

Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities

Report to the Segal Family Foundation - Q2/Q3 2011

Highlights:

- >> HapFam enters its 3rd year of operations in Paynesville, Liberia
- >> HapFam receives Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) small grant for general support
- >> Andre Johnson, a HapFam student, was a special guest at the signing ceremony of the new Reform Education Act, which was attended by the president of Liberia
- >> HapFam hires new Administrative Director



The Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities has had a productive 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2011. The period under review includes the completion of the 2010/2011 school year and preparations for the commencement of the Center's third school year of operations in September 2011.

1. Staffing and Training

Throughout May and June, HapFam Director Delbert Johnson and Niapele Program Manager Henry Snyder conducted recruitment of an Administrative Director (AD) for HapFam to assist in the organizational development of the Center. Director George Brown and his staff at the Department of Disabilities in the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare also assisted in the hiring process by giving referrals and advising on potential candidates. Having someone to manage the Center's administrative tasks full-time allows the Director to oversee operations and focus on strategic planning and daily classroom supervision. **The AD works directly with the Director for networking, budgeting and reporting, as well as local fundraising and income-generation efforts.** Mr. Neuville has not yet begun full-time work, and has been spending time familiarizing himself with the organization and its processes during the summer months. Full-time work is slated to begin in October 2011.

The teachers of HapFam had the opportunity to benefit from a U.S. based organization's 3-day teacher capacity building event. Topics included lesson planning, classroom management and teaching methods. The staff found the training to be informative and encouraging. They are eager to continue to participate in training exercises in order to enhance their abilities. This is one area where additional support for HapFam would allow The Niapele Project to organize and facilitate additional teacher and staff training, which is particularly essential in the context of working with children with special needs and disabilities.

2. The students

In June of 2011, the Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities suffered a devastating loss when one of the students passed away suddenly. Young Pape had suffered from polio at the age of six and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. For the 8 years following his illness, he never attended school until HapFam opened in his community. When of the brightest and most eager to learn students, Pape touched all of our hearts with his gentle enthusiasm and determination. His passing renewed the Center's commitment to serving the educational, social and medical needs of the students with disabilities.

Currently, **support is being sought to build a sustainable partnership with local medical professionals who can work to optimize the wellbeing of HapFam students, beyond individual emergency appointments.** This area of programming, currently in development, is a key dimension that needs to be put in place for HapFam. Part of the issue is that the governmental agency that supports NGOs focused on disability (the National Union of Organizations for the Disabled, or NUOD) has been very disorganized and ineffective. In the last two years, there have been multiple changes of leadership in NUOD, and the organization can only be described as sluggish. NUOD is supposed to advocate for organizations like HapFam and help leverage resources, including medical expertise. With The Niapele Project's support, HapFam will continue to seek ways to create a viable relationship between medical experts and the Center, so that children can be fully assessed and their specific needs catered to as needed.

3. Community sensitization

The school year concluded on June 26, 2011. As is customary in Liberia, a special program was held for the students and their family members. In accordance with HapFam's mission to

Mr. and Miss HapFam 2011 !





educate and sensitize families and communities on the needs and capabilities of children with disabilities, the speaker encouraged the parents to take an active role in their children's development. The students performed songs and completed spelling and storytelling exercises. Several parents were impressed to witness their own children demonstrating skills that had previously seemed unattainable.

In December 2010, HapFam hosted a workshop - "*Understanding Disability*" which was attended by family members of the students and community members and facilitated by Mayaedeh Kemeh-Gama, the Director of Special Education at the Ministry of Education and HapFam board member.



Del Johnson -
Exec. Director

4. Signs of progress toward sustainability

Throughout the break, HapFam senior staff networked with government agencies and INGOs to build support. **A major development from these efforts is the official commitment of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to sponsor the Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities with a small quarterly stipend (TBD, but it will be between \$100 and \$300).** Though this milestone only covers a fraction of HapFam's operating budget, the gesture indicates the endorsement of the innovative Community Based Day Program by the Government of Liberia.

Thanks to the support of one of its board members, Mayaedeh Kemeh-Gama, the Director of Special Education at the Ministry of Education, **HapFam has also been discussing the possibility of having a staff member's salary be sponsored by the Ministry of Education,** which would allow HapFam to free up some of its limited resources.

Despite the resource constraints faced by the post conflict nation, it is imperative for the National Government to take an active role in providing for its most vulnerable citizens and recognizing the importance of replicable sustainable programming that may be scaled to meet similar needs throughout the country. The Niapele Project is pleased with these developments, which **strengthens the goal of making HapFam a model for addressing the needs of children with disabilities at the grassroots level.** Many communities in Liberia could benefit from similar programming, and Niapele is hopeful that the increasing support from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education is a sign that the model is valid and that it can be shared with other communities in Liberia.



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Lastly, since the installation of a water pump on the grounds of the Center last year (facilitated by a grant from the Friends of Liberia Foundation), **HapFam has been generating a small amount of income (between \$5 and \$7/month) to help assist in covering their costs.**

While the income generated is still very small, this development allows HapFam to create its own resources and has been a welcome development in terms of moving towards self-sustainability.