



Published April 18th, 2018

Efforts to build an orphanage in Sierra Leone

By *Sophie Braccini*

Dianne Wilson, Moraga Royale executive director and current president of the Moraga Rotary, recently went to Sierra Leone in West Africa to get field knowledge of the area where her club is sponsoring the construction of an orphanage. The 10 days she spent there turned out to be a rich, even if sometimes heartbreaking, human experience that renewed and enhanced her commitment and determination to see this project to fruition.

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest African countries. It suffered a devastating civil war from 1991-2002. This was followed by an outbreak of the Ebola virus in 2014 that claimed thousands more lives. In the town of Makeni, Wilson's sister, Becky Becker, on a Christian and humanitarian mission met Bambay Savaneh, a young man who is a double-hand amputee maimed by rebels in the civil war and who had created a faith-based soccer team to bring discipline and fun to the lives of children. Ebola, which claimed the lives of the healthy adults, left many children in Makeni orphans.

In a country where people have difficulty feeding themselves, the insecurity of the situation of orphans is daunting, with many still living on the streets, resorting to all kinds of activities to survive, and being subjected to abuse and crime.

Beker and her group continue to help Savaneh and the 21 orphans that have found refuge with his family. She also had involved Wilson from the start, helping with the soccer equipment and such, but Wilson now feels that much more is needed.

The Moraga Rotary is now committed to help build an orphanage for Makeni's children, under Savaneh's leadership. During Wilson's recent voyage in West Africa with her sister, an award-winning filmmaker Paul Freedman and translator Angela Geer produced a documentary showing the precarious, though hopeful, life of the children.

Savaneh is Sierra Leonean and studied abroad. His goal is to put the children through school; they started coming to his door because the children understood that there they would get some food and would not be bitten. Wilson was impressed by Savaneh's dedication and that of his wife, who works from dawn to dusk to feed and clean everyone.

Wilson reports the joy and positive attitude of the orphans as they now feel safe and have the prospect of a future. But she also witnessed firsthand the more than simple conditions in which they live, with no sanitation on the premises.

The Rotary project consists of building an orphanage on a large lot that has its own water supply. All the work will be done by local labor, using local material and techniques. Wilson explains that half of the money has already been raised - \$23,000 was recently raised for the orphanage at the Night at the Races Rotary fundraiser - and is confident that the rest will be collected as people understand what is at stake.

The documentary should soon be available on the Moraga Rotary website: www.moragarotary.com.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA