

# LAUGHTER AFRICA TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021



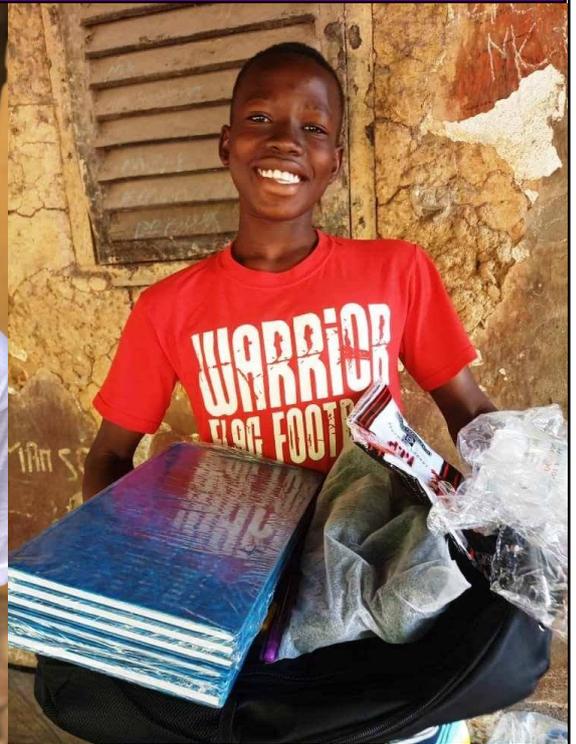
**Laughter**  
AFRICA

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# A. REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS OF THE CHARITY



Charity Name: **Laughter Africa**

Other names charity is known by:

Registered charity number in UK: **1154712**

Charity's principal address in UK: **124 Princes Boulevard, Bebington, Wirral, CH63 5LP, UK**

Charity's Principal address in Sierra Leone: **Laughter Africa, Adonkia, Freetown, Sierra Leone**

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity in Sierra Leone:

<b>Trustee name</b>	<b>Office (if any)</b>	<b>Dates acted if not for whole year</b>	<b>Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)</b>
<b>Aminata Sheriff</b>	<b>Chairperson of Trustees</b>		
<b>Amadu Alpha Bah</b>	<b>Treasurer</b>		
<b>James Tyrrell</b>	<b>Secretary</b>		
<b>Shellac Davies</b>			
<b>Eric Massallay</b>			
<b>Mira Koroma</b>			
<b>Mariama Doe</b>			
<b>Sinneh Bockarie</b>			
<b>Alhaji Safieu Bah</b>			
<b>Abubakarr B Sheriff</b>			
<b>Albert Daniel Gbow</b>			
<b>Ansumana Konneh</b>			

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity in the UK

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
James Tyrrell	Chairperson of Trustees		
David Cartmell	Treasurer		
Mark Neal	Secretary		

Names and addresses of advisers

Type of Advisor	Name	Address
Bankers in the UK	Royal Bank of Scotland	1 Dale Street, Liverpool, Merseyside, L2 2PP
Bankers in Sierra Leone	GTB	12 Wilberforce Street, Freetown
Auditor in Sierra Leone	Peter Kamaray &Co	20 Wilberforce Street, Freetown

Name of chief executive or names of senior staff members (Optional information)

Moses Sheriff ( Director of Administration) (Sierra Leone)

Sia Lucy Ngaujah (Director of the Interim Care Centre) (Sierra Leone)

Abubakarr Kargbo (Director of Outreach) (Sierra Leone)

Abubakarr Zombo (Director of Family Tracing and Reunification) (Sierra Leone)

Isata Samura (Director of Advocacy, Communications and Campaigns) (Sierra Leone)

James Tyrrell (Country Director in the UK in a volunteer capacity)



# B. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT



## Description of the charity's trusts

**Type of governing document**

Constitution adopted on 02/04/2013

**How the charity is constituted**

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

**Trustee selection Methods**

The existing trustees are responsible for the recruitment of new trustees. Each new trustee must be appointed by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the charity trustees. In selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the charity trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of Laughter Africa.

## Trustee training and induction.

Once a new trustee has been appointed, they will be given all the necessary training in accordance with Laughter Africa's 'Trustee Induction Policy' which outlines the induction, support and training programme involved.

As well as training, the following documents will be given to a newly appointed trustee:

- A copy of the constitution
- The latest Annual Trustee Report and accounts
- All Laughter Africa's policies and procedures (particularly highlighting the Code of Conduct, Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy, Accepting Donations from Companies Policy and the Whistleblowing Policy).
- The Corporate Risk Register
- Trustee job description.
- Contact details of trustees and minutes of previous trustee meetings
- Organogram of Laughter Africa
- Financial Framework and details of resources and assets that belong to the organisation.
- The new Charity Governance Code published in 2017/18

A number of publications from the Charity Commission are also provided including the guidance on Charity Law and Public Benefit, the new Charity Trustee Welcome Pack published by the Charity Commission in April 2018 and 'The essential trustee: what you need to know, what you need to do (CC3)'. This ensures that new trustees are aware of the scope of their responsibilities under the Charities Act 2011 and to brief them on their legal obligations.

## **Risk management**

The Trustees in the UK have established a risk management policy for Laughter Africa. The key to Laughter Africa's risk management policy is the 'Corporate Risk Register and Assurance Framework' which identifies the key risks pertinent to Laughter Africa in meeting its objectives and map out the key controls in place to manage them. The Risk Register is updated annually. The major risks to which Laughter Africa is exposed have been identified and reviewed: procedures have been established to mitigate those risks. The Trustees are confident that strong systems and procedures are in place to manage the risks that have been identified. The Risk Register is available for the Charity Commission to see upon request. Appropriate insurance cover is in place for Laughter Africa both in the UK and in Sierra Leone to cover every eventuality. Laughter Africa also insists that all staff and volunteers receive a DBS check (in the UK) or a Police Clearance certificate (in Sierra Leone) as part of the safeguarding policy and procedures. No safeguarding concerns were reported to Laughter Africa in 2020/21 due to the effective and robust safeguards that we have in place.

## **Trustee's remuneration**

All of Laughter Africa trustees give their time voluntarily and receive no remuneration or other benefit for their work with Laughter Africa.

## **Laughter Africa's organisational structure and how decisions are made**

The principles of local ownership and local empowerment are at the heart of all Laughter Africa's work. We have a local Trustee Board. It is important to everyone at Laughter Africa that only local Sierra Leonean staff are employed; thus supporting national capacity building and the long-term sustainability of our activities. The Trustees both in the UK and in Sierra Leone have delegated the running of Laughter Africa to the five Directors in Sierra Leone. The Directors are responsible for different departments:

- Outreach Department
- Interim Care Centre Department
- Family Tracing and Reunification Department
- Administration Department
- Communications, Advocacy and Campaigns department

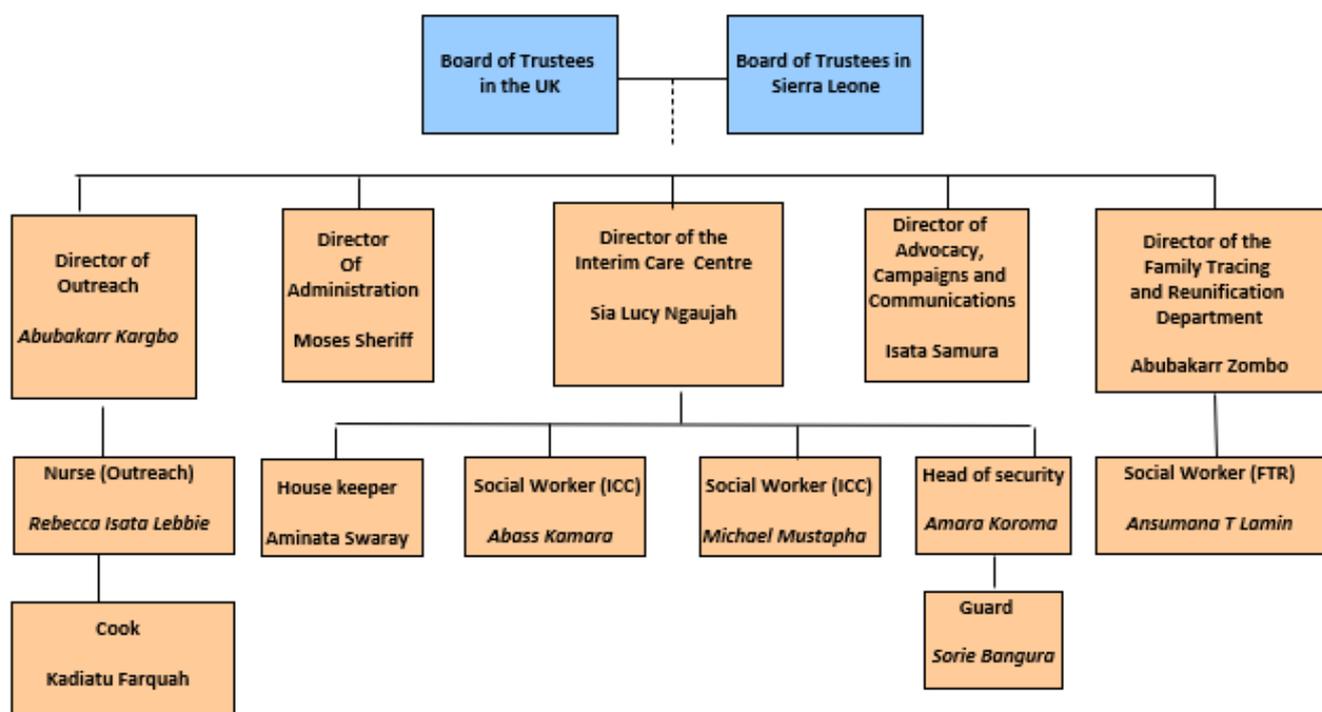
All five Directors are responsible for the day-to-day operation of Laughter Africa in Sierra Leone and managing the national staff and volunteers. The Directors report to the Trustees regularly and the Trustees delegate to the Directors accordingly.

The Trustees are responsible for the overall direction and decision making of Laughter Africa. The Trustees are ultimately responsible in law for the charity, its assets and activities. They take responsibility in the following areas ensuring that:

- Laughter Africa complies with its governing document, charity law, employment law, health and safety legislation, safeguarding legislation, equal opportunities legislation, data protection and fulfilling any other relevant legislation, regulations or statutory duties.

- Laughter Africa prepares reports on its work, and submits Annual Returns, the Trustees Annual Report and financial statements in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Laughter Africa applies its resources exclusively in pursuance of its objectives (Laughter Africa must not spend money on activities which are not included in its own objectives, no matter how worthwhile or charitable those activities are).
- The organisation pursues its objects as defined in its governing document.
- Laughter Africa's vision, mission, values and identity are promoted and maintained.
- There is accountability to all Laughter Africa's stakeholders.
- All employment procedures are in place.
- All the potential risks to Laughter Africa are mitigated.
- Operational management of the organisation is supported.
- Policies are established, monitored and implemented.
- Proper accounting records are kept.
- There is effective and efficient administration of Laughter Africa's resources including funding, insurance and premises.
- They give firm strategic direction to the organisation, setting overall policy, defining goals and setting targets and evaluating performance against agreed targets.
- The organisation is financially stable.
- The assets of Laughter Africa are protected and safeguarded and taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.
- There is proper investment of Laughter Africa's funds.
- The budget is approved and that there is agreement on all financial planning.
- Suitable accountancy policies are selected and then applied consistently.

Here is an Organogram of how decisions are made currently at Laughter Africa:



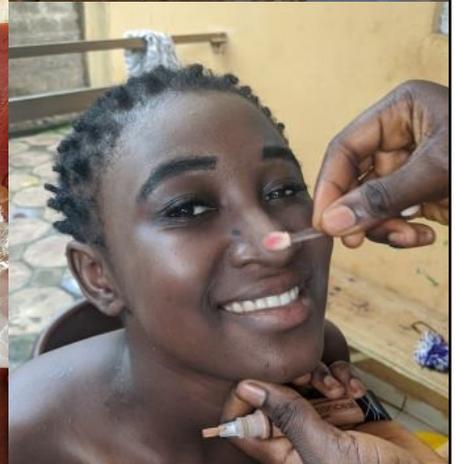
## **Laughter Africa's Policies and procedures**

The Trustees, staff and volunteers are also held accountable by the Laughter Africa constitution and all the internal policies which can be requested via the open information policy. The organisational policies include:

Treating Donors Fairly Policy	Supporter Promise
Acceptance of gifts and hospitality	Environmental Policy
Data Protection Policy (now updated to comply with the GDPR ) and privacy policy.	Evaluation Policy
Dignity, Diversity and Equality Policy	Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures
HIV Workplace Policy	Safeguarding Children Policy
Bullying and Harassment Policy	Position statement on vulnerability and inequality
Health and Safety Risk Assessment	Communications about children policy
Laughter Africa's statement of Accountability	Security policy
Laughter Africa's safer recruitment statement	Security manual
Laughter Africa's human resources policy for all staff working in Sierra Leone (This includes our grievance policy, disciplinary policy, probation policy, redundancy policy, maternity leave, paternity leave, annual leave policy, sick leave policies etc.. in compliance with Sierra Leonean law).	Risk management policy
Laughter Africa's vision, mission and values	Trustee Induction policy
Whistle blowing Policy	Register of Trustees
Staff Code of Behaviour	Capability Procedures
Trustee declaration of interests forms	National staff job descriptions and contracts
Conflict of interest policy	Trustee Declaration Forms
Health and safety policy	Volunteer policy
Security Manual version 2	Gender policy
Vehicle policy	Laughter Africa's volunteer handbook
Supply Chain Manual (procurement policy)	Laughter Africa's Open Information Policy
Security country plan for Sierra Leone	Trustee Job Descriptions
Grievance Policy	Disciplinary Policy
End of Contract Policy	Redundancy Policy
Probation Policy	Working time and office hours
Maternity Policy	Flexible working policy
Annual leave policy	Paternity policy
Adoption policy	Sickness and Absence policy
Retirement Policy	Time off for personal reasons policy

Please note that the financial policies are listed under the financial review (section E). Laughter Africa has every applicable policy recommended by the Charity Commission.

# C. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES



## Summary of the Objects of Laughter Africa set out in its governing document

The object of the CIO is the relief of poverty, particularly but not exclusively by the provision of housing, and the advancement of education for street children and other children or young people at risk in Africa.

## An explanation of Laughter Africa's strategies for achieving the stated objectives

Laughter Africa carries out a wide range of activities in pursuance of its charitable aims. The trustees consider that these activities provide benefit to street children aged 0 to 15. Laughter Africa works with street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone to fulfil their aspirations and to help them to bring about positive change in their lives. Laughter Africa delivers this objective through assisting children in leaving the streets, through the following three-phased approach:

1. **Outreach Work.** This involves the social workers meeting the children living on the streets through day or night surveys. The first priority is dealing with the immediate needs of the street children. They may be hungry and need food. They may be ill or in need of medical care. They may be lonely or grieving and just need a listening ear. They may have been raped and need someone to talk to. They may be having legal trouble with the police or judiciary and need someone to advocate on their behalf. Whatever they need, Laughter Africa is willing to provide. Whilst Laughter Africa's trained social workers will try to encourage them to leave the streets, they are not forced to do so.
2. **The Interim Care Centre.** The Laughter Africa Interim Care Centre is a safe place for street children to live while attempts are made to find their families. At the Interim Care Centre food, clothing, health care, education, counselling, support and other essentials are provided. Activities such as drama, music, sports, cultural dance, arts and crafts and cookery are also available. The Interim Care Centre is a place where the street children can be children and learn to laugh again.
3. **Home-tracing and family reunification work.** This is an integral part of Laughter Africa's approach, through which social workers trace the street children's families in the hope that the parties can be reunited. Reunification with their families is dependent on whether the family situation is safe and secure. If this is not the case, for instance if there is sexual or physical abuse known to have taken place, then an alternative long-term home will be found. Before reuniting a child with their family, we work with both parties to understand the reasons that led to the child turning to the streets in the first place. Our goal is to ensure that the child feels happier and the original issues that precipitated their move on to the streets are resolved. Once the children have returned home, Laughter Africa offers continued support and pays for their school fees and other school support until they finish their WASCE (the Sierra Leone equivalent of A-levels) or pays for vocational training - whichever option the child prefers. Social workers keep in touch with each child and their family to check on their progress and make sure that all is well. If any problems arise then the staff will intervene before the child is tempted to return to the streets again. Social workers visit the children at home at least once a quarter or more often if necessary.

Through its outreach work, establishment of a safe care centre and family reunification activities, Laughter Africa seeks to protect vulnerable children from the dangers of living on the streets, meet their basic health, education and nutrition needs, and ensure their long-term well being.

## **Activities**

### **A summary of the main activities undertaken by Laughter Africa in order to carry out its charitable purposes for the public benefit:**

The main premise of the work of Laughter Africa will never change: the outreach work; the Interim Care Centre and the Family Reunification work. As outlined in last years' annual report, Laughter Africa is divided into five departments:

- Outreach Department
- Interim Care Centre Department
- Family Tracing and Reunification Department
- Communications, Advocacy and Campaigns Department
- Administration Department

### **Our Emergency Response Work**

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 a fire broke out in Susan's Bay, one of the largest slums in Sierra Leone where many street children live. It's a densely populated area with flimsily constructed houses made from scavenged materials, so the fire took hold quickly and ravaged the area leaving thousands of people displaced. We are saddened that the fire claimed the life of a five-month old baby. Many people jumped into the bay to save their own lives but had to helplessly watch on in horror whilst their livelihoods were destroyed. So many people, including the girls from the mobile project, lost everything. We heard the story of 17-year old Famata who was having a fun night with a group of friends at a local football match. They returned to see the whole community on fire, including the Sugabar, where she had stored all her possessions. Famata was heavily pregnant at the time and lost all the money she had been saving and the baby things she had collected in anticipation of the birth. Laughter Africa staff attended the Ministry's Emergency Response meeting, and we sent our team to check on the safety and provide medical care for street children in the area. The Laughter Africa team worked tirelessly on the ground at Susan's Bay for a few weeks after the fire to check on the street children. Aminata, who was living on the streets, gave birth three days after the fire in the toilets at Susan's Bay and was living in the toilets with her newborn baby until we found them. Although the Susan's Bay project had finished when the fire broke out – we were in the middle of our Reunification Week - the project was a huge help in reaching the children in need, since the girls living on the streets already knew us, and they trusted us.

Nine girls, living on the streets in Susan's Bay, turned up at the ICC looking for help after the disaster. The nine girls included four pregnant girls and two girls with young babies. Laughter Africa supplied clothing and toiletries for the nine girls and provided nappies, pap and clothing for their babies. They stayed in the ICC for a few weeks. In fact, one of the girls gave birth in the early hours of Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, while she was staying at the ICC. The labour took all night but Laughter's nurse, Isata, stayed by her side throughout. Fatmata was scared and she was refusing to push, so Isata phoned me to go to the hospital at 4am and see if I could get through to her. As any

one who knows me can testify, I am completely calm under pressure and never panic (not!). Thankfully after watching a lot of Neighbours episodes, I knew what to do. Any way to cut a long story short, the delivery was successful. Fatmata gave me the honour of naming the child, so I chose Sarah, who is the patron saint of Laughter, and Jane after the nurse who delivered her. What a welcome to the world she got! I might have shed a few tears as the dangers of childbirth are a sad fact here.

Meanwhile, four young people living in Susan's Bay, whom we had previously reunified with their families, sadly lost everything in the fire. We provided them with an emergency response pack which included sanitation items, clothing, education supplies, toiletries etc.....One of the girls was pregnant and another girl had a 7 month old baby.

### **The Outreach department**

As outlined in last year's annual report, the Outreach Team established a mobile project in January 2017 in response to the death of two street children, Augustine and Mohamed who died on the streets in 2016. The mobile project takes place five times a week from Monday to Friday from 4pm to 8pm. Each day, medical treatment, food, water, and different activities are provided such as cultural dance, modern dance, art and crafts, games and sports. Over the last year mobile has developed in a new direction. Rather than being static in one area for a protracted period of time, it was decided to alternate the location of mobile in different communities where street children are known to live. For instance, since the last annual report, mobiles have operated in four different locations; Susan's Bay, the City Centre, Portee and Waterloo. The intention is to stay for six months to a year depending on the size of the area and the number of street children who attend. The reason it was decided to move from the City Centre is two-fold. Firstly, most of the young people who attended mobile in the City Centre were older (18 plus) which discouraged the younger street children from attending. These young adults were not serious about changing their lives so it was decided to use Laughter's limited resources to attract younger street children. Also the behaviour of the older boys was atrocious which caused difficulties with the local community. The rent, on the premises, expired at the end of December 2020 and the community and local counsellor would not rent the hall to us again. By working in different communities, the mobile projects attracts younger street boys and street girls which was the original intention of the mobile project idea. This never happened when the mobile was in the City Centre; the boys and girls segregated themselves from each other.

### ***The Mobile girls' project in Susan's Bay***

In October 2020, Laughter Africa established a girls' mobile project in Susan's Bay for a six month period funded in part by the Consortium for Street Children. It finished at the end of March 2021. The idea for the girls' only mobile project came about after hearing the story of Saffie. She is one of our old girls who already has a two year old daughter called Mary. Last year, Saffie had been living on the streets and gave birth without any pain relief in an unfinished building with only a passer-by for help. She never attended a single clinic throughout her pregnancy. We wanted to make sure that this wouldn't happen to anyone else. Sia's experience was similar to Saffie. She is another of our old girls who lives on the street. At the beginning of September, she turned up at

the ICC in labour. We managed to get her to the clinic in Adonkia in time and she gave birth to a beautiful girl named Josephine Sia. Throughout her pregnancy, she too had never attended a clinic or hospital and she received no check ups whatsoever. Both Sia and Saffie are great examples of why our girls' mobile was so necessary as there are so many pregnant girls living on the streets without any support in their pregnancies.

Another reason we believed that the girls mobile project was so important is because so many girls are dying unnecessarily of preventable deaths, particularly from severe STIs. When we speak to the girls about their friends who have died, they say they "died of sick." For instance, Yvonne told us about her friend Josephine, "Two years ago of my paddi Josephine died on the streets. Her private parts were rotten. And she died because she had no medication. She was only 15 years old." Similarly Susan said, "My friend Hawa died while living on the streets. Her private parts got sickness. She was 18. She died in 2020 before mobile started." As Posseh shared, "Another friend Aminata died after her vagina rotted."

In total 296 girls attended the girls' mobile over the 6 month period. The girls came from Susan's Bay, Mo Wharf and Egan Street. The success of the girls' mobile project exceeded our expectations. The attendance, as one might expect, differed each day: the number ranged from 28 - 60 girls attending the centre each night. The initial target was to help 100 girls in 6 months which we achieved in the first month.

One of the main priorities of the girls' mobile project was the provision of medical care. Laughter's nurse, Rebecca Isata, worked full-time at the mobile. She took all the pregnant girls for prenatal check-ups and provided any additional care they needed. Many of the girls gave birth during the project. We provided the new mothers with a 'help a baby basket' kit. Approximately 30 of the girls who attended the mobile project are mothers. Between them all, they have 50 children. Their children often got sick so we looked after their health issues too.

The girls were offered different workshops including COVID-19 prevention and drugs awareness education. Most of the girls were taking the drug known as koosh even the pregnant girls. Koosh is highly addictive and we have seen at least three boys living on the streets who now have serious mental health issues caused by the use of it. And because girls are more at risk of violence and rape on the streets and much more likely to turn to transactional sex for survival, we incorporated sexual health advice, self-defense classes and our full-time nurse conducted HIV and hepatitis rapid tests.

Every day there was a different activity available for the girls to enjoy. On Monday, it was games, counselling and education. Tuesday was modern dance, Wednesday was cultural dance, Thursday was drama and Friday was teaching the girls different income generating activities. At Laughter Africa, we give street-connected children a step up in life, not a handout. A large part of this is teaching them life skills and providing them with career options. The skills we taught to the girls over the 6 months of the project included making jewellery, carpets, raffia skirts, soap, crochet, crochet balls, fish in batter, shoes, bags, king driver, rich cake, hairdressing and how to attach eyelashes, carry out manicures and how to apply make-up (as part of their hairdressing sessions). We are so happy they are starting to diversify their income generating activities from commercial sex work. Another activity we

promoted was music lessons at the girls' mobile. The girls learnt how to play different instruments and we taught them how to sing. Simeon from 'Music Heals' led the sessions. At the end every session they received a meal. For more information about the girls mobile project, please see the achievements section of the annual report.

### ***The boys mobile in Ambrose Street***

Due to the coronavirus restrictions, the mobile was temporarily closed from 1st April 2020 to July 2020. We provided food to street children, living in Lumley, in lieu of the mobile. At the beginning of July 2020, because the government restrictions were reduced, the mobile project was able to return to its original location in Ambrose Street, in the city centre of Freetown. As a precaution against infections we implemented social distancing as well as temperature checks and hand washing. There were no activities provided, just food provision and medical care. Between July and the beginning of October 2020, 96 boys was our highest number. This was our highest number since we started mobile 4 years ago.

The boys' mobile reached 111 street boys from October 2020 until the end of December 2020. By then, all the usual activities had returned to the boys' mobile project: education, counselling and the provision of food and medical treatment. Topics covered under education, include among others, ; hygiene, drugs, and sexual health education. We held a spelling bee competition on Friday 6th November which they loved.

During the last week of mobile of 2020, we suspended our usual activities and carried out different activities for the boys including arts and crafts, football and cultural dance. Arts and crafts involved making Father Christmas beards and hats. For a special Christmas treat on the last day of mobile, we took 52 of the boys to 'Climb Salone.' The new climbing wall which had just opened.

A highlight of the work of that mobile was the case of Tamba. He is a small boy under the age of 10 who had lived on the streets for only a few weeks. He was raped repeatedly by the older boys. They paid him 5,000 leones (less than 50p) so we brought him straight to the ICC while we carried out medical tests and psycho-social counselling. He came to the ICC in mid-December and we are delighted that he has now been reunified with his family. We paid school for him in January 2021. We were delighted that mobile was able to protect the boy in this way. It's one reason we established the mobile in the first place to protect the most vulnerable- boys or girls. It was the reminder that we needed that the boys' mobile is just as important as the girls. Sometimes, because of the boys' bad behaviour, it is easy to forget how vulnerable many of them truly are.

This mobile closed at the end of December 2020 and we moved it to Portee. Although we no longer operate in town we still have the street children come from Lumley and Town for medical treatment at the ICC. Abubakarr is one example. He came to see us in February 2021 very weak, coughing ,he'd lost a lot of weight and was struggling to breathe. The nurse, Isata, immediately took him to the hospital where he tested positive for tuberculosis. Fortunately, treatment for tuberculosis is free in Sierra Leone. When he was well enough to travel we took him home to his father to recover in Bo. Abubakarr is a HUGE fan of biscuits, so in the care package we gave him there was a huge supply of biscuits to keep a smile on his face. He has made a full recovery and he is still at home and we are about to pay his school fees. He has put on weight, stopped coughing and has not returned to the streets which is a miracle in itself. Another example is Sheku.

He was beaten up by a rival gang in the Aberdeen beach area in September 2021. They beat him so badly that his face was disfigured. It was difficult to even recognize him at first. Our nurse, once again, provided immediate treatment for him.

### **The Portee Mobile**

We established our mobile project in Portee, in the Eastern area of Freetown, in February 2021. We closed at the end of July 2021. The project was a huge success. For six months we had 80 street children in attendance most nights. As one of the street children remarked at the end of July, "There's not many street children in Portee now, you have reunified them all." The Headsman and community members of Portee even offered us land to build a permanent structure as they were delighted with the impact we had had on the street children and really wanted us to stay past the initial six months as planned. It is very rare to be offered land, so we were thrilled. However, we had to turn down the offer. One of the highlights from the six months in Portee was our record breakers month when we attempted to break different world records. Some of their favourite record breakers included wife carrying (we changed it to street child carrying as we didn't have any wives available!) and how many rounds of the limbo they could complete in 3 minutes. Other highlights from the mobile project in Portee was when Isata, our nurse, saved the life of a girl who suffered complications after giving birth on the streets in May 2021. She had not pushed out the placenta. Thankfully, with Isata's quick action mother and baby are both doing well and are now back living at home with their family.

We increased the counselling and psychological support at mobile too. One counselling session involved the young people writing letters to people who had hurt them in the past, and then burning these letters as a cathartic symbol of moving forward with their feelings. We had a whole hall of 80 children in complete silent reflection, it was a sight to behold.

The good thing about rotating our mobile around different areas is that we meet the most vulnerable street children in those areas. We have come across more disabled children through our work within the different communities like Fatmata. Fatmata lives with a disability and needs to crawl on the ground to get around. Here's her story:

***"My name is Fatmata and I am 16 years old. My mum died of Ebola. I don't know where my father is. The last time I saw him he denied me and told me that I wasn't his daughter. All my family have rejected me because of my disability. The only person who will let me live with them is my Grandma. I crawl on my hands for hours to go on the streets as my granny doesn't have money so I beg to get money for food. I feel like I am invisible to people. They don't see me. They just see my disability and think I am a fool. People provoke me. People beat me and slap me as they know that I can't fight back. My name on the wharf is the Temne version of millipede, "Nitoro." They just call me a cripple and treat me like I am not important. I can't fight back cos of my disability. I am an easy target."***

The ultimate embodiment of the joy dance can bring is Fatmata. Fatmata lives with a disability that means she cannot walk although she does not let this define her, she lives life to the fullest - she performs on the floor. We would quote the cliché 'dance like no-one is watching', but when Fatmata dances everyone stops to watch and join in the fun she brings. To see a video of Fatmata dancing, please click [here](#). At the moment Laughter Africa supports six disabled

former street children (Please see the achievements section for more information).

### **Waterloo Project**

We moved the mobile project to Waterloo at the beginning of August 2021. Waterloo is a much bigger area than Portee but already by the beginning of October 2021 we have reached 209 street children. Interestingly, Kadiatu, one of the girls who we've met in Waterloo mobile, has Albinism. It is the first time we have met any street child living on the streets suffering from that condition.

### **Interim Care Centre**

Activities carried out in the ICC are the same as outlined in last year's annual report. When children are ready to leave the streets, they stay with us, temporarily, at the Interim Care Centre (ICC) in Adonkia, where there is plenty of room, a big courtyard and most importantly it is very secure. It's a safe place for children to just be children... which after years on the dangerous streets is a welcome relief. We see the smiles back on their faces and they begin to open up to our social workers, who provide vital counselling, to support their return home. We provide activities to keep the young people busy while also teaching them skills which they may choose to pursue as a career. Meanwhile our staff in the Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) team work with the children to trace down their family, and assess if it is safe and suitable for them to return to home. A lot of the time it is, and the family welcome the child back with open arms.

Unfortunately, not all of our tracing efforts have a happy ending. Sallu was staying with us at the ICC when we had to tell him his father had passed away. His father was working hard to provide for his family as a fisherman. In the dark of night, the small boat he was in on collided with a bigger vessel and his boat was destroyed. They found his body several days later. Similarly, one of the boys, Joseph, who came to the ICC in November 2020, lost his father earlier in the same year. He had not heard the news as he had been on the streets and had had no contact with his family. We had to tell him that his dad had died. He was bitten by a snake while looking for Joseph in the bush. The family had no idea where Joseph was until we traced them. He is now living with an amazing aunt who truly loves him and he is attending school everyday.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 we welcomed 141 girls and 46 boys into the ICC. Three of the girls (Gloria, Mariatu and Mariamma) we worked with in 2020/21 had babies of their own; Michael, Christiana and Abdul Aziz who they brought to the ICC. All three babies were perfectly behaved and were a joy to have in the ICC. The babies were between 5 months and 1 year old. All three babies had lived on the streets since their birth - the streets are all that they had ever known.

We provide extensive counselling in the ICC before the children return home to address the issues that caused them to turn to the streets in the first place. We introduced boxing counselling to our programme in May 2021; it's actually an idea which was sparked from a method shown on the TV show "How to get away with murder." The girls get to release their stress physically on a punching bag, whilst also saying aloud affirmations about what they deserve in life. You can see it in action by clicking this [link](#).

We introduced 'Superhero counselling' in June 2021. In the session the young people create their own superhero to include a back story, special powers and design their own mask. So far all the young people have been very creative. Some of our favourite superheroes created include: 'Fly Boy,' 'Captain Salone,' 'Stone Boy,' 'Fish Boy' and 'Stick Boy.' They then starred as their new superhero alter-egos in a set of dramas, think Avengers but set in Sierra Leone. The session ends in a discussion that to be someone's hero you don't need a cape or special powers, you just need to be kind and treat people with respect.

We are always on the look out for new arts and crafts ideas for the children to learn while they stay in the ICC. One of the new activities we introduced in April 2021 was painting on canvas which the children loved. They are taught by one of our old boys Osman who also teaches them how to make shoes and bags.

### ***Family Tracing and Reunification Department***

The FTR department duties are still the same as outlined in last year's annual report. The FTR department's role is to trace the street children's families and reunify them. If the children stay home, we pay their school fees or vocational training. We were very strict in 2020 and any child, who we knew was not attending school regularly or had returned to the streets (even for a few days), did not receive school support for the academic year 2020/21. Before receiving their school supply, each child had to show their report card so we could assess their previous school attendance record. Every street child who stays home receives educational support. Each year, we provide a school starter pack to each student which consists of uniforms, shoes, a vest, socks, books or ledgers, pens and a bag. Not only do we pay for school fees but we also give extra support for the most vulnerable including transportation costs, lunch, bags of rice, mattresses, rent or wheelchairs. We provided bikes to two children, Lamin and Ibrahim, who live in the Provinces, where no school transportation is available. In September 2021, we will be providing school supply and paying school charges/vocational school fees for around 540 children/young people. This is due to the success of the mobile projects in Susan's Bay and Portee as well as our 'second chance' scheme.

As well as the school charges we also pay for extra lessons and the required text books for those pupils who are taking external examinations in the academic year e.g. the NPSE, BECE and WASCE as well as pay all the additional exam fees and charges. In 2020, 60 of our children sat either the NPSE, BECE or WASSCE. We are particularly proud of all the students who sat the BECE— 97% of all the students passed. In 2019, less than half of the young people did. We are particularly proud of Mohamed C and Ibrahim Sorie K who both got a mark of aggregate 13. This is one of the highest marks that you can get in the BECE and both achieved the best marks that any Laughter Africa child has ever got in the BECE. We are particularly proud as both of them have stayed home since their reunification – Mohamed for 5 years and Ibrahim Sorie K for 2 years. In the 2020/2021 academic year, there were about 92 children sitting external examinations. We pay for all the practical items for the young people in vocational schools. Most of the staff receive phone calls from the children and their families. Often the children just phone to say hello but sometimes they might need something like medical care or have an issue at home. The team are on call 24/7 for the children and are ready to go into action whenever needed.

One of the biggest change within the FTR department has been the growth of the business support scheme. We have started to provide tools or other equipment for our beneficiaries or their families to establish their own businesses. From the end of June to the beginning of August 2020, we provided business support (about 1,200,000 leones per family) to fifty families. The idea behind the business support scheme was to counteract the economic ramifications of Covid-19 as food prices increased dramatically in Sierra Leone during the pandemic. Our main fear was that many of the children who had stayed at home, since their reunifications, would return to the streets. The majority of the families (33 families) who benefited from this scheme were those who lived in the provinces. We provided tools, crops and seeds for those who are farmers; tools for those who are carpenters, tailors or welders; and equipment for those who are caterers, shoe makers, electricians, masoners, fish mongers, bread makers, soap makers or make jewellery. We provided livestock such as sheep, chickens or goats if the family didn't have any vocational skill. Here is a breakdown of the 50 businesses we supported through our business support scheme:

- 12 farmers
- 12 livestock (chicken, sheep or goats)
- 9 tailors
- 4 carpenters
- 3 soap makers
- 2 caterers,
- 1 bread maker,
- 2 welders,
- 1 electrician,
- 1 jewellery maker.
- 1 shoe/bag/frame maker
- 1 fish monger
- 1 stone masoner

One example of why this support was so necessary is the case of Mariatu. We first met Mariatu in June 2017 and she has stayed home since her reunification over four years ago. In May 2020, due to economic desperation, her family sold Mariatu to a man who wanted to marry her. He was more than double her age. He paid her parents 900,000 leones (less than £90). However she refused to marry him as she is only 16 years old. He threatened to take her family to the police so her family ran away from the village, leaving Mariatu by herself. He was constantly pressurising Mariatu to marry him even though underage marriage is illegal in Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, despite the fact Mariatu was living at the local chief's house, the man would turn up night and day to harass her, saying things like, "If you and I do not get married, one of us will die." When you hear threats like this and you are a susceptible teenager, of course you will be afraid. We managed to find more family members in another village. She now lives with her grandmother and her uncle. The man who wanted to marry her doesn't know where she lives so she is safe for now. No one will now force her to get married and her family have agreed that she can attend school. We provided her grandmother and uncle with two sheep. Mariatu is doing very well now and is back to being her bubbly, enthusiastic self.

24% of the support we provided was for farmers. In 2019 the farmers were affected by poor harvests caused by the heavy rains in July and August so most of the families had very little left. Some of the families didn't have seeds to plant or even food to eat so were trying to farm on empty stomachs. Most of the farmers usually end up borrowing seeds from Farmers' Corporations and then the family end up paying interest on what they borrow after the harvest. We provided seeds in excess so that the families did not have to borrow from corporations in 2020. This gave them financial stability and independence as they are no longer are getting into debt. The families were ecstatic with the support. Mohamed Ibrahim's granny in Kakuna was so happy she just kept bursting out into local tribal songs for the whole day. We can't put into words the impact of the business support scheme on our families. It really is restoring their dignity and gives them hope in ways we couldn't even imagine. For more information about the business support scheme, please visit our achievement section.

One of the main jobs of the FTR team is to provide 'Help a Baby Basket' kit to all those girls who give birth while living at home. Over the last year (April 2020 - September 2021) we have supplied around twenty-three 'Help a Baby Basket' kits to our young girls who are living at home. We give them the 'Help a Baby Basket' kit as most of the girls don't have anything when their babies are born. They are always delighted with their supply. At the same time, we give them some training about how to care for their children. Most of them also attended our Mother and Baby educational training session in December 2020 (please see the achievement section for more information about the day).

Not only does the FTR department provide school charges, educational equipment, business support, baby support, etc., they also provide medical treatment for any of the children who remain at home. For instance, in October 2021, one of our old children, Mohamed came to us presenting symptoms of TB and hepatitis. At the time of writing this report, he is still undergoing treatment. Another example was in August 2021 when one of our old girls Aisha was rushed to hospital with a swollen belly, and after many scans, was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis, typhoid and malaria. We found out she recently gave birth in secret and received some traditional healing. Isata, our nurse, suspects something might have happened during the delivery. Laughter Africa paid for Aisha's hospital treatment, in total around £150. We learnt that there were three other patients on Aisha's ward with the same symptoms, who could not afford the treatment and unfortunately passed away. It is unfortunate that healthcare is a business in many countries, including Sierra Leone. Ramatu, who has been living at home and attending tailoring school whilst pregnant, was rushed to hospital in Spring 2021 after she gave birth at home and our nurse Isata rushed out there to support her. Ramatu required a blood transfusion, which you need to pay for in Sierra Leone. As her family could not afford to pay for it, Laughter Africa, paid for the treatment. Ramatu has made a full recovery, however, we are very saddened that her baby passed away only four days old. Similarly, another of our old girls Emma gave birth in her house in Spring 2021 and required urgent treatment. Isata went straight away to support her. The reason so many girls give birth at home is that hospitals often try to charge them for treatment; even though it is supposed to be free. Another example is Naomi. In September 2020, Naomi came to us in extreme stomach pain. We were very concerned so took her to hospital. It turns out that she had given herself a home-made abortion. The baby had already died and she herself was turning septic. Thankfully, the treatment was successful and Naomi has made a full recovery and is about to start vocational school in September 2021. We treat a lot of the babies of the girls that we have reunified. The infant mortality of under 5s in Sierra Leone is shocking so we encourage the young people to bring their children to us if they are sick.

Recently, the mother of two children we support came to us in agony, begging for medical treatment. We don't usually treat the family of the street children but she looked really ill and so we made an exception. Isata, the nurse, took her to hospital and it turned out that the mother was HIV positive. Thankfully, she didn't have TB which we suspected and was one of our biggest fears. We got her the HIV medication that she required, which is provided free in Sierra Leone, and she has now started her treatment. Thankfully, her children do not have HIV. The mother is a single mother and if she had remained undiagnosed - she would have died, then there would be no one to look after her children. It made us think that maybe we should try and offer some check ups for the parents /guardians of the children as if anything happens to them then their children will possibly end up back on the streets again. In this case, the mother was too ill to work to make money to provide for her family so this all had a knock on effect on her children: if the carer of any child is ever too ill to work, then how will the child/ children be fed?

One thing we have realised is that just because a child goes home and stays off the streets, doesn't automatically guarantee them a happy ending. This is why the FTR department is so, so important. Girls certainly face more challenges than the boys and the FTR team respond to all the issues and difficulties facing our children and young people. The more girls that we work with, the more issues arise. One of the girls we reunified in June 2020, Mariamma, suffered an attempted rape by the son of her family's landlord. We took her to the hospital for medical treatment and also to the police to ensure that she received justice. She has now moved to a different area with a different family member and is recovering well from her experience. Thankfully, she used the moves that we taught her in the self-defense classes that we run in the ICC to defend herself. We have had to deal with similar issues with other girls like Fatmata in Cockle Bay who was horrifically raped in December 2020.

### **Communications, Campaigns and Advocacy**

Our Communications, Advocacy and Campaigns department started in September 2016 and has been in full swing ever since. The head of Communications, Campaigns and Advocacy changed in 2020 as Kaday Turay left Laughter Africa to work for NACOVERC. Her replacement, Isata Samura, took over in September 2020. Isata has been involved with Laughter Africa since October 2016, so this was a well-deserved promotion.

The Communications team have had a very busy year. This is because the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs were writing a National Strategy on Street Children and were reviewing two other laws: the Adoption Act 1989 and the Child Rights Act. Advocacy and campaigning for this new National Strategy on Street Children was a major focus for Laughter Africa for 2020/21 and will continue to be so in 2021/22 during its implementation stage. Policy change is the best way that we can facilitate change for street children in Sierra Leone. Laughter Africa was asked to be a member of the Child Protection technical working group at the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs which is a huge opportunity to ensure that the changes needed are implemented. James, the founder of Laughter Africa, has attended every meeting of the Child Protection Technical working group since Laughter Africa joined in September 2020. James has also met with researchers from Harvard University and Mr Momoh Turay, the consultant appointed by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, on several occasions to give his feedback on the new National Strategy on Street children. In fact, the consultant overseeing

the review of the Child Rights Act publicly thanked Laughter Africa at the last meeting in December 2020, for attending every meeting and for our contributions. They said that they had learned so much from Laughter staff especially about UN General Comment 21. Both the local consultant and the consultants from Harvard wrote similar sentiments in emails. Laughter Africa co-ordinated the chance for the street children in Freetown to give their feedback on the new strategy too. For more information about this, please see the achievements section.

In June 2020, Laughter Africa joined a coalition of street children organisations based in Freetown. The members include Don Bosco, Pikin Paddy, Street child and St George's Foundation. Laughter Africa is a founding member. The coalition focuses on policy change. We tried to devise a strategy for street children living in Sierra Leone based on 'UN General Comment No 21 on Children in Street Situations' (2017). This is the crux of what we are campaigning for and the coalition have discussed this with the researchers from Harvard and the consultant from the Ministry. Only two countries worldwide have officially adopted a strategy based on General Comment 21: Uruguay and the Philippines. If we are successful and the government adopt the strategy, we will be the first country in Africa to adopt a street child policy based on the UN convention for Children living in Street Situations. It could be the blueprint for other African countries to follow. It could really change street children's lives all over Africa. The coalition met with the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs three times over the last year to talk about the strategy. To read what the consortium of members sent to the consultant in regards to the new strategy for Street children: please follow this [link](#).

Every year on 12th April, Laughter Africa celebrates the International day for Street Children, which provides a platform for the millions of street children around the world to recognise the humanity, dignity and defiance of street children in the face of unimaginable hardships. The theme for this year was that all children deserve access to essential services. To get an education, healthcare and be protected from harm, no matter where they call home. Here's a summary of how Laughter Africa celebrated the day:

- Isata, Laughter Africa's Head of Communications and Posseh, one of the children we support, appeared on radio and tv across Sierra Leone. In addition, we held a press conference that was attended by 17 media outlets.
- A billboard was commissioned in Uppun, a busy thoroughfare in Freetown. Thank you so much to Laughter Africa's volunteer Anna Kirke who designed the billboard.
- Thank you to Laughter Africa's volunteer, Hannah van Helvoort, who designed our very own Laughter Africa Facebook frames for profile pictures.
- The Network for Street Children Sierra Leone website launched, check it out at [here](#)
- The Network also produced T-shirts and posters
- A pop song and video, written and performed by our street children, was released (please see the achievements section for more information).
- For the International Day for Street Children, Laughter Africa held workshops with over 130 children currently living on the streets in Susan's Bay and Portee. Our friends at the Consortium for Street Children developed the activities which explored this year's theme of access to basic services such as healthcare and education. The preconceptions and judgements of living on the streets was a big obstacle in accessing services, "Because we live on the streets, they treat us like we are worth nothing. They can do what they like to us and no one will believe us." Yet the street children had such fantastic ideas on what actions can be taken including free wheelchairs for disabled street children (which cost 5 million

leones), drug rehabilitation, mental health support as well a superb idea of a National Apprenticeship scheme. The most popular idea was the creation a complaints system, where street children can report any corruption or mistreatment to an authority for investigation.

- 80 young people in Portee mobile also got involved in the advocacy and campaigning side as we hosted another workshop with our friends at the Consortium for Street Children. The children wrote letters to the Mayor, President and First lady to advocate for change. To top it all off we held our young people in Portee the most wonderful party afterwards to thank them for all their advocacy work and to celebrate the International Day for Street Children in style!

The day was a huge success. Campaign engagement across all social media was at an all-time high, with over 40k+ interactions, 60.6 million reached and 2,154 uses of #streetchildrenday and/or #accessforstreetchildren!

Throughout the year, Laughter Africa commemorates different days. For instance to mark the Day of the African Child, some of the girls we support in Cockle Bay and Isata, our Head of Communications, attended a rally organised by the Family Support Unit, a part of the Sierra Leone Police to campaign against gender-based violence. The march went from the National Stadium to the famous Cotton Tree.

Various staff and children appeared on different media programmes throughout the year. For instance, Amie (one of the girls we've supported) and Isata (Head of Advocacy), appeared on STAR radio in the middle of August 2021 to discuss the topic of girls living on the streets. The show was a big success and they have already been asked back again for other shows.

Throughout the year, Isata, the head of Communications, Campaigns and Advocacy, Moses, the head of administration, Lucy, the head of the ICC or James, the founder of Laughter Africa have attended every meeting that we have been invited to by The Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, The Ministry of Social Welfare, SLANGO and the Directorate of NGO Affairs at MOPED.

### ***Administration department***

The duties outlined in last year's annual report remain the same for the administration department. The main responsibility for this department is the Sierra Leonean accounts.

We are proud of the incredible team at Laughter Africa who always go above and beyond to make sure that children on the streets and their families are safe, despite the risk to themselves. While other NGOs stopped direct service delivery on the ground because of Coronavirus, Laughter Africa's staff continued to feed the boys on the streets every day from the end of March until July until we could restart our mobile project. The staff didn't have to work but they didn't want to just abandon the children. The fact that the mobile, ICC, FTR and administration teams kept working throughout the Coronavirus is a testament to their dedication and commitment to the children.

To see more information about our work please visit our [facebook page](#) or our [website](#).

### **Public benefit**

The trustees of Laughter Africa have complied with their duty in section 17 (5) of the Charities Act 2011 and The Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 to have due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant. The Trustees paid particular attention to the guidance when reviewing, planning and shaping Laughter Africa's aims, objectives and activities for the year ahead. The trustees have considered how the charity's planned activities would contribute to the aims and objectives that had been set.

### **Volunteers**

The Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank all of Laughter Africa's volunteers in Sierra Leone. Late 2016 saw the creation of our Sierra Leone volunteer scheme. It has been a huge success. We are very lucky to have such a dedicated, hard working and committed volunteer base. We couldn't have achieved everything we have done, without their support. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021, we have had 15 Volunteers/interns come and join us. As of September 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, we have three volunteers.

The trustees would like to say a huge thank you to all our volunteers in the UK too. However, special thanks to the following people who have gone the extra mile for Laughter Africa this financial year:

- Thomasine Warmington (Social media volunteer)
- Anne Marie Stead (Trusts and Foundations Volunteer)
- Helen Stead (creator of Laughter Africa's online gift shop)
- Dave Bixter (Graphic design volunteer)
- Hannah van Helvoort (Graphic design volunteer)
- Anne Kirke (Graphic Design Volunteer)
- Marc North (I.T. volunteer)
- Alison Benson (organised a Christmas concert on Facebook)
- Sarah Blake (who ran the Hackney Half Marathon for Laughter Africa in September 2021)
- Clare Finlay (who ran the Virtual London Marathon in October 2021)
- Five year old Toby (our youngest Laughter Africa volunteer who completed a 46 mile sponsored walk in August 2021)
- Mary Tyrrell (Administration volunteer)

We would also like to say an extra special thank you to our friends at St Patrick's RC High School in Eccles, especially Eddie, one of the teachers. They have been fundraising throughout the year and they arranged the first ever Laughter Africa Charity Golf Day in September 2020 at Styal Golf Club in Wilmslow. To see some of our volunteers, visit [here](#).

# D. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE



## **Achievements**

### **Mother and baby training session**

On Saturday 19th December we decided to carry out an education day for young mums and pregnant girls for the girls from the mobile project and the girls whom we had reunified with their families. This came about because in the last two years, five of our girls, who lived at home, have lost their babies. We wanted to teach the girls pediatric first aid, practical advice in raising a child and to see if we could help make a difference in building their relationships with their children.

About 30 girls who have attended the mobile project in Susan's Bay have children. Most of their children live with them on the streets, although some live with random community members. Between them, they have around 50 children- some girls have three children each. Some of them have no relationship whatsoever with their child. One girl called Naomi, who we reunified in 2018 after she stayed at the ICC, brought her child along. Her mother brings up her child for her so Naomi and her daughter have grown more like sisters. At the start of the day, Naomi said in front of her child "I hate pikin." For many of these girls, it is easy to understand their resentment towards their children: some of the girls are not mothers through their own choice and become pregnant because of commercial sex work or a sexual assault. This makes the relationship they have with their baby challenging. For example, at least two of the girls who we reunified in 2018 after staying in the ICC, Iris and Arunatu, both conceived after being sexually assaulted. Every time they see their children's faces, it serves as a reminder of what happened to them. Sometimes because of their pregnancy the girls are thrown out by their parents. As one girl said, "My family told me that I had brought shame upon them. That I was dead to them." Another girl agreed saying, "The day I got pregnant was the day I lost my mum and dad." Ultimately, we wanted to help the girls work through their feelings as the girls ultimately want to be the best mothers they can for their child- they just don't know how. Altogether we welcomed 70 girls and 42 of their children for the day.

The first session was a paediatric first aid session led by our nurse Rebecca Isata. Among other things, she taught them how to perform baby CPR/ child CPR, what to do if their child is choking, how to treat burns and how to treat a fever. After the paediatric first aid training session, we had lunch. After lunch, we started the psychosocial counselling which included meditation, art therapy and group discussion. We gave each girl and their babies a teddy bear and taught them how this can be used as a comfort or transitional object. It was important that the girls gave something to their child so we asked each girl when they presented the toys to say to their child, "You are my piken and I love you." After the counselling session there was a practical training session. The girls were taught how to change nappies, how to wash a baby and how to dress a baby. We also talked about positive parenting techniques so that rather than hitting their child to discipline them, they should use other non-violent forms of discipline. We taught the girls how to show their child love and different soothing practices including three lullabies. At the very end of the day, we gave the children some small Christmas presents as they left. The day was a huge success, and we plan on carrying out more training for pregnant girls and young mothers in the future. We want to break an otherwise generational cycle of poverty and street-connectedness.

### **Our Advocacy work**

We are immensely proud of our advocacy work over the last year, particularly the consultations with the street children and the song that the street children released as part of our celebrations for the International Day for Street Children:

#### ***Organising consultations with the street children about a new National Strategy on Street Children***

We carried out consultations with the girls and boys from mobile about the new National Strategy on Street Children which the Sierra Leone Government are hoping to introduce this year. The girls' consultation took place in Susan's Bay on

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and the boys' consultation took place in Ambrose Street on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020. There were 7 groups of 8 young people in each session so altogether 56 boys and 56 girls took part: a total of 112 street children and young people have therefore contributed their opinions and experiences to this process. The children and young people were consulted via the use of specially designed exercise, designed to encourage them to share their experiences and develop their ideas of solutions. This exercise incorporated the questions provided by the Consultant, generating responses from the children and young people in an engaging manner. We are really proud of how successful this consultation went. They gave great contributions. To see a list of the girls' and boys' recommendations for what they would like to see a National strategy tackle please visit [here](#). To see their drawings, please click [here](#). They are well worth reading if you have a bit of time. It gives you a huge flavour of what the children experience while living on the streets. If even just some of their recommendations are adopted into the new strategy then life on the streets should become a bit easier for the boys and girls. The consultant released a draft National Strategy for Street Children in January 2021. We are so proud that Laughter Africa is mentioned many times in the report, including the consultation workshops we held with 112 street children.

### ***Song***

"Street Pikin Dem" is written, sung and directed by children living on the streets of Sierra Leone. Pikin means child in the Krio language, and the catchy tune shares the challenges Street Pikin face in Sierra Leone, and their spirit to overcome adversity and triumph. To see a copy of the video please visit this [link](#). On Facebook alone we had over 7500 views. Never mind the views on WhatsApp, Insta, Youtube and Twitter!

### ***Contribution to a research paper for the UN***

Laughter Africa contributed to a research paper submitted to the UN by the Consortium for Street Children for an International Conference. The paper focused on gender-based violence and children living on the streets. We provided evidence of abuse stemming from foreign fisherman and law enforcement. This paper aims to enact change and hopefully prohibit such atrocities in the future. The paper will be presented in Autumn 2021.

### ***Building a relationship with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs***

One of our proudest accomplishments has been our input into the Ministry's Street Children strategy. We attended the regional validation in February 2021 where James, the founder of Laughter Africa, spoke publicly about the stories of abuse and even in some cases murder that the girls have shared to Laughter Africa. A lot of powerful people were present in the meeting. A representative from the Human Rights Commission said that they would launch an investigation into the foreign fisherman accused of these horrific crimes. However, this investigation has still not taken place. Laughter Africa was asked to join the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs specialist committee on street children. It was a huge honour for us and a fantastic opportunity for us to advocate for positive change.

### **Our prevention-based work**

We are particularly proud of our prevention-based work. We love supporting the street children of Sierra Leone, but we'd be happiest if they never took to the streets in the first place. Unfortunately, many children think running away from

home will fix all their problems, which is why we've been ramping up our prevention work. Who better to help educate at-risk children about the reality of street life than street children themselves? On 9th December 2020, the girls and boys from mobile created and starred in a variety of short plays, dances, and musical acts about their experiences, and performed these for the community in Susan's Bay. It was an amazing showcase of talent and we are hopeful it will act as a preventative tool to stop other children from turning to live on the streets. One problem the girls identified is that they often feel discriminated by the community and often receive abuse from community members. So many of the community gathered to watch and it was a great way to begin to bridge the divide between the street children and the community. We are hopeful that the performance is the start of a better relationship between the children living on the streets and the community members who if they understand the reality of the girls' lives then they might have more empathy for them. Here's a [video](#) of the day.

We would like to replicate similar performances to the one we did in Susan's Bay in December but in other areas which have a big contingent of street children too such as Waterloo and Funkai. This is dependent upon coronavirus restrictions.

### **The impact of the Mobile projects in Susan's Bay and Portee**

We are delighted with the success of the girls' mobile project- not just with the numbers of girls who attended every day – but with the long-term impact of the programme. Between October 2020 and the end of March 2021 we reunified 56 girls living on the streets in Susan's Bay with their families. Some of the families had thought that their girls had died as it had been so long since they last saw them. What's even better is that most of the girls that we reunified from the Susan's Bay mobile project also have children of their own which means that there are a lot less under 5s living on the streets. We realised, quickly, that we need to pay school charges / nursery for the children of the girls as otherwise the girls would be unable to attend school or vocational training if they had to look after their children during the day. Even though the girls mobile project ended at the end March, we still have girls coming from Susan's Bay asking for us to reunify them with their families. Since April, we have reunified another 37 girls from the mobile in Susan's Bay with their families. Some of these girls came in September 2021, nearly 6 months after the girls' mobile closed. Its lovely to see the lasting effects of the Susan's Bay girls' mobile. That means altogether we reunified 93 girls living in Susan's Bay. It can be difficult for these children to break the cycle of living on the streets, we are so proud of the wonderful resilience and commitment to a better life these young people show. We have been visiting all the girls from the Susan Bay mobile project whom we have paid vocational school for since January to see if they are attending school. We are flabbergasted to say that 81% of all the mobile girls we have paid for are still attending. This is about triple the number we expected and shows how key vocational education is to encourage the girls to remain home. Of all the stories I have heard from the girls' mobile project, the one story that touched me the most was the kindness the girls showed to others who were affected by the fire in Susan's Bay. One of the volunteers from the project, Musu, lost everything in the fire. The girls living on the streets knew this and bought clothes and other essential items for her (without anyone asking) so that at least she had something to wear. They told her, "You have been there for us, now let us be here for you." I was so proud of them. It showed me the impact that this project has had on them and the values that it has instilled in them: kindness, compassion, and dignity. We had similar success with our mobile project in Portee. The mobile project at Portee reached 275 street children at the project (151 girls/ 124 boys) in six months and reunified a total number of

124 children and young people from Portee with their families. And the even better news...they are all still at home.

### **Business Support scheme**

One of our biggest achievements in the last year has been the introduction of the business support scheme. We are delighted to say that most of the families have been very successful in their businesses. One success story is the story of Abdulai and his family. Abdulai lives in the provinces. He lived on the streets in 2017 and we reunified him in December 2017. The reason he went onto the streets was because he was staying with an aunt in Freetown, but she was too strict and would beat him. We offered his family business support in June by buying his father lots of different material. His father is a tailor who used to sew clothes for people using materials that they had provided. Using the material he was given, he can now make clothes and sell those clothes on, increasing his profit tenfold. Every 2 months he makes approximately 1,800,000 leones which goes a long way for Abdulai and his family. When we visited him in October 2020, we found the business was booming. He now employs 8 apprentices and a local church in the village want to build him a training centre so that Abdulai's father can teach tailoring to the whole community. Abdulai, himself, started a small business selling face masks using the scrap pieces of material from his father. With the money he made he paid for his school charges, school bag and shoes himself. This support is a great example of empowerment and sustainability. The whole point of Laughter Africa is for the street children to become independent and self-empowered, so Abdulai is the embodiment of everything that Laughter stands for. We are so proud of Abdulai and his family.

Another story that particularly touched us was Mustapha C's family in Kenema. Mustapha's mother worked every day for a rich family from 7am until 11pm. She was only earning 20,000 leones per day (less than £2 a day). Even if she was late by a few minutes-they would deduct her salary. Thanks to the business support we gave her she was able to quit her job. She has decided to make and sell her own soap. She said, "I am no longer a slave. I can now sleep at night. No one will ever take advantage of me again. You have given me back by life and my dignity. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Another example of the success of the business support scheme are Ibrahim and Ibrahim. We bought them some welding machines. Since then, they have set up their own business. With the profits they have already made, they have bought themselves a grinding machine worth 1,200,000 leones. They have also rented a small shop with the profits so they now have their own premises. The business support we gave them and the profit it is generating is allowing them to invest in growing their business. Ibrahim even said, "We don't want to ask anything from you again. We want to do it for ourselves."

Another family we supported with business support was Ibrahim Sorie. He was homeless in 2019. We reunified him with his family in August 2019. His mum has a disability and is unable to provide for the family so every day he makes jewellery which he then sells. He provides everything that his family needs while still attending school himself. Without him, his family would suffer. He learnt how to make the jewellery while at the ICC in the arts and crafts lessons. In June 2020, we bought him all the materials he needs to make jewellery. He saved up all the profits to pay for his mum to have an operation which was very expensive. He could have spent that money on anything but he chose to spend it all on his mum. He also paid his private school fees for himself. Laughter Africa's policy is that we only pay for government schools for the young people as we support the Government's agenda of free education so Ibrahim paid private school for himself. These are just a few examples.

We are hopeful that the current business support schemes will flourish. It could be something that we provide to all families of the children we reunify in the future, particularly those families in the provinces. It makes the families truly empowered, self-sufficient and it makes the impact of Laughter Africa's work more sustainable.

### **The successes of the children and young people that we work with**

Whenever one of the young people we work with succeed, we share their joy. Here are some of their most amazing successes from the last year:

#### ***Amie***

A year ago Aminata (Amie) was living on the streets. Today she is playing football in the Sierra Leone Premier League.

Amie turned to the street after a fight with her Aunt, who believed only boys should play football. Like for most of the young people we support, the streets were a traumatic experience. After the market stalls closed for the day she would sleep under the empty tables though this was not a safe place. She was abused for being a girl who wanted to play football, was the survivor of sexual assaults and witnessed her best friend's murder in a gang attack.

Laughter Africa is proud to be supporting Amie from the sidelines; helping Amie off the streets, back home with her Aunt, paying for her education and medical treatment so she can be at peak fitness to compete at the highest level. The female Premier Football league officially launches in Sierra Leone on 17th October and Amie will be a part of it! Her dream one day is to represent her country in the World Cup. Imagine.... from the streets to the World Cup!

Not only is Amie a superstar on the pitch, she is one off the pitch too. In October she begins her Nursing degree at Njala University. She is the first young person we have worked with who has applied for university. As well as supporting her football career, we will be paying for Amie to learn nursing so that she has multiple options for her future.

To quote Amie "Football is my dream and my passion. It is who I am". We are so unbelievably proud of you Amie, you are a role model to all the young people in Sierra Leone and around the world who have experienced homelessness.

Laughter Africa isn't just about supporting the young people through schooling or vocational work, it is also about letting their talents nurture and grow. It's about them reaching their full potential so that they can shine – whatever that talent may be - music, fashion, drama, dance, art or sport.

#### ***Adamma***

One of the young women Laughter Africa has supported to leave the streets is Adamma and she has since found her way to Sierra Leone stardom!

At 14 she lived on the streets for two years as her father had severe mental health issues and couldn't look after her. Adamma's mother had abandoned her at a very young age. But Adamma is a tough cookie and she never gave up on her dreams.

Singing is a passion of Adamma. She's wowed crowds at birthday parties, schools, the stadium and the beach. She even featured on Laughter Africa's single "Street Pikin Dem." Adamma can also act! She stars as the daughter in a Sierra Leone comedy 'Family Issue.' You can see you all the episodes on their [YouTube channel](#) if you fancy a giggle.

Adamma auditioned for two Salone films on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2021. She was accompanied by Lucy, one of our social workers, for moral support who auditioned too. The films are being produced by Netflix and the famous Nigerian Frank Rajah Arase is directing. The film titles are 'Smart, Vicious and Dirty' and 'Fame & Fashion.' They are still waiting to hear back from the production company although they did have a great time at the audition. Imagine a former street child winning an Oscar!

In July 2021, Adamma graduated from a three month make up course that we paid for. Adamma is currently sitting her WASCE and wanted to learn a new skill for after her exams. Not only did she get first place on the course but the institution where she studied wanted to give her an internship. Adamma has set up her own business so when she finishes her WACSE she can make a lot of money by being a make-up artist. It is a new career for her. She also creates tie dye hats, t-shirts and socks.

That's not enough for Adamma. She sat her WASCE University Entrance exams in September 2021 and hopes to study medicine. The results come out in the new year. Laughter Africa is so proud of Adamma, and all the young women we support. We are proud to fund the education and tools these young people need to give them the step up in life they deserve.

### ***Abdul***

A huge congratulations to Abdul, who took first place in a local spelling bee competition in his area in June 2021. We first met Abdul living on the streets 5 years ago. He is disabled and didn't have a wheelchair. He would crawl on his elbows to get around the streets. He had never been to school, but had taught himself to read and write on the streets. Last year he got the highest exam mark in his school. He has an amazing foster family who really love him; their only complaint is he never sleeps – he is always studying. To see a video of Abdul talk about his life, please click [here](#).

### ***Ibrahim***

Ibrahim is 19 years old. For five years he lived on the streets; "My mum didn't have money when I was growing up so she sent me to live with my uncle who had small small money. My uncle would flog me constantly so that's why I went on the street."

Ibrahim has been home now for 3 years and in that time he has trained as a welder. Thanks to support from Laughter Africa Ibrahim now runs his own welding business. We provide tools for him every year, just while his business is still growing. We could end the story here and still be proud of Ibrahim. But it doesn't end here. Ibrahim has made enough money from his welding business to pay a long-term lease for land to build his new workshop. He's also providing apprenticeships for other Laughter Africa children. "I want to help other street children. I want to show them love. I don't like them to strain in the streets. I have three boys from the streets now- Wilson, Mohamed and Ibrahim- who work for me. The same love that Laughter showed me, I now want to give back to my friends on the streets. I want to help more

after my business grows." We are so proud of him and his kindness to others.

### ***Adamsay and Amie***

Over the last few months we've become a lot more fashionable here at Laughter Africa. Thanks to Adamsay and Amie who have been making clothes for the Laughter Africa team, who wear their clothes with pride.

Amie went on the streets when she was 10 years old after the death of her mother and father. Her uncle had stolen all of her inheritance. We see this often, extended family believe the girls have no rights to the inheritance- just because they are under 18 and female. Laughter Africa is helping Amie attend school, and next year she will be her WASC Exams in order to graduate high school. Amie is also a young mother "I gave birth to my beautiful daughter Fatmata on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Sadly my boyfriend died a few months ago- he was a bike driver. He was involved in a motorbike accident so I am alone with my pikin. I decided to start making country clothes to make money for my daughter. I taught myself how to crochet. My baby gives me pleasure-she is my pride and joy."

Adamsay's mother had severe mental health issues and was unable to care for Adamsay and her siblings which lead them to the streets. Her father and step father have passed away. She doesn't know her exact age but she thinks that she is around 17. Adamsay said, "Living on the street is like hell. Suffering, everyday I had to struggle to get my daily survival." However, Adamsay keeps a positive attitude, "I enjoy learning tailoring. I have met different people at vocational school and I have made new friends." Her dream job is to one day do all the tailoring work for Laughter Africa. She is also a young mother to an 18-month year old son, Abubakarr who is named after one of Laughter Africa's social workers.

Amie, Adamma, Ibrahim, Abdul, Amie and Adamsay embody everything that Laughter Africa encapsulates giving street children the tools they need to empower themselves to change their lives and fulfil their potential. They then use this potential to empower others. We are so proud of each and every one of them.

### ***Bilkissu***

The NPSE (the salone equivalent of SATS) results came out in August 2021 and the majority of our children passed with flying colours. A special congratulations to Bilkissu who got a score of nearly 320!

### **The successes of our staff**

Whenever one of our staff succeed and achieve their dreams, we share their joy. In June 2021 our staff members Moses and Lucy both graduated from UNIMTECH university. Moses's degree is in 'Networking and Telecommunications' while Lucy graduated in 'Development Economics.' Lucy is the first girl from her family to ever go to university. Moses has worked at Laughter since we first opened. In fact, he was the first person we ever interviewed for a job while Lucy started in November 2015. They have worked really hard to achieve their degrees and we couldn't be prouder. We have another four staff who are currently studying at university: Abass, Zombo, Isata and Lamin. It is important for us that our staff achieve their dreams too.

### Long term success

Over the last few months, our FTR team have been visiting all our old young people as part of our 'second chance' months. The good news is we have now finished visiting them all and we now know the exact figure of young people at home since we reunified them with their families. As of June 2021, we found that 67% (532 children) of our young people are at home, 22% (168 children) are on the streets, 3% (26 children) are being supported by another organization, 7% (61 children) have either moved house or changed their numbers so there is no way for us to contact them and 1% (9 children) have died. We were pleasantly surprised with how many young people are living at home.

### Recognition of work

We have started getting recognized in the different communities by the Headsmen and different community leaders. For instance, in September 2021, we approached the headsmen in Funkia to ask permission for us to work in their community for an event in October. He said yes straight away. He said that he knows all about our work as he has seen us carry out follow up visits with other girls who live within that area so whatever we want to do in his community- he is happy to support. Other headsmen with whom we have a strong relationship include the headsmen of Tombo, Waterloo, Portee and Susan's Bay. For instance, the chief of Tombo phoned us a few weeks ago to thank for us for supplying the school starter packs for a lot of the girls in his community.

Thanks to a lot of meetings over the last year at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, the Ministry staff are a lot more aware of our work too and we have developed a good working relationship with them. In fact, we have been given a lot of referral cases from the Ministry of Gender over the last year.

We have also developed a good relationship with key members of the ministry. For instance, one senior member of the leadership team said to the founder after a meeting, **"Why do you care about street children? Why are you so passionate?"** It was nice to have Laughter's enthusiasm and passion noticed. Similarly, a senior member said once, **"I wish I could live at Laughter. It sounds so much fun."**

Another member said of the founder, **"He like kalo kalo."** This is a compliment. It means he is fun. Another representative said this from the Ministry of Social Welfare too.

Meanwhile another member of the ministry said to Laughter Africa, **"Thank you very much for your effort and your support in complementing the government's efforts in providing services for children. The ministry really recommends you. Most times when we have our meetings, we talk about Laughter Africa. That is very good."**

One time we had a referral from the ministry of a girl who was over 20 with a very bad attitude and was not really a street child. The following day we returned her to the ministry because of this attitude- she wasn't ready to change yet. One staff member told the girl, **"If Five o (the founder's nickname) can't put up with you, then no one can."**

Meanwhile we received a lovely email in October 2021 from a Laughter Africa supporter based in Germany. He said:

***"I heard about your work when I travelled through Salone in 2019. I am very happy that I could support your valuable work and thus the girls a little bit."***

This really made our day as we didn't know that many people knew about our work apart from the street children. We are not able to afford media coverage as it is quite expensive in Sierra Leone and we prefer to spend our money on food, medicine and school fees/equipment. So the fact that a stranger heard about our work shows us the impact we must be having.

### **The Lila Foundation**

The children we help go through challenges that are unimaginable to most. So wherever we can we give them the chance to just be kids. Thanks to the Lila foundation, we had one of those days in September 2021. Our Interim Care Centre was filled with games that brought a smile to everyone's face, and a few tears of joy on mine. We were joined by over 100 children from the community of Adonkia where the ICC is based. The giant carousel made from scratch was an absolute favourite, there was so much joy and laughter. We definitely lived up to our name Laughter Africa!

### **Sallieu**

A few years ago we met a young boy who was deaf and couldn't speak living on the streets. He was affectionately known as 'Mumu boy.' He used to visit our mobile project, but stayed in the outside and was too shy to join in. One day we were doing an activity involving the children writing messages to the Government about their lives on the streets, and in came Mumu boy, who had found a piece of scrap paper and signalled for a pen so he could join in. Whilst his message was illegible, he still wanted to be heard. For someone who couldn't speak, his voice was the loudest that night.

We lost touch with Mumu boy as being unable to communicate made it very difficult for us to reunify him. But we never give up! In September 2021 we discovered where he lived and learnt his real name...Sallieu! We met with his mother and provided him with a school starter pack as well as paying his school fees. His joy is contagious. As he so grateful he has told all the other mute children in Freetown. It was wonderful to be reunited with Salieu again after all this time!

### ***A verbal commendation from the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs***

At two different meetings with all the NGOs in September 2021, one with the Ministry of Social Welfare and another with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Laughter Africa was publicly praised for our quarterly reports which are submitted regularly to the Sierra Leone government. Someone asked a question about the ideal report template and the representative from the Ministry said that Laughter Africa wrote the best reports. They told the crowd that our reports are always on time and full of information. The representative from the NGO unit also echoed this. It was very re-affirming to receive such praise as the administration team spend a long time preparing these reports and it was nice to know that they are read, acknowledged and appreciated.

### ***Radio one show***

James, the founder of Laughter Africa, appeared on Radio 1 Breakfast with Greg James on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 as part of the 'Up Yours Corona' segment. Originally, James was pencilled in as the backup option, but after the researcher spoke to James he was promoted as the main speaker representing Sierra Leone. While other participants only featured briefly, James was on the radio for 10 minutes. He was heard by over a million listeners. The feedback on social media was amazing- there wasn't one negative comment. His appearance on the radio led to a small influx in donations which was much needed at the time. James was even asked back by Radio one due to his popularity and listener feedback, but he politely declined. On Christmas day, Radio 4 repeated James's appearance as part of their highlights from the year show which was a huge honour.

### ***Social media presence***

Our social media presence has nearly doubled over the last year, thanks to the amazing work of Thomasine Warmington, our new social media volunteer. Our Facebook views alone have reached thousands. Just one example of this is that Laughter Africa went viral on a Facebook group called 'Bin isolation Outing-bin nation.' We had over 7,100 likes and 2,100 comments on the post of the boys singing 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.' We have also joined Instagram. It is great that a lot more people are hearing and reading about Laughter Africa than ever before.

### ***New online virtual gifts shop***

In November 2020, Laughter Africa volunteers Helen Stead and Thomasine Warmington helped design a new online shop for our virtual gifts which is now open all year round. The online shop was a huge success. In fact, in 2020 we doubled the amount raised from the previous year. Thomasine and Hannah Van Helvoort also introduced digital downloads which were hugely popular. The new gifts introduced in 2020 included:

- buy a sheep for a family
- buy a chicken for a family
- Provide business support for a family
- buy some hair (The hair will be used as part of our hairdressing sessions in the ICC and at the mobile project to teach the girls different ways to make income).

A big thank you to the ultra-talented graphic designer Laughter Africa volunteer Dave Bixter for his work updating all the old gifts as well as creating the 4 new ones.

## Challenges

### The raping and brutalizing of the girls

One of the biggest challenges we are currently facing is that there are issues that we need to speak out about which will anger the Sierra Leone Government. Everything is political in Sierra Leone - even issues which shouldn't be. For instance, during the consultations, the Ministry was very defensive when NGOs brought up the fact that there is no free education in Sierra Leone because the schools apply extra charges. This is a huge factor which causes children to migrate to the streets as their families cannot afford the charges. However, those present saw it as a personal insult against the government. We particularly wanted to speak out about the abuse perpetuated by the foreign fishermen and the fact that girls are being raped by the police but this will put us in direct opposition to the government. Our fear is that if we speak out about these issues then we will be unable to re-register as an NGO in January 2022. Re-registration takes place every two years. However, we cannot in good conscience just ignore what we know. Change only happens when people are brave enough to speak out! One of our core values is having the courage of conviction:

**“Laughter Africa always speaks out for truth and justice. This requires us to be creative and radical, bold and innovative – without fear of failure – in pursuit of having the greatest positive impact on the lives of street children. We will not rest on our laurels; we constantly challenge ourselves to be more effective, creative and innovative and we will challenge others to think and act differently towards street children. We will strive to achieve this by being passionate, enthusiastic and courageous in our beliefs.”**

As we state on our campaign website page:

***‘When we see injustice we won't be silenced. No matter the issue. No matter the consequence. We will speak out.’***

We made a promise to the street children when Laughter Africa first opened that we would be advocates of their truth and we must stick to our promise. Here are some of the issues that we need to address in the next year, some of which will put us in direct conflict with the government:

#### **1. Police Rape:**

Out of the 65 girls who have stayed in the ICC in 2021, 52% admitted to being raped by the police. Aminata said,

***“The police raped me twice. The first time I was raped by two policemen. The second time there was one policeman. I was sleeping where the market women sell and it was past curfew. They said that they were going to take me to the police station for breaking curfew but they said if I had sex with them, then they would let me go. They took me to an unfinished house. The other policemen caught me smoking me koosh. He asked me for money but I didn't have any so he made me have sex with him.”***

Meanwhile Esther clarified,

***“When you are out at night, the police will ask for money or they will hold you. If you don’t have money, then you have to lay down with them. Its happened so many times to me- over 10 times at least.”***

This was reiterated by Ramatu,

***“The policemen have beaten and raped me many times. Its so happened so many times- I lost count years ago. They tell me that if I don’t lay down with me, they will lock me in a cell. I was scared and had no choice.”***

This type of story was repeated again and again. Most of the girls had been raped more than once by the police and usually there was more than one officer involved. This is something that we will be addressing as part of the Network for Street Children Sierra Leone in 2021/22. We hear those incidents have increased ten-fold since the Covid-19 curfew was introduced. Another girl called Esther confirmed,

***“During the curfew, the police would arrest me but they forced me to sleep with them. It happened to me boku times. Sometimes two policemen at once would rape me. It has only just started happening since corona and the curfew was introduced. The only time I have ever been raped was by the police.”***

Although this matter has been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, no further action appears to have been taken in this matter.

## **2. Foreign Fishermen**

Many of the girls we have supported have experienced serious sexual exploitation at the hands of fisherman, often from Korea and China, who arrive in Freetown’s ports and commit offences against street-connected girls. The girls drew attention to one particularly horrifying incident in August 2020 when a girl died after she was made to have sex with a dog aboard a Chinese fishing vessel. Subsequently, another incident of the same circumstances has occurred in Freetown, with yet another girl dying after being forced to have sex with a dog. One of the girls from the Susan’s Bay mobile, Elizabeth, told us about the death of her friend Kadiatu who also lived on the streets.

***“We often go to see the Chinese fisherman on the trawler boats where we are paid money to sleep with the men. Usually we get around 100,000/150,000 leones. If you steal from the fishermen, they throw you overboard into the sea. Kadiatu went to the Chinese fisherman to find money. When she was at the boat, she was made to have sex with a dog. She was given 200,000 leones. After one day, she became sick. She said that she didn’t have money for hospital. So she died on the streets at the age of 17 in August 2020.”***

Esther confirmed, ***“My friend Mariama died while living on the streets in 2019. She went to the foreign fisherman and they made her sleep with a dog. She got sick and she died afterwards.”***

Laughter Africa are also aware of several reported incidences of girls in street situations being thrown overboard these fishing vessels after being sexually abused, where they have drowned. One girl Posseh said,

***“My best friend FA went to the foreign fishermen and never returned. A week later I met the girls who went with her and they told me that she was thrown overboard and drowned in December 2020.”***

Her death was never investigated and she has just been forgotten about. As Zainab explained,

***“ I go to the Chinese fisherman. After I finish sleeping with them- they would pay me less than we agreed. And if you argue they will either beat you or throw you overboard.”***

Many girls have died in these circumstances, yet as they are living on the streets- no one notices their disappearances.

Although the issue of the foreign fishermen has been reported to the Human Rights commission, Head of Police, the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs and the UN by different street children organisations, including Laughter Africa, no further action has been taken. We believe that this is because of how dependent Sierra Leone is on China and Chinese money/investment.

### **3. Pregnancy and Childbirth:**

Most of the girls ended up giving birth on the streets, as they could not afford the exorbitant prices charged by the hospitals. Even though childbirth is meant to be free in Sierra Leone hospitals, some of the girls were told to pay up to 500,000 leones. As Isatu says,

***“I gave birth to my second child in a shack. I couldn’t afford to go to the hospital as it is boku boku money.”***

Meanwhile Kadiatu said,

***“I gave birth to a baby boy on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2021 but he died. I didn’t give him name. I gave birth in a hospital. The hospital charged me 500,000 leones but I begged so they said that I could pay 300,000 leones instead even though it is meant to be free.”***

This also relates to pregnancy clinics. Even though clinics are meant to be free, the girls are unable to afford all the medicines and tests that are prescribed. 5 girls out of 65 had lost their babies on the streets. Adamsay said,

***“I gave birth to a little girl on the streets in January 2020. I didn’t have money to pay for the clinic so I had no choice but to give birth on the streets. Sadly my little girl died the same day.”***

Meanwhile Kadeja sadly lost her son on Tuesday 21st April 2020. He was called Yusif. He was eight months when he died. She said:

***"He was sick. His body was warm, fever, he was crying. He had a runny nose."***

One of the girls, Zainab from the mobile girl's project in Susan's Bay, sadly lost her child Zainab Junior in November 2020. She was born on 1st September 2020. She gave birth in a house as she couldn't afford money to go to hospital. She never went to any clinic throughout her pregnancy as she didn't have money to give the nurse. They both lived on the streets. Zainab took her child to hospital but it was too late. Her baby died aged just 2 and half months. Although there was no post mortem- we believe that she died from malaria.

At least two girls mentioned that their friends had died in childbirth. Mariamma mentioned that her friend F.A. died in childbirth:

***"She gave birth in a shack because she couldn't afford hospital treatment. They rushed her to hospital as she was bleeding too much but it was too late for them to do anything. She was only 17."***

Although this matter of hospitals illegally charging girls for child birth has been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs, no further action appears to have been taken in this matter.

Connected to this issue is that at least five of the girls spoke about the fact that they miscarried their babies on the streets. They were beaten by men in the stomach. One girl, Ramatu. said,

***"I got belly on the streets but I lost the baby. One man I lay down with beat me in the belly. I told him to pay me and he refused so when I argued back, he beat me and I lost my child."***

This story was replicated time and time again.

#### **4. Violence, mutilation, torture and murder:**

The violence against girls living on the street is completely shocking and unacceptable. One girl, Absatu, talked about her friend Aminata:

***"Mi paddi, Aminata, died in December 2020. She went to see a customer. They arranged for 150,000 but he only gave her 5,000. They argued and the man stabbed her in the throat. He ran away afterwards."***

Another girl, Esther., talked about two friends who were mutilated:

***"Aisha died last year. They found her body on the beach. She had her hands, toes and ears cut off. No one was ever caught but it is believed to be witchcraft. Another of my friends was Hawa. They found her in the same place as Aisha a few weeks later. They had cut off her breasts. And they had cut out her vagina."***

Amie shared the heartbreaking story of her friend who was the victim of a hate crime,

***"Mi paddi Marie (Kaka) was a lesbian. She died as a result of a hate crime. She was my best friend. She was gang raped by a group of men in Dryzac on January 24<sup>th</sup> 2021. They chose her because they knew she was a lesbian and they wanted to make her straight. Because she tried to fight back- they raped her to death. No one was arrested."***

A lot of the girls from the Susan's Bay project talked about one of their friends Borotelli who died on 12th August 2015. She was raped and after she was raped the man put sand in her mouth, nose and vagina and she suffocated to death. The man was never caught.

At least eighteen of the girls talked about 18 different friends who had been "raped to death" on the streets. Usually, their bodies were found dumped the next day. In every single case, no one was ever held accountable. Not one of the girls has received justice. Probably the most heart-breaking story was Aminata F's story. She is 13 years old and lived on the streets for two years before Laughter Africa found her. She went over the streets after her mum and dad died in car accident. She said;

***"The streets are bad. You lose your life quick. I should have died a long time ago. One friend I met on the streets was a small pikin. One day a group of men chased us. I ran and hid. They caught her. They raped her until she died. She was bleeding terribly. I watched her die."***

Fatmata, told us the story of Zainab, 17, who was killed on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020,

***"We were coming home from a club and a group of 4 men tried to attack us. They stabbed her in the stomach and they stabbed me in the arm. After they stabbed me- they took me to an unfinished house and raped me. When I returned, my friend was dead. No one was ever arrested for the crimes."***

Similarly, Josephine, told us about the death of her friend Fatmata,

***"We were coming home from a club and a group of men attacked us. They raped her and they raped me. I was the lucky one as they raped Fatmata until she died. I was right next to her as she died. I was yelling and screaming for help but no one came. She was my best friend. Fatmata was only 16. She died in November 2020."***

Meanwhile Memunatu. talked about her friend, Kadiatu who was 16:

***"In 2019, me and my paddi wanted to go upline to the provinces to hustle. On the way we hitched hike. The driver said he only had room for one girl so he took my friend. However, he raped Kadiatu and cut off her vagina and breasts. A farmer saw the whole thing and reported the man to the police. They took him to court but the father of the accused paid a bribe so they dropped the case."***

## **5. Rape and the difficulty of reporting rape**

50 out of the 65 girls had been raped while living on the streets (77%). Most of them had been gang raped. Lombai admitted that she had been raped over 20 times on the streets. Even the 8 and 9 year olds were survivors of rape. As Adamsay clarified,

***“I have been raped over five times. But after a while I stopped counting as it happened so much. Once I was raped by nine men, one after the other.”***

One of the most heart breaking stories that we were told was Aminatas'. Aminata is gay and she talked about the horrific bigotry and violence facing gay people living on the streets. She experienced corrective rape:

***“ I am a lesbian. I have had a girlfriend for five months. I was raped one time on the streets by two men in Susan’s bay- they raped me because they wanted me to become straight as they knew I was gay. They said that because I play football I have no time for men. They wanted me to know what a real man felt like. Afterwards I felt physically sick and I couldn’t stop bleeding. I couldn’t even walk fine. People bully me on the streets and in the community because I am gay.”***

Girls with disabilities were particularly vulnerable. Fatmata explained,

***“ I have been raped 5 times. 2 of those times I was gang raped. They said that if I refused then they would kill me. I can’t fight back cos of my disability. I am an easy target.”***

Boys were also raped on the street. Out of the 30 boys that we had stay in the ICC in 2021, 20% had been raped while living on the streets. Alhaji said,

***“I was raped once on the street by two men. I was sleeping on a market table and the two men came along holding a knife. They told me that If I didn’t let them have sex with me then they would kill me. It hurt. I was bleeding afterwards. I was too ashamed and I didn’t have any support to go to the police. I felt so angry.”***

Meanwhile Abdul confirmed,

***“I was raped once by two men. I was sleeping at a market table and they threatened to kill me if I didn’t lay down with them. They held a knife to my throat. It hurt me. I didn’t go to police. I didn’t even think about going to the police. I cried afterwards.”***

Alusine confessed,

***“On the streets they butterwaiss me once. I was sleeping and then a gangster put his hand over my mouth. He held a bottle and threatened to stab me. “***

In December 2020, we came across the case of Tamba who was ten years old and who was being raped by the older boys.

Most of the girls and boys did not report their rapes to the police. However, the few who did approach the police had difficulty reporting their rapes. Adamsay talked about her experience,

***“The policemen will only help you if you sleep with them first. For example, when I was raped, I went to report the matter to the police but they told me that they would only investigate the matter if I slept with them first. It’s happened four times now. Not just the same policeman or police station- I have been to 4 different police stations and they all did the same thing.”***

This was accentuated by many of the girls including Adamsay,

***“One night I was raped and a police man found me crying and asked me what I was doing out late. I told him I was raped and he said that he would help me as long as I slept with him first. But he lied, after I slept with him, he never helped me. He just dismissed me like I was nothing.”***

This has led to the girls no longer reporting their rapes. As Ramatu clarified,

***“I was scared to report it to the police as I think that they will want to lay down with me again. I have no option but to bare.”***

Sometimes the police just didn’t take their accusations seriously. As Isatu explained,

***“I went once to the police station after the first time that I was raped to report it- they just told me to bare -they didn’t do anything. So I didn’t bother going back the second or third times that I was raped.”***

Meanwhile Susan commented,

***“One time a man beat me so I went to the police to file a report. However, they told me to go to a different police station in Eastern. It’s because I am a street child that they don’t take me seriously.”***

Edna agreed,

***“After they raped me, they beat me too. I went to report them at the police station but no one helped me. They just ignored my complaints.”***

The girls believe that there is a culture of impunity for sexual offences committed against them, rooted in gender norms.

One girl stated,

***“When we are raped, the man should get life imprisonment, but they don’t. It’s like the law doesn’t apply to us. That we don’t matter.”***

One of the boys, Idrissa who had been raped said that, **“I was afraid to go to the police.”**

This is something that we will be addressing as part of the Network for Street Children Sierra Leone in 2021/22. We want to make the whole process of reporting rape easier so that more perpetrators will be brought to justice.

## **6. Commercial sex work**

97% of all the girls in the ICC this year had turned to commercial sex work for their survival. The girls could receive anything from 5,000 leones up to 50,000 leones. Some of the girls who engaged in commercial sex work were aged 8 and 9 years old. There are two problems related to commercial sexual exploitation include non-payment for sex and physical assault when having sex for money. As Nancy explained,

***“Sometimes after I lay down with them. They wouldn’t pay me. They would beat me instead.”***

Another girl reported,

**“I was stabbed, beaten and cursed by a man that refused to pay me for sex.”**

This was a common problem for many of the girls. Some of the girls would not receive money, but other things instead. As Fatmata explains,

***“I have to lay down with man to get food. The fisherman don’t always have money so they sleep with me for fish. But people exploit me when I try to sell the fish. Sometimes I am paid 10,000 leones for a fish that is worth 30,000 leones. Because of my disability, people think that I am stupid and take advantage of me.”***

10% of the boys who have stayed in the ICC in 2021 also admitted to engaging in commercial sex work to survive while living on the streets. Usually this is the domain of the girls. Boys usually collect cup cup, tote or bloom and blye. This is a stark reminder to focus on all genders in our upcoming sexual exploitation advocacy campaign plans which will be starting in October 2021 (please see the future plans section for more information).

## **7. Child Trafficking**

One of the boys Alusine who stayed with us in September 2021 shared with us a story before he left,

***“On the streets, someone tried to kidnap me. A pastor. However, he was arrested and I was saved. I was at the beach and he offered to give me and my friends a lift home. Instead he tried to traffick me.”***

This is the first time that we have come across a child trafficking case but we know that it does happen in Sierra Leone. Sometimes the young people might be trafficked for forced labour, sexual abuse or for rituals. To see an article from the BBC in 2018 about children being kidnapped for rituals, please click [here](#). Locally it is known as 'catcha catcha' and street children are an easy target as no one knows if they been taken. This is something we will monitoring in the build up to the 2023 election and will be educating the children about.

### **Corruption and political instability**

The major challenge facing our work is the political and civil instability in Sierra Leone. Corruption in the country is at an all-time high. Every day there is a new story about corruption. There is a lot of tension and dissatisfaction within the country. In April 2021, there were a few days of riots between bike riders and the police over the brutality of the police. The images were scary. Land grabbings are also at an all time high. One man was shot in Hastings by a police officer over disputed land in April while students, who were protesting peacefully at their university, were shot at by police in April. The best example of this tension in the country is in Adonkia, where Laughter Africa is based. Adonkia is usually the most peaceful area. However, in July 2021, I was caught up in a riot in Adonkia. I was returning from a meeting. In the next village Dodo, there was lots of fighting and violence over the issue of land rights which spilled over to Adonkia. A politically connected person claimed that they owned all the land in Dodo so she 'arranged' for the police to raid the area. The police brought with them local gangsters from Lumley to help them. The gangsters from Lumley were armed with machetes and cut glass and were standing side by side with the police. The gangsters destroyed all the houses in Dodo and stole people's money and property. It was terrifying. There was over 50 of them. The police also released tear gas. I rushed to a neighbours' house for cover (Thank you Neneh. Alhaji and SorryBintu!). We rubbed potato leaf in our noses as that stops the effects of the tear gas. As usual in the face of danger, I stayed immensely calm. I might have yelled. "Run for your life" to Auntie Amie (our cook). The next day the community members from Dodo retaliated against the police and there was another day of fighting. Thankfully peace has now been restored in Adonkia but it was terrifying at the time! We are quite apprehensive about the upcoming election in March 2023 as the campaigning is about to begin. The Government of Sierra Leone reportedly bought more ammunition in August 2021.

Coupled with this is the fact that costs have risen extortionately over the last 3 years. A bag of rice has risen from 180,000 leones in March 2018 to 330,000 leones (as of September 2021). The cost of cooking oil has followed the same trajectory. People really are struggling to survive. For instance, if you walk around different communities you will hear the slang "the game don big. The game don bafta. The ground don dry." The increase in food prices is fuelling the tension within the country.

Connected to this is the fact that the country ran out of money in January 2021. There was no money in the banks. Sometimes we could only access 1 million leones from our account, even though we had more than that in the account. We needed a lot more than that to operate. We could not open at full capacity and thus the ICC remained closed until February.

## **Strategy**

Sadly, we realised that the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs' agenda is different from the NGO's agenda when it comes to producing a strategy on street children. The NGOs working with street children would like a rights-based approach based on General Comment 21 whereas the ministry just want to remove street children from the streets. Not one of the street children's suggestions was included. This dichotomy in agendas came to a head at a very tense meeting in March 2021. Harvard University carried out research, but the Ministry never published that research, although it has been completed. We saw a summary of their report and the Harvard researchers seemed to accentuate all the same points made by the NGOs and the street children themselves. Their report emphasized the issue of police rape and the issue of the foreign fishermen. Sadly, it seems that this research has not been used to inform the strategy. At the end of May 2021, there was a meeting between the Minister, Dom Bosco, AMNET and SOS about a new pilot scheme for street children. Only Dom Bosco out of those NGOs actually work with street children. AMNET have never worked with street children, they work with women. As of September 2021, the strategy has still not been shared with the NGOs. All we have been told is that ANMNET is responsible from Calaba Town to Eastern Police, Dom Bosco is responsible from Town to Congo Cross and SOS is responsible from Congo Cross to Lumley. Since the end of May 2021, there has been no further updates from the ministry about this strategy. We did hear, in July, that a strategy has been presented to Parliament but we have still not seen a copy of it. Between now and March 2023, Laughter Africa will only be working in the Western rural area which is outside the parameters of the pilot scheme which focuses only on the Western Urban Area.

## **New labour law**

A new labour law for Sierra Leone was introduced in January 2021 which increased staff costs. This meant that we had to reduce staff and volunteers as we didn't have enough money to pay all the increases stipulated. One staff was made redundant as well as other volunteers. We could face further redundancies too....

## **Deaths of some of our young people**

Since the last annual report, we have sadly lost 5 of our young people which is always challenging:

### **Alhaji**

One of the street children with whom we have worked with since 2015, Alhaji, tragically died. On Sunday 6th June Alhaji was in an altercation with a gangster over ginger beer. The gangster retaliated by throwing hot burning liquid all over Alhaji's body. The street children brought Alhaji straight to Laughter and we took him direct to Emergency hospital. He was transferred from there to Connaught Hospital. Our nurse, Isata, visited him every day and stayed with him for about 4 hours to make sure that he was comfortable. We paid for all the medicine that he needed for the week (over around 1,500,000 leones) and his feeding. Sadly, Alhaji started to misbehave in the hospital. The other street children would come and give him illicit drugs. On Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June, the hospital was about to throw Alhaji out but thankfully our friends at Dom Bosco came to our rescue and offered for Alhaji to stay at their hospital. However, Alhaji finally succumbed to his injuries on 14th June 2021. He really suffered in the end from the burns and the different infections but at least now he is at peace. Lucy, one of our social workers, attended Alhaji's funeral in Mile 91 on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June. She travelled with our friends from Dom Bosco. She met with Alhaji's mum, granny and sister. We

promised Alhaji's family that Laughter will pay the school fees of Alhaji's sister until she sits the WASCE starting in September. Thanks to Alhaji's legacy, his sister will have an education and will be able to provide for her family. A lasting legacy! A post mortem later revealed that Alhaji had died from Covid-19.

### **Abdul Aziz**

Abdul Aziz was one of our old boys who lived at home with his family. He first came to Laughter Africa in October 2016. Abdul Aziz definitely had presence. You could never accuse him of being shy and retiring. He had the greatest dress sense and style for any street child I have ever met. He died early on Friday 9th October 2020. He and his 2 friends broke into a house and when he was caught outside the house, some of the community members beat him to death. He died in the most agonising and terrifying manner, His friends were beaten to death too. His body was thrown away like rubbish and his family couldn't even trace his body. His killers will face no justice and no charges will ever be laid against them.

He might not have died in the most heroic way, but Abdul Aziz was capable of great compassion and kindness. I don't want his good deeds to be forgotten. There's no doubt he wasn't a saint. He never claimed to be. He was human like the rest of us. One thing that I will always be grateful to Abdul Aziz for is the kindness that he showed to Sylvanus when he was on the streets. It's no exaggeration when I say Abdul Aziz saved Sylvanus's life. Without him, Sylvanus would no doubt be dead by now. Sylvanus did an interview for a school a few months ago. In the interview he mentioned Abdul Aziz by name:

***"When I was on the street, I was helpless and had nowhere to stay. No one cared about me - not because I was horrible or naughty-just that people didn't care. I became sick on the street. I had malaria and cancer. Some of my friends on the streets ran away from me. I was left with only one friend and that was Abdul Aziz. We stayed together on the streets for a few months. One day I was unable to fight for our survival because I was sick. So, he went alone and did not return. I didn't know that he had gone to Laughter Africa, I was on the streets alone. When Laughter Africa took him home a few months later, he came back on the streets looking for me. When he saw how sick I was he took me straight to Laughter Africa. "***

I still remember the day that he brought Sylvanus here. He might not have a cape but that day Abdul Aziz was a true superhero. Rest in peace Abdul Aziz. Til we meet again.

### **Adikalli**

Another challenge was the death of Adikalli, one of the street children living on the streets, who died on 3rd December 2020 of TB. His death came to us as a big shock- we thought that he was on the road to recovery. Adikalli came to us directly off the streets at the beginning of September. We have never seen anyone look so thin. He couldn't walk more than two steps- I had to carry him on my back to get to the transport to take him to the hospital. We managed to get him admitted into the TB hospital at Laka which wasn't easy as apparently he has been there twice before. Each time he started to improve, he would steal from the other patients and run away. Sadly, his condition worsened and he didn't pull through. He was 22 years old.

The saddest thing is that we don't know anything about his family. We are unable to tell them that he is dead. All we know is the area in the provinces that he is from. So, when we buried him- he had no family present- just his Laughter family. He was over 18 so he could consent to have treatment for himself. We were going to trace his family when we were about to reunify him but now it is too late. We will still try to find his family to let them know of his passing but the chances are slim that we will find them with the minimal information available. I can't imagine what it must be like having a child and not knowing that they have died. He is buried in Adonkia where the ICC is based so we can visit his grave very easily. I want to say thank you especially to our nurse Isata who had shown such kindness to Adikalli over the 3 months that he was in hospital. She would visit him every few days to keep company and make sure that he had everything that he needed. I also wanted to say a huge thank you to the community of Adonkia. The whole of Adonkia came out to give him the send-off he deserved. Although none of the community knew Adikalli, they know Laughter. After 2pm prayers, the whole Mosque came together and prayed for Adkalli and then they carried him to his final resting place and buried him. He is buried in Adonkia where the ICC is based. We were joined by some of our old boys too. We have never felt so much part of the community as we did that day. Although his family were not there- we did Adikalli proud.

### ***Finda***

One of our old girls Finda died on 20th July 2021. We first met Finda at our mobile project in Susan's Bay in October 2020. We reunified her in March and since then she has stayed home. She was attending vocational school every day and had a renewed outlook on life. After feeling sick, she decided to visit some of her family in Kono but as soon as she arrived in Kono she died. Her cause of death is not known. Our team member Lucy travelled to Kono and attended her funeral, gave condolences on behalf of Laughter and committed we will pay for Finda's younger brother to attend school as part of her legacy. Rest well Finda!

### ***Sallu***

Sadly, when we were checking in on the old children which we do every quarter, we learnt that one of our old boys Sallu had passed away from Malaria in January. Rest in Peace Sallu.

### ***The death of Edrisnatu***

Another challenge was the death of Edrisnatu. We mentioned Edrisnatu in last year's annual report. Edrisnatu, the daughter of one of our old girls tragically died on 11th July 2020. She was only 9 months old. She died due to complications caused by HIV. Her face and feet were swollen. We had been supporting the family since Edrisnatu's birth providing monthly support for nappies, food and other essentials. We used to visit the family monthly but because of the inter district curfew ban during the height of the coronavirus, we were unable to visit her to check on her health. We were due to visit the baby, a few days after she died. Her mother has gone back to living on the streets again, so she wasn't there when her daughter died. The baby was with her father's family. The family had to leave a message with local gangsters to inform the mother that her baby had died. She came the next day, saw Edrisnatu's body and just left, but did not wait for the funeral. The mother was already going off the rails since January 2020, and with this tragedy we

are scared that she will further spiral out of control. She is not taking her tablets and her face and feet are starting to swell, another indication of the final stages of her own battle with HIV. It is a difficult time for all concerned. Edrisnatu had not had an easy life since she was born as she has been battling ill health such as TB and HIV, but now she is finally at peace and her suffering has ceased. Lucy, the head of the ICC, travelled to visit Edrisnatu's family to pass on our condolences and give a contribution for the funeral.



# E. FINANCIAL REVIEW



**Brief statement of the charity's policy on reserves**

The Trustees of Laughter Africa have established a general Reserves Policy which is in place to protect our overseas programme work from risk of disruption at short notice due to a lack of funds and other financial risks that the organisation faces, while at the same time ensuring that we do not retain income for longer than required. The trustees have determined that Laughter Africa's general reserves should be equivalent to approximately three months' running costs and expenditure for each country programme where Laughter Africa is based. The trustees believe that the reserves should be maintained at this level as it will ensure that Laughter Africa's core activities could continue for at least 3 months during a period of unforeseen difficulty. At the moment Laughter Africa is only working in Sierra Leone so the reserves are quite low. However in the future, the Trustees hope to expand Laughter Africa's work in other African countries too which would increase the reserves needed. Laughter Africa reserves are held in our UK bank account. The Trustees have estimated that 3 months running costs for Laughter Africa's work in Sierra Leone is around **£5000**. The trustees will review Laughter Africa's reserves policy each year, ensuring a balance between spending on the immediate needs of our charitable programmes and setting aside a reserve to protect Laughter Africa and our work by providing time to adjust to changing financial circumstances. The basis of determining the target reserves level is kept under periodic review and will be adjusted as perceptions of risk and other factors change. By the end of this financial year, our reserves were £5000.

**Details of any funds materially deficit**

Not Applicable

## Laughter Africa's principal sources of funding and how expenditure has supported the key objectives

Laughter Africa's principal sources of funding in the financial period came mainly from donations from supporters, schools, churches and Trusts and Foundations. In the financial period the total raised from supporters was **£100,634.11 (unrestricted)**. **£12,121.02 (unrestricted)** was raised from Gift Aid. **£0.96 (unrestricted)** was earned through bank interest. **£16,861.20** was kindly donated by different Trusts and Foundations (**£7,400** was unrestricted while **£9,461.20** was restricted). Laughter Africa received **£7,450.23** from the Consortium for Street Children for our Girls' mobile project in Susan's Bay. In total, **£137,067.52** was raised in 2020/21. Laughter Africa had **£9373.33 (unrestricted)** remaining from the previous financial year. In total, **£146,440.85** was available for Laughter Africa's use in 2020/21.

None of the money we have received from supporters is spent in the UK (apart from bank charges for the transfer of funds to Sierra Leone). All money received is spent directly on in-country operational costs and we are proud of the fact that Laughter Africa is managed entirely by volunteers at the central level, with no administration, fundraising or organisational support costs.

The trustees have purposely decided to stay away from government institutional funding sources such as DIFID, the European Union, the European Commission or the UN for the time being. The trustees have also decided that Laughter Africa will not fundraise via direct marketing methods or telephone fundraising and instead will concentrate on generating funds via individual supporters, schools, churches, community groups, businesses/ companies and trusts or foundations. All of our fundraising plans have sadly had to be postponed due to Coronavirus.

We are committed to achieving the highest standards in fundraising. We comply with all relevant statutory regulations, including the Charities Act 2011, the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016, the Data Protection Act 2018, the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 and the Telephone Preference Service. We adhere to and comply with the Fundraising Regulator's Code of Fundraising Practice and the Fundraising Promise, which set the standards for fundraising activity throughout the UK. We also comply with laws relating to health and safety, the environment and UK data protection legislation including the General Data Protection Regulation (May 2018). Laughter Africa does not use any third party fundraising agencies otherwise known as 'Professional Fundraisers' to undertake fundraising on our behalf. Our 'Treating Donors Fairly Policy' outlines how we manage fair treatment of all supporters and potential supporters and how any individuals who may be in vulnerable circumstances or are unable to make an informed decision are protected. We log and respond to all complaints. In 2020/21, we received no complaints related to our fundraising activity.

The trustees would also like to say a big thank you to all the organisations and trusts and foundations who gave a donation to Laughter Africa in 2020/21:

## EDUCATIONAL AND GENERAL CHARITABLE TRUST



Thank you to everyone who has given extra donations to Laughter Africa to support us in our struggle against Coronavirus. We have been so touched and humbled by your incredible kind hearted support and generosity particularly when we know that times are tough for everyone in the UK and around the rest of the world. I can't say thank you enough to all my amazing friends and family for all your help. We are so, so grateful - and none more so than the children and their families!

## Discussion of how Laughter Africa spent the money and how this expenditure has supported the key objectives.

Laughter Africa's total expenditure in the financial period was **£122,258.59** and there was **£20,100.19** held in the bank accounts and petty cash at the end of the financial year. A total of **£142,358.78**. Laughter Africa lost **£4,082.07** via multi currency exchange rate losses. This is to be expected due to the uncertainty of Brexit and the economic consequences of Covid-19. A total expenditure of **£126,340.66** was spent in the 2020/2021 financial year. You can see a full breakdown of our costs in the table below:

### Expenditure in Sierra Leone

Type of expenditure	Cost (Pounds)
Rent for the Interim Care Centre for 2 years	£15,326.84
Salaries for National Staff	£20,003.35
Food	£8,688.41
Non- food items	£4,622.71
Games and entertainment Costs	£7,812.86
Staff travel costs during reunifications	£3,552.71
Educational equipment	£12,464.75
Generator fuel for mobile/ICC	£315.20
Street children travel costs	£1405.46
School fees/vocational training	£9,753.44
Medical costs for the street children	£6,922.79
Street children travel accommodation	£11.30
Volunteer costs	£3,427.93
Travel subsistence for staff	£244.80
Family support for the street children	£9,624.42
Clothing	£1,510.79
Campaign and Advocacy	£321.77
Rent Tax	£1,297.66
Toiletries	£293.96
Staff travel accommodation	£683.03
Travel subsistence for the street children	£13.55
Audit fees (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£951.40
Redundancy (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£79.56
Water supplies	£719.28
P.O. Box (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£13.19
Community Development	£248.69
Bank Charges in Sierra Leone	£600.49
Safeguarding Costs	£23.00
Hire of Premises for Mobile	£277.48
Asset ( A laptop for the Admin department)	£470.46

Electricity for the ICC/mobile	£408.03
Insurance (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£203.12
Work permit and residential permit (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£288.36
Annual leave allowance for National staff (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£3,009.40
Medical Treatment for National Staff (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£1,924.03
Country Registration fees	£73.42
NASSIT (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£2,036.90
End of service benefit for National Staff (legal requirement in Sierra Leone).	£455.28
Telephone costs	£372.05
PAYE (legal requirement in Sierra Leone)	£1,172.22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£121,624.09</b>

**Expenditure in the UK**

<b><u>Type of expenditure</u></b>	<b><u>Cost (Pounds)</u></b>
Bank Charges in the UK	<b>£634.50</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£634.50</b>

All the above expenses are part of our charitable objectives, without them, Laughter Africa couldn't function.

## Costs associated with all three departments: Outreach, the Interim Care Centre and Family Tracing and Reunification

### (FTR)

Some of the costs overlap between the three different departments. For instance, medical care is provided for all children at the mobile project, the Interim Care Centre and for those who have been reunified with their families. The total cost of medical care was **£6,922.79**. Similarly, food is provided at both the mobile project and the Interim Care Centre. The total cost spent on food in 2020/21 was **£8,688.41**. Coupled with this is the cost of non food items, (both at mobile and the Interim Care Centre) which totalled **£4,622.71**. Non food items include things like coal, washing powder, towels, bleach and plate/cups etc..... **£7,812.86** was spent on teaching the children income generating skills/ games and entertainment including art & craft materials, hairdressing materials, cultural dance, modern dance at both mobile and the Interim Care Centre. The travel costs of the street children across all three departments was **£1405.46**. Meanwhile staff travel across all three departments reached **£3,552.71**. This travel was for the payment of business support for families, payment of school fees and reunifications. All the social workers in all three departments are given monthly phone credit. This is because the street children are constantly phoning the social workers about different issues so the social workers need credit to phone them back. The total spent on telephone costs was **£372.05**. Meanwhile the cost of electricity for both mobile and the ICC totalled **£408.03** while **£315.20** was spent on fuel for the generator for the ICC and mobile. Water supplies for the children at the ICC and mobile totalled **£719.28** for the year.

### Costs associated solely with the Outreach department

The only payment solely associated with the outreach department was **£277.48** for the rent for the mobiles in Susan's Bay and Portee. All the other expenditure such as food, non-food items, medical care and games and entertainment are listed above.

### Costs associated solely with the Interim Care Centre

The main expense connected to the Interim Care Centre is the rent which was **£15,326.84** for two years. Laughter Africa also paid rent tax for two years which is a legal requirement in Sierra Leone. This totalled **£1,297.66**. Other costs associated with the interim Care Centre include clothing (**£1,510.79**) and toiletries (**£293.96**) for the street children. All the other costs are listed above like medical expenses, food/non-food items and income generating skills. Without an Interim Care Centre, we would not be able to carry out our key objectives: it is crux to our work. This year we also started a 250,000 leones payment per month to the headman in Adonkia for community development where the ICC is located. This totalled **£248.69** in 2020/21. We feel that it is important to give back to the community that we have called home for over 6 years.

### **Costs associated solely with the Family Tracing and Reunification Department**

The three major expenditures in the Family Tracing and Reunification department (FTR ) were school fees/vocational training (**£9,753.44**), educational equipment (uniforms, school bag, school shoes, stationery, equipment for vocational schools, text books) (**£12,464.75**) and family support for the most vulnerable street children once they have returned home (**£9,624.42**). This support could be a mattress, a bag of rice, a wheelchair, business support or rent. Thanks to a grant from the Fore this financial year, we were able to provide business support to 50 of our most vulnerable families, who were hardest hit by Covid-19. It is expected that these costs will increase in the next financial year as Laughter Africa will continue to pay the school support for the children we worked with between 2015 and 2021, as well as the new children with whom we will work in 2021/22. For instance, in September 2021, we will be providing school support for 540 children and young people. Family reunification is a key objective of the work and paying for school support is a major factor in keeping the street children at home. Other costs associated with this strand of work include; travel accommodation for staff during the reunification process (**£683.03**); travel subsistence for staff during the reunification process (**£244.80**); accommodation for street children during the reunification process (**£11.30**); and travel subsistence for street children during the reunification process (**£13.55**).

### **Costs associated with the Campaigning and Advocacy department**

In 2020/21, the communication and advocacy programme for Laughter Africa revolved around the International Day of the Street Child (12th April). The total cost spent on advocacy and campaigning was **£321.77**.

### **Costs associated with staffing**

The biggest expenditure was on national staff salaries which was a total of **£20,003.35**. However without staff Laughter Africa wouldn't be able to complete its work or charitable objectives. It is Laughter Africa's policy that only national Sierra Leoneans will be appointed as staff. Laughter Africa will never employ an international staff member in Sierra Leone. By the end of the 2020/21 financial year, Laughter Africa employed 13 full time staff. We have achieved gender equity in pay. All our female staff are paid the exact same as their male counterparts in the same roles. All staff are paid above the minimum wage and receive medical care (**£1,924.03**) and GPA insurance (**£203.12**). Laughter Africa also paid NASSIT (**£2,036.90**) and PAYE (**£1,172.22**) which are tax payments and are legal requirements from the Sierra Leone government relating to staff. Similarly Laughter Africa complied with all the labour laws in Sierra Leone including annual leave allowance (**£3,009.40**) and end of service benefit (**£455.28**). Due to the introduction of the new labour law during the financial year, we unfortunately had to make one staff redundant (**£79.56**). This was because of the increases in salaries and annual leave allowance which was mandated within the law. We had no choice but to comply but because of limited funds, one staff had to leave. The new increases within the law has not only led to an increase in annual leave allowance and salaries but also had a knock on effect on NASSIT and NRA payments too. The staffs' work has been greatly enhanced by the work of volunteers. During this financial year Laughter Africa had a total of 15 Sierra Leonean volunteers. We needed extra volunteers this year due to the Girls mobile project in Susan's Bay. Costs associated with the volunteers totalled **£3,427.93**. At the time of writing this report (August 2021), Laughter Africa currently has 3 volunteers; Humu, Emmy and Komba. Safeguarding costs reached **£23.00** this financial year as all volunteers have to receive a police clearance before they are able to work at Laughter Africa.

### **Country registration and other associated fees**

As we paid country registration fees in the last financial year, we had no need to pay again this year as registration is every two years. However, Laughter Africa still have to pay registration charges to Freetown City Council and Western Rural District Council yearly. The total cost of re-registration with these councils cost **£73.42**. To be re-registered as a charity in Sierra Leone, an audit must be completed. The audit costs were **£951.40**. Another legal requirement is that any international volunteers must have a residential permit/work permit so this was purchased for the founder James. This cost was **£288.36**. To be recognised as a registered charity in Sierra Leone, one must have a PO Box. Laughter Africa has one at a cost of **£13.19** per year.

### **Assets**

A laptop was purchased in January 2021 for the Administration department as the old laptop that they were using broke. The department need a laptop for all the administrative tasks of the organisation. The cost of the laptop was **£470.46**.

### **Bank charges in Sierra Leone**

The bank charges in Sierra Leone were **£600.49**.

### **Bank charges in the UK.**

The only expenditure in the UK is for bank charges when money is transferred to the Laughter Africa Sierra Leone Bank Account. This is because the Trustees believe that the money entrusted to us by supporters should not be spent on fundraising or administrative costs in the UK but on the street children themselves. The Trustees see each donation as an honour and a privilege as there are so many other charities which people could chose to support instead. The total cost of bank charges in the UK was **£634.50**.

## **Principal Financial policies in force throughout the year**

Laughter Africa has the following financial policies in place:

Laughter Africa's Earmarking policy
Foreign currency and exchange rate policy
Laughter Africa's Paying staff policy
Sierra Leone Financial procedures
Reserves and investment policy
Anti- bribery policy
Fraud and loss policy
Acceptance of donations policy
Policy on safeguarding resources from terrorist abuse
Credit card policy
Authorisation of expenditure policy
Payment of expenses policy
Internal financial controls policy
Laughter Africa's Accountancy manual

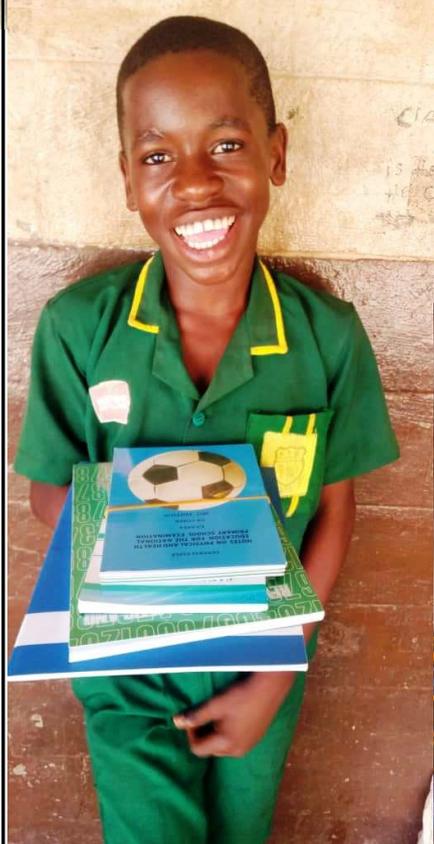
The trustees have also prepared financial templates and documentation for Laughter Africa including assets registers, chart of accounts, budgeting templates etc. All are available upon request.

## **Investment Policy**

At the moment, Laughter Africa has no investments as the charity is still so new and we use every penny we receive for our work in Sierra Leone. However, there is an investment policy in place for when the charity is ready to make investments. This policy governs how cash resources are managed, which institutions may be used, security ratings and risk management etc. The policy is as follows:

The objective of the investment policy is to maintain high liquidity while ensuring maximum security by avoiding risk to capital. This is to comply with Laughter Africa's ethical standards and to achieve the best possible return within these limiting parameters. To meet this objective, the charity plans to invest in sterling deposits with financial institutions that hold a high security rating, ordinarily spreading the total invested across fixed terms from overnight to 12 months, and limiting the amount invested with any one financial institution. In response to the increased risks highlighted by the credit crunch, Laughter Africa plans to have limited deposits to UK domiciled banks for shorter periods to enable the charity to react more quickly to the fluctuating financial environment. The Trustees annually review Laughter Africa's investment policy. The charity has no long term investments.

# F. OPTIONAL INFORMATION



## Future Plans

Laughter Africa will continue to carry out its usual outreach work, Interim Care and Family Tracing and Reunification throughout the year. We have set targets for the year. **The Outreach Department** aims to work with a minimum of **200** new children through the mobile projects by the end of December 2022. **The Interim Care Centre Department** aims to work with **120** new children in the Interim Care Centre. **The Family Tracing and Reunification Department** aims to pay school fees for the children with whom we have previously worked (between 2015 and 2021) who are still at home in addition to the street children with whom we will work with in 2021/2022. Here are the more specialised future plans we have for each department:

### ***Advocacy and Communication***

The plan that we are most excited to be delivering in the upcoming year ahead is our sexual violence initiative as part of the 'Network for Street Children Sierra Leone' focusing on street children and sexual violence. It is a key component of the 'Lef mi bodi' campaign. The 'Network for Street children' will be advocating on behalf on any girl or boy living on the streets who experiences sexual abuse. It is usual for the children living on the streets not to take any further action after they have been assaulted. We want to change this, and ensure they feel safe and supported to access relevant services and achieve justice. We will hold workshops to educate the children on what sexual assault is, the support available and what to do if they or a friend should do if they are a survivor of sexual assault E.g. no washing, keep the clothes that they were wearing.

We have created a process for street children to report sexual assault and will be appointing community advocates in areas with the highest numbers of street children. The role of these advocates is to be the person whom the street children can approach if they have been assaulted. The community advocates will then call one of the Network members who will take the street child to the police and then to the Rainbo Centre for medical examination. One of our social workers will accompany the girls or boys the whole time. Our job is to walk alongside them on their journey to justice. The lawyers at Dom Bosco will then follow up each case with the police. We will ensure DNA testing is carried out on any forensic evidence gathered. There has been no DNA testing machine in Sierra Leone until very recently. It is privately owned and each test costs 3 million leones.

We hope to work within ten communities over the next year including : Funkai, Tombo, Portee, Grafton, Waterloo, Lumley, Aberdeen, Congo water, Culvert in Clein Town, Susan's Bay. We will focus on one area at a time. The training will start in Funkia in October 2021. The community advocates will be trained by the Network so that they are able to respond to any problems in a professional manner. We hope to train key community members (Imams, Pastors, priests, youth leaders, teachers and headsmen) and invite them to help communicate the help that is available. We hope that more prosecutions of perpetrators will serve as a message to any future offenders that sexual assault against street children is taken seriously and has severe consequences, so that we see a reduction in the number sexual abuse offences.

Staff from the different network members had a fantastic training session about sexual violence presented by the 'Rainbo Initiative' on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021. After the training session, the network members wrote the resources and

planned the workshops for the community and the street children. James (the founder) spoke at a Press conference on 24<sup>th</sup> September as part of the launch of the new campaign, 'Lef mi Bodi.' 18 different media houses were present including Television. Our target by the end of March 2022 is to have trained 20 community members in each community which in total will be 200 people across 6 months. We aim to train 50 street children in each community which in total will be 500 young people within 6 months. By the end of 6 months, we hope to have 20 specially trained community advocates. Our hope is that by the end of March 2022, we will have helped around 25 girls report their attacks to the police. One of our old volunteers, Francisco, is now working at the Humans Right Commission and he has offered to follow up any gender-based cases reported to the police to make sure that appropriate action is being undertaken.

### **Mobile**

Our five-year plan for Laughter Africa in Sierra Leone is to have a mobile project in each community where clusters of street children can be located. We would prefer to work more in the communities and have earmarked the following areas for future mobile projects Grafton, Tombo, Waterloo, Funkai, Lumley, Aberdeen/Cockle Bay, Town, Portee and Congo Water. We want to be at the heart of the communities so that all the street children know Laughter Africa and not just the street children in the city centre. Presently, there is no funding to support more than one mobile so we plan on rotating our mobile project via one community at a time. After every six months to one year, we will move onto a new community. We will replicate the current programme of activities which has already occurred in Susan's Bay and Portee. Through these mobile projects in the community we can also carry out prevention work and a lot more community sensitisation. In 2021/2022, we plan to run a mobile project in Waterloo followed by a mobile project in Funkia.

### **ICC**

The ICC was bursting at the seams in August 2021 as the young people for whom we pay school brought their school reports. One worrying thing from the reports is that some of our more serious girls were absent during the third term. It turns out they went to the village as part of 'secret society' business or 'bondo.' Known in the Western world as Female Genital Mutilation. Since learning of this we have contacted the girls involved to provide them with support. It gave us a frightening reminder that this brutal practice unfortunately still happens in Sierra Leone. In the year ahead, we plan on educating all our children and families on the dangers of FGM in the ICC and during reunifications.

### **FTR**

In August 2021, when we saw the reports of some of the children we supported, we were disappointed by their attendance figures as they were absent so often. One girl didn't even know the name of her school. Similarly, we discovered that some of the attendance figures were just invented by the teachers. For instance, we visited one girl in Grafton throughout November/December 2020 to provide extra lessons and textbooks but whenever the social worker went to the school, she was absent. But her school report said that she had had no absences. This has made us review the FTR programme. Our social worker, Lamin, will be visiting every school in Freetown monthly to check on attendance. Each school will be visited ten times between October 2021 and July 2022. If a child is absent any more

than three times, when Lamin visits, then they will no longer receive school support.

### Prevention

We also hope to carry out more prevention based work in 2021/2022. Currently our focus has been on response and reintegration work. In 2021/2022, we would like to carry out similar performances like the one we did in Susan's Bay in December 2020 but in other areas which have a big contingent of street children too. This will be dependent upon coronavirus restrictions.

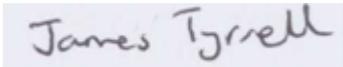


# G. DECLARATION



The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)		
Full name(s)	James Francis Robert Tyrrell	Mark Quentin Neal
Position (e.g. chair or secretary)	Chairperson	Secretary
Date	08/10/2021	08/10/2021

