

Enable the Children (ETC), founded as an independent not-for-profit in 2007 and incorporated as a program of World Hope International in September 2015, is a team of local and expatriate staff who provide Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, care, and support services to approximately 1,000 children living with disabilities in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Staff visit patients in their homes and teach families and caregivers how to support children with disabilities using play, developmental positioning, and feeding support. This allows families the opportunity to provide at-home care and treatment to children in a manner that is sustainable in their everyday lives. ETC also provides support for the family unit as they learn to look after the child and provide a loving, nurturing home life. As cultural beliefs lead many mothers to place blame upon themselves when a child is born with a disability, ETC works with mothers so they understand each child's medical case and to reassure parents that they've done nothing wrong.

Additionally, ETC's school sponsorship initiative provides support to children with disabilities in the form of school fees, which allows these children the otherwise unlikely opportunity to attend school. The program also provides household support to families who've had to change their pattern of work to allow for care to be provided for the child at home. Also, the team has been developing inclusive sporting events for children with disabilities to encourage community engagement, improved self-esteem for the child and development of skills.

Finally, ETC works with local carpenters, tailors, and technicians to provide specialized equipment for patients including specially designed chairs, standing frames, leg gaiters (to support standing and walking), and drop-foot supports. The program also provides wheelchairs to patients in need.

Vision: Children with disabilities to be included, loved and valued in their families and their communities and have a good quality of life.



Beach Outing

Every year, ETC celebrates not only the children in the program, but their families and caregivers as well, hosting a beach day outing in partnership with many other organizations and companies. This year, the event was held on February 16 and the Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs; the President for the Sierra Leonean Union for Disability Issues; the Chairman for the Pastors Union in the east part of Freetown; the Chairman for the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone; and the President for the Union for the Blind in Sierra Leone all provided remarks that encouraged families and caregivers and emphasized seriously addressing the stigmatizing of or discriminating against people living with disabilities. More than 1,850 people attended with 500 children with disabilities in attendance.



Training

Five rehabilitation therapists and 2 rehabilitation therapy assistants were trained on the anatomy of major body systems and brain to help the therapists understand the human body to aid with clinical reasoning. Another training was performed on Mind-Body Health: Stress Management to help themselves and support the children and families.

A final year Occupational Therapy student from Indiana Wesleyan University conducted her 8-week residency with ETC. She worked alongside the therapists, visiting children at home, working in the clinics and performing trainings on Occupational Therapy, Behavior Management and Activities of Daily Living.



Anna Vines is involved in the development and the set-up of the Physiotherapy School in Masanga. She teaches classes to the students throughout the year. We hope that ETC therapists will be able to go to train there and that students will come on placement to ETC.



Specialized Therapy, Support & Equipment

The therapists worked weekly and bi-weekly at two clinic locations for the identification, registration, assessment and initial treatment of disabled children. In 2019, 1,008 (527 boys & 481 girls) children with disabilities, out of which 488 new children, were seen. Out of the 151 clinic days, 306 new children with disabilities were admitted into the ETC program. The therapists also performed home visits to 1,138 (664 boys & 474 girls) children to assess, progress exercises and provide therapy. Three hundred twenty-one pieces of specialized therapy equipment were provided to facilitate maximum functional achievement in children with disabilities.

Achilles tendon releases were performed on 4 children with 5 releases performed in total. This helped children to stand and walk with their feet flat on the ground, rather than on tiptoe.



Support Group

Families of children with behavioral issues are supported with behavioral therapy techniques and counselled by 2 family support workers. Two autism support meetings were attended by about 50 caregivers, 25 children, 5 teachers and 1 stakeholder. The question and answer session was useful to address concerns and questions. The teachers learned how to better help children with behavioral issues.

During the year, ETC shifted from holding 12 small support groups to 4 larger groups to encourage more families and children to attend. The supports were held at the following part of town: Ark (86 participants), Waterloo (150 participants), Ferry Junction (250 participants) and Collegiate (150 participants).

Sports

Enable the Children began involving the children in sports for the first time! Sixty children with disabilities visited the National Stadium for two hours, facilitated by national and premier league coaches. The children and families enjoyed the event, covered by the media. This led to a meeting with the Special Olympics Committee who would like to plan further sports events with ETC for children with disabilities.

Anna met with the Sierra Leone National Team's manager who invited the ETC team and some children with disabilities to watch the National Team play before their game with Liberia. At this event, the team and children met the President of the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA), and she invited them to have another event with the National team the following day. This event was attended by 25 children with disabilities who played with the team.

One of these children was Alfred, who is delayed in his development and has a left sided weakness. Through the Enable the Children program, he is improving with ongoing exercise. He was excited to meet the players of the National team and pass the ball back and forth. For a child who loves football and has had a rough start to his young life, being part of Enable the Children and getting the chance to meet the Leone Stars was a great experience for him. Alfred's mother stated: *I am not sure what would have happened to me and my son if Enable the Children had not got involved. My son has improved so much and now he is playing football with the Leone Stars. Usually people move away from me because of my son's condition, but you embrace him for who he is.* The President of the SLFA hopes to work with the Enable the Children team on more projects.

In addition, ETC had a positive sports meeting at the National Stadium with 88 children attending with many different stakeholders and media reporting on the event. The children participated in 5 different sports, practicing their skills in front of different coaches and peers. ETC's hope is to continue these events so our children have more opportunities to be in the community as we find ways to increase acceptance.



Additional Support

One hundred twenty-one children with disabilities were supported with school fees, who would not be able to access education without financial support. Alfred is also one of the Child Sponsorship children. Thanks to the generosity of his sponsor this year, he also received a few new clothes and food supplies that will help his family meet their immediate needs. This support lead to improved mobility, speech and self-esteem for the sponsored children and better understanding for children at school on how to relate with children with disabilities.

Twenty-four families were supported with a grant to start a small business as their pattern of work changed due to looking after the child with disabilities.



Partnerships

Children with disability outside of Freetown were also visited. Nine children from the community at the Children of the Nations, 2 children from the home and approximately 30 other children received therapy at Mattru Jong. ETC team performed therapy services to 45 children with WESOFOD and Street Child at Kambia. During Sierra Leone Autistic Association's play scheme in Makeni, the ETC team assisted 50 children to improve their function. Two additional visits were conducted throughout the year.



Thank you for your generous support for Enable the Children!



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