

ALL AS ONE

After 16 years of saving lives in Sierra Leone, the charity All As One has an unlikely but vital UAE connection. From Freetown to Downtown Dubai, this is a journey of hope



FREETOWN, THE CAPITAL OF SIERRA LEONE, is a city built on the principle of hope – in 1792 it was founded as a safe haven for freed African slaves to settle and start a life of their own. Of course, the situation in Freetown, and Sierra Leone as a whole, has changed a great deal in the ensuing two centuries – the country and its capital have endured uprisings, military coups, ethnic violence and, up until 2002, a bloody 11-year civil war.

While some semblance of normality has returned to Sierra Leone, its people – specifically its children – still face huge challenges. According to UN reports, the country has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates – one in seven children die before they reach the age of five, and more than half of these children die from preventable conditions such as diarrhoea, malnutrition or dehydration. Furthermore, the country suffers from one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates – one in 21 women are likely to die during childbirth (compared to one in 2,800 in developed countries).

These shocking statistics, coupled with the atrocities of the civil war, were enough to prompt American Deanna Wallace to set up the All As One charity (www.allasone.org) in 1997.

“Sierra Leone’s orphaned and abandoned children are often left to fend for themselves and lose the possibility of a happy childhood,” explains Deanna. “Instead, they face malnutrition, homelessness, abuse, illiteracy, sickness and even death... I decided if I could help even one child, it would be worth the effort.”

But, after 16 years, Deanna and her team have exceeded their own expectations, having helped countless children out of poverty and destitution.

“We believe in restoring children’s futures,” Deanna continues. “This belief moves us to provide Sierra Leone’s most vulnerable children with a loving home, three meals a day, an onsite accredited school, medical care, counselling and, most of all, a family.”

All As One, based in Freetown, achieves its goals in three ways: the All As One Children’s Centre, which provides a stable and loving home for the children with 24-hour crisis response and care; the All As One Academy, which provides education for children living at the Children’s Centre, as well as other children living in the surrounding community; and the All As One Medical Clinic, which offers preventative intervention and medical treatment.

But Deanna is quick to point out that All As One’s good work wouldn’t be possible without the help of the charity’s “generous and like-minded supporters”.

One such generous and like-minded supporter provides All As One with an unlikely, but very important, UAE link. Having visited the All As One Children’s Centre in 2005, Dubai resident Matthew Morgan-Jones was so moved by what he saw in Freetown that, by 2007, he had successfully registered the charity as a licensed UAE-based non-profit organisation (www.aadubai.org). Furthermore, Matthew has four adopted children from the Centre.

It was only a matter of time before Matthew’s good work for All As One



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To get involved with All As One’s work in Freetown, Sierra Leone, call (04) 322 6707, (050) 450 8360, email info@aadubai.org, or visit the website www.aadubai.org

caught the attention of his Dubai contemporaries – one of whom, his good friend David Thomson, Chief Operating Officer for JA Resorts & Hotels, was sufficiently inspired to mobilise the hotel group’s resources to help the charity. JA Resorts & Hotels has now been working alongside All As One for over four years, sponsoring children at the Centre, as well as sending out regular supply packages and gifts.

“I’m so proud to be able to say we work alongside the people who keep the orphanage running,” enthuses Thomson. “And even prouder to call them my friends.”

As Sierra Leone journeys down the long, rocky road to recovery, the needs of the country’s children – the very people who embody the country’s future – are as great as ever. For all the good work of All As One and its supporters, Deanna points out that for every child the charity helps, there are literally hundreds they are forced to turn away due to lack of resources. However, judging from the infectious enthusiasm that permeates All As One, the future is bright – it would seem that the charity is abundant in the most important resource of all: hope. 