

Thank You and Happy New Year

It's been another great year for the Dorothy Springer Trust (DST). We post some news on Facebook, but not everyone has access to this. So here are a few updates from 2023.

Firstly though, some sad news. Our patron, Peter Penfold, sadly passed away in October this year. Peter was the UK's High Commissioner to Sierra Leone in 1997, as a military coup unfolded in the country. He played a pivotal role in re-establishing the elected President and was honoured by the people of Sierra Leone with the title of 'Paramount Chief Komrabai' and made a Freeman of the city of Freetown. DST was privileged to have Peter as patron, he was a great supporter of the Trust and it's founder Dr Abs Dumbuya. He will be sorely missed. Earlier this year we renamed the DST training hall at our 'Opportunities House' premises as the Penfold Hall.

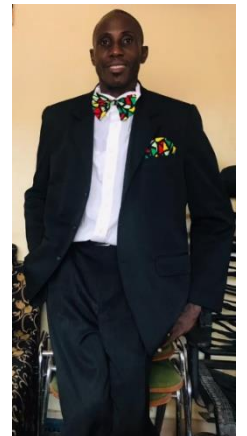


In February over 40 DST students from the previous two years attended the DST graduation ceremony to celebrate their achievement and receive their official certificates. Our students each have some form of physical disability and must overcome numerous challenges and prejudices in life. Because of this, our training is provided free of charge, and DST



provides each student with a scholarship covering transportation, food and in some cases an accommodation allowance. The graduation ceremony was attended by the Minister of Social Welfare, and the keynote address was from the Mayor of Freetown (capital of Sierra Leone) Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, who later wrote: "I was inspired by the resilience, determination and commitment the graduants exhibited in completing the course and I wished them well for the future."

A further twelve students received basic IT training this year, with their course completing in July 2023. The training is full time and demanding; a high standard is set. DST supports those who complete the training to find employment. From this year's group for example, one is now working in telecommunications, one a pastor and one is running her own charitable organisation. One student progressed onto further education, and one took an opportunity to become an amputee footballer.



One of the successful students, Pastor Fennel, shared his experience of the training: "I was given the opportunity to be a student of DST. As a worker the course helped me to increase my knowledge and ability to use the computer. I can comfortably say I can work with the different programs with confidence. It is blessed and I ask all physically challenged people to grab this golden opportunity".

DST also provides training for various partner organisations. This September for example the Liliane Fonds organisation asked DST to deliver digital literacy and numeracy training for students with little or no background in formal education. This course aims to teach students to read, write and gain core numeracy skills using the computer.



This year DST received accreditation from the Sierra Leone National Council for Technical Vocational and other Academic Awards (NCTVA). The accreditation followed a detailed assessment and means DST courses are now formally NCTVA certified. We're proud of this achievement, as it recognises the high quality of training delivered by DST. We are the only Sierra Leonean training provider for people with disabilities which has this certification.

2023 was the fourth year DST have delivered the Child Empowerment Programme (CEP), in collaboration with One Family People (OFP) and funded by the Dutch organisation Liliane Foundation (LF). 170 children

and young people with disabilities (CYWD's) are supported by the programme, which aims to develop their personal, social, educational, and economic strengths. In practice, this covers a wide range of activities, such as arranging access to physiotherapy and other rehabilitation services, funding adaptations to homes, providing mobility aids (such as wheelchairs and crutches), antiepileptic medication and simple things like toiletries.



As part of the CEP's social inclusion element, DST arranged a one-day recreational sport event for CYWD's and non-disabled children on 25 March. Three schools participated, and Abs spoke about the need for children and youngsters with disabilities to be included in all school activities.

CEP education support ensures every child owns a school uniform and shoes, has learning materials, and a bag to put them in. Where necessary, CEP will fund transportation to school. Older children and young people may also receive vocational training, which could be practical in nature, such as carpentry, or using the excellent IT facilities at Opportunities House. This year, at one of the quarterly distribution events, Abs received his own award from the Students with Special Needs at Fourah Bay College (FBC) for support toward their education.



DST also works within the CEP to empower parents of CYWD's, for example delivering sessions on Income Generating Activities and support in opening a bank account.

Sierra Leone is beautiful but can be a difficult environment to live in and operate from. The cost of living has risen dramatically in Sierra Leone, with food inflation reaching an all-time high of 64.67 percent in September. And there has been some civil unrest, including an attempted coup at the end of November.

The supply of electricity is not reliable in Sierra Leone, with frequent outages affecting the ability to deliver training at our base, Opportunities House. In late 2022 a solar power system was installed to provide a degree of resilience. And following thefts and associated damage of IT equipment in 2020, earlier this year we were delighted to receive a kind donation of intruder and fire alarm equipment. Huge thanks to Phil & Kat Jarvis for this.



Inevitably, people with disabilities (PwD's) in Sierra Leone face additional challenges and prejudices. DST, and particularly our Chief Executive Abs, is recognised as a prominent advocate for the rights of PwD's. For example, in November 2023, Abs and the DST Team embarked on advocacy training for the Sierra Leone Ministry of Social Welfare on monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the disability-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2024 DST aims to deliver two further intermediate IT training courses, each with at least ten students. The cost of these have risen from £1,000 to around £1,500 per student, due to higher costs and extending the duration of the course from seven to ten months to meet the new NCTVA accreditation and examination requirements.

You can see, your support has been and continues to be crucial in allowing DST to change the lives of young people with disabilities, giving them hope and a future. We thank you and wish you a blessed 2024.

The Dorothy Springer Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 1120537. For **more information** visit <https://dorothy-springer-trust.org.uk/> or write to 35 Woodmancott Close, Bracknell RG12 0XU.