing partnership with UMaine's AT Workshop team, the combined experience and expertise of HCW and the CRC are leading conversations in Tanzania, Zambia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Haiti, Uganda, Kenya, Philippines, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, India, Guatemala, and of course, Sierra Leone.

**Microfinance Program** helps families learn money management and small business skills, so they can achieve financial stability and self sufficiency. Graduates receive a small loan to launch or expand a small business.

**Promise Scholarships** provides secondary school graduates with the opportunity to pursue university, vocational, or technical education, according to their unique potential and God-given talents.

**VILLAGE PARTNERS** HCW's newest initiative is expanding services to the villages already served by the Child Reintegration Centre and Mercy Hospital, with a three year plan to provide family empowerment, micro-finance training, sanitation, clean water sources, school development, and improved infrastructure. Through community mapping surveys to solicit information from the village residents and leadership, we can determine which improvements are most needed and will be the most effective in lifting the community out of poverty, for the good of all of the families and their children.

## MERCY HOSPITAL

**Prenatal and Postnatal Care** Maternal and infant survival are primary to Mercy Hospital's mission. Expectant mothers are monitored throughout pregnancy, encouraged to give birth at the hospital, and receive postnatal care. Mercy's care for mothers and babies is having a powerful impact on maternal and infant survival in Bo and the surrounding community, and the addition of a surgical centre has enabled the staff to do emergency or planned caesarean sections.

**Village Outreach** Mercy Hospital provides mobile care to a network of villages surrounding Bo, to serve people without access to health care, including malnutrition screening and treatment, prenatal and postnatal care, malaria testing and treatment, and HIV testing.

**Nutrition Program** Mercy Hospital screens babies and toddlers for malnutrition and failure to thrive, enrolling an average of 100 children monthly to receive supplementary feeding and monitoring, and an average of 25 children graduate from the program each month.

**Malaria Testing and Treatment** Malaria testing and treatment are available to children and adults at Mercy Hospital and via village outreach. Malaria is one of Sierra Leone's highest burdens of disease and causes of death. A partnership with the United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries enables Mercy's malaria patients to benefit from monthly donations of medical testing supplies and the most effective drug treatments currently available.

**Surgical Centre** Mercy Hospital's new operating theatre enables the staff to perform scheduled and emergency surgeries, including caesarian sections, meaning the difference between life and death for many patients. The first floor holds two separate operating theaters, recovery room, waiting area, and office space. The second floor houses two new wards, a private ward, a conference room and exam rooms.

Child Reintegration Centre student Hawa Yokie (in white shirt and black pants) helps her family prepare dinner. As the recipient of a Promise Scholarship, Hawa is currently studying to become a Community Health Officer at Njala University in Bo. Hawa lost her father ten years ago and her mother is nearly blind. She is the first person in her family to go to school beyond the primary level. "I can't imagine how I could have gotten an education, if not for the CRC," Hawa says.



Learn how you can get involved in a mission that will transform lives -- including your own! Scan the qr code at right or visit us online at [www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/get-involved](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org/get-involved)





Children in Lemblema Village, which is served by the Child Reintegration Centre and Mercy Hospital, attend school in an outdoor classroom. Learn how you can sponsor a student, sponsor a family, or partner with a village to help children and families thrive at [www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org](http://www.helpingchildrenworldwide.org).



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### Transform lives in Sierra Leone

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