



Building Bridges

Sierra Leone Educators Trip

Sierra Leone, West Africa
July 2012 (16 days)

PURPOSE:

1. To create a professional learning community between Canadian and Sierra Leonean elementary educators that encourages dialogue, fosters professional development and creates a supportive environment for global collaboration.
2. To provide Canadian teachers, and consequently their students and colleagues, with an experience that will bring to life many aspects of the 'Canada and World Connections' and 'Heritage and Citizenship' strands of the Ontario Social Studies curriculum.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND:

CAUSE Canada highly values education. In 27 years of operation, all of our projects have involved an educational component for our local partners to build capacity in their communities. We are excited to be working in formal education and especially with teachers who, like their Canada peers, are leaders in their community. We want to make sure these teachers have the support, resources and training to do the important and challenging work with which they are faced. Presently, CAUSE Canada's CAUSE Kids program supports fifteen primary schools, totaling over 4,500 students and approximately 90 teachers, with infrastructure, preventative health care, agricultural education, teacher training, supplies and uniforms, water and sanitation, and nutrition programs.

While providing access to school, we are also committed to quality education and creating learning opportunities that will make a significant difference for students and their communities. We recognize the role that teachers play in creating these life-long learners and feel that it is through these teachers that this vision of successful schools can be achieved.

Partnership and collaboration are essential to success and sustainability. Our work with the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone (SL) was our first step in building a strong program within an existing system. However, what we have noticed is that this existing system is facing its own constraints that have significant impacts at the local level. Once in the classroom, teachers receive limited support, almost no resources and strained working environments.

While teachers in Sierra Leone may not all have the same level of teaching education or the same access to resources, they do hold their own expertise and experience that is relevant to their teaching environment. The intention of this program is to honour this experience while fostering an atmosphere of growth and development for both parties.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

This program will consist of three parts. The first part will consist of Canadian teachers preparing for the trip and the workshops that they will facilitate in Sierra Leone.* Teachers will work collaboratively to create and design workshops geared toward meeting the needs of Sierra Leonean teachers. Guidance will be given by Canadian educators familiar with the classroom environment in Sierra Leone and teachers will no doubt wish to do some research about the country (and school system) they will be visiting.

The second part of this program will involve Canadian teachers traveling to Sierra Leone and spending 9 days with Sierra Leonean peers exchanging teaching experiences; presenting and facilitating workshops; discovering commonalities and struggles; exploring how they can support one another's needs in the classroom; and ultimately how they can create quality educational opportunities for their students.

The third part of the trip occurs once the Canadian teachers return to Canada. After returning, participants will be asked to be involved in a minimum of two public engagement activities* in which they will share with others the experiences and lessons learned during their time in Sierra Leone. This may take many forms: classroom projects, PD sessions (sharing knowledge and experience that will enrich the Social Studies curriculum for the entire school), speaking engagements, etc... The possibilities are endless!

*Participants will also be asked to complete one public engagement activity before departure – participating in a *Poverty Awareness / Millennium Development Goal* workshop (conducted by CAUSE Canada). Following this workshop, they can then lead their classes in a similar activity, with support from CAUSE Canada staff.

OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES:

CAUSE Canada is a responsive organization, consulting and collaborating with local partners in our countries of focus. It is important that the planning of the 'Building Bridges' trip employs this same philosophy, with both Canadian and Sierra Leonean teachers giving input regarding the desired objectives and outcomes of the exchange.

OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED BY OUR TEACHERS AND STAFF IN SIERRA LEONE:

1. **Foster Understanding** – Teachers in our CAUSE Kids schools would like to give a practical demonstration of the challenges of teaching in SL. For example, they would like to offer a 'Day in the SL Classroom' in which Canadian teachers conduct a lesson using the SL teacher's day plan and resources.
2. **Professional Development** – Many teachers in SL have not been able to pursue official certification due to the economic constraints in which they live. CAUSE Kids supports teachers in obtaining certificates through distance education and we offer as many informal workshops as our budget allows. Still, teachers are hungry for training and professional exchange. They would welcome the opportunity to brainstorm creative ways of teaching and engaging students with their Canadian colleagues.
3. **Continuing Education** – Teachers in Sierra Leone have requested workshops in math, phonics, teaching English (most Sierra Leone teachers speak English as a second language), civics (including peace and reconciliation) and study habits. Canadian teachers who are going on the 'Building Bridges' trip will be given opportunities to work collaboratively to design any and all of the workshops that they will later facilitate in Kabala, Sierra Leone.
4. **Share Culture and Cultural Challenges** – SL teachers would like to host a session about SL culture and the impact it has on education. Example topics would include: educating girls, language issues (while the official language of the education system is English, few students speak it before they begin school), and community perceptions of education and educators. This session could compliment the civics workshop hosted by Canadian teachers.
5. **Compare** – CAUSE Kids teachers would like to hold discussions on the differences/similarities between education in Canada and Sierra Leone and the responsibility teachers have for the students in comparison to their Canadian colleagues.

FOR CANADIAN TEACHERS WE SEE POTENTIAL FOR THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

1. **Develop Global Citizenship** – Personal understanding of the struggles and realities in the developing world can be applied in the classroom, helping students understand diversity and citizenship responsibilities in an international context. It will help build global knowledge and encourage students to recognize the impact of their actions as well as the importance of advocating for themselves and others.
2. **Enhance the Social Studies Curriculum** – The Ontario Social Studies curriculum places a strong emphasis on the concepts of citizenship, decision-making, global consciousness and globalization. When teachers dialogue and collaborate with individuals who represent much of what we study, there is an increased ability to accurately deliver and explore the global strands of the curriculum. Participants have an opportunity to realize ‘Canada and World Connections’ and the responsibilities of ‘Heritage and Citizenship’ that are integral to the Social Studies program.
3. **Increase Global Collaboration** – This trip creates another structure that supports the efforts and highlights the importance of global collaboration. Participants in this program will have laid the foundation for establishing an International Professional Learning Community while also significantly contributing to the CAUSE Kids educational program.
4. **Support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** – The second MDG is to provide universal primary education – for boys and girls alike – by 2015. While some countries are moving in that direction, recent research has shown that the quality of education is still low. This is due to a lack of qualified teachers, teacher training, resources and support, especially in rural areas. One of the purposes of this trip is to address this reality and play a tangible part in fulfilling the commitment made by Canada and the world to the MDGs.

TENTATIVE TRIP ITINERARY: JULY 2012

Day 1 – Flight from Toronto (Saturday) to London, England. For teachers who are able to depart on Friday pm, there is an option of an overnight stay in London on Saturday.

Day 2 – All teachers meet at Heathrow Airport in London. Flight from London to Freetown, Sierra Leone. (Sunday) Overnight in Freetown.

Day 3 – Tour of Freetown. Prepare for upcountry travel. (Monday) Overnight in Freetown.

Day 4-13 – Kabala (2 days travel + 9 days workshops, collaborative projects, shared learning, outings, school visits, CAUSE Canada project tour) (Tues travel; workshops W–S; M – F).

Day 14 – Travel to Freetown, city tour (Saturday).

Day 15 – Freetown market, beach. Travel to airport. Flight from Freetown to London (late Saturday night).

Day 16 – Flight from London to Toronto (Sunday).

PACKAGE COST:

The cost of the trip is **\$4450.00 USD per participant**. This includes the return flights from Canada to Sierra Leone, accommodation, in-country transportation, fees for activities and most meals.

**Cost is based on 7 participants with the current projection for flight prices from Toronto to London and London to Freetown. It may vary slightly based on pricing of flights at the time of purchase.*

****Please note:** listed cost does not include costs for vaccinations (contact your local travel clinic for detailed costs of all vaccinations), visa, hotel and meals in London, England, meals in Freetown, and supplementary health/travel insurance. Please contact trip coordinators Betty Knight at bjknight@sympatico.ca or Debbie Penninga at education@cause.ca or 403-678-3332 for details on approximate projected costs.

A significant portion of the trip is tax deductible. Teachers may also be able to apply for partial funding through their local OTF.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS:

Flights - Flights to Sierra Leone are routed through London, England. Travel time from Toronto to Freetown will take 12-16 hours, depending on connections and stopover times. The flight from London (Heathrow Airport) to Freetown (Lungi Airport) is approximately 7 hours.

Visa - \$72.00 USD for 6-month visa (plus the cost of courier transport to and from the Sierra Leone Embassy in Washington)

Accommodation - Participants will be expected to share a room with one other person. It is important to note that once upcountry in Kabala, accommodation becomes quite simple. No one has running water or electricity and while we will make sure you are comfortable, please remember that you will not be granted the same luxuries as home. A generator is usually available for a short time in the evenings.

Vaccinations - Please consult a travel clinic for a list of required vaccinations. If you have never traveled to a tropical country before, be prepared for a list of required immunizations. A Yellow Fever vaccination is mandatory in order to be granted a visa.

In-Country Transportation - A CAUSE Canada car and driver will be provided for the duration of the trip. For your safety, we recommend that no one take public transport or attempt to drive.

Food - Local dishes include Krin Krin (leafy vegetable), Cassava Leaf, and Groundnut Soup (rice, peanuts, fish, etc...). While Freetown offers more food options, selection becomes limited when traveling upcountry. Please be prepared to eat local cuisine.

Climate - Sierra Leone is a tropical country that enjoys hot temperatures. July is the middle of rainy season, which means you will enjoy periods of heavy downpours almost every day. Please be prepared to be flexible for changes to the schedule because of weather and road conditions.

COMMITMENTS:

FROM TEACHER PARTICIPANTS:

- Adherence to the CAUSE Canada codes of conduct and travel guidelines. All participants will be required to sign a Standards of Accountability document and Travel Waiver before departure. Failure to sign could result in a restriction to travel with CAUSE Canada.
- Involvement in pre-departure meetings and planning.
- Involvement in planning and preparing workshops prior to departure.
- Attending a Poverty Awareness workshop (conducted by CAUSE Canada) and simulating the workshop for their students prior to departure.
- Hosting a minimum of 2 public engagement events/activities upon return.

- Writing a minimum of 2 stories about individuals met by participants in their travels.
- Ongoing communication with CAUSE Canada regarding how the experience in SL is being applied in the classroom.
- Effort made to initiate collaborative ideas/projects with SL teachers.
- Share experiences with colleagues and students to the benefit of school global citizenship programs and related strands of the Social Studies curriculum (any formal presentations made would count as meeting public engagement requirements).

FROM CAUSE CANADA:

- Pre-departure meetings.
- Staff availability for questions and concerns.
- Well-prepared travel itinerary.
- Risk management and safety plans.
- CAUSE Canada staff leader.
- All travel details (local transport, accommodation, most meals). This excludes visa, immunization and contingency costs.
- A transformative opportunity for teachers to express solidarity with their colleagues in Sierra Leone and involvement in developing improved pedagogy in both countries.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

CAUSE Canada has been working in Sierra Leone for over 20 years and has been leading groups in that country for many years, as well as having sent CIDA interns since 2002. Safety for our guests is a top priority. CAUSE Canada will take the following measures to ensure the safety of all groups:

- Accompaniment by experienced CAUSE Canada staff person.
- Registration of all participants with the British High Commission in Freetown.
- Accommodation in a secure guesthouse with night watchman.
- Hired driver and CAUSE Canada vehicle for all in-country travel.
- Meals arranged in clean establishments and/or prepared through hired cook; bottled water provided.
- Adherence to recommendations made by CAUSE Sierra Leone management.

BACKGROUND ON CAUSE CANADA:

CAUSE Canada is an international relief and development organization that facilitates responsive and integrated community development projects in Central America and West Africa. CAUSE Canada seeks to alleviate poverty and injustice through long-term partnerships that empower communities to improve their quality of life. CAUSE Canada has been active in grassroots community development with local partner organizations in the developing world since the organization's inception in 1984. Development programs for women and children are a principle focus, in addition to programs in water and sanitation, reforestation, microfinance, emergency relief, and preventative health. CAUSE Canada believes that, with the right tools, people have the determination and intelligence to overcome their challenges and break the cycle of poverty.

CAUSE Kids is a program that works proactively to remove the many barriers to education in Sierra Leone – expense, need for household labour, social perceptions of the girl-child, ill health, food insecurity, poor infrastructure, and others. Currently, in Sierra Leone, only 69% of children attend primary school. This means that the average child will grow up to be illiterate, unable to benefit from the opportunities provided by formal education. CAUSE Kids is committed to building a legacy of education, opportunity and justice in Sierra Leone.