

Dear Friend of Liberia,

With YOUR help and career experts like returned Peace Corps volunteer Sia Barbara Kamara, whose story you will find below, Friends of Liberia’s Family Literacy Initiative (FLI) started its fourth year in January. Almost 180 families are enrolled in four communities (Caldwell, Duazon, Neezoe and West Point). At the end of the pilot years (2016-18), the first group of 45 children who completed the three-year FLI/HIPPY curriculum “graduated”. Of these children, 39 are now in formal schools. FLI is working to follow these students and document their success. Anecdotally, one principal immediately promoted all FLI students to First Grade!

The Adult Literacy Program (ALP) pilot, a component of our Family Literacy Initiative, is halfway through its first year with 25 women in two FLI communities and earning much positive attention.

Early Education and Adult Education

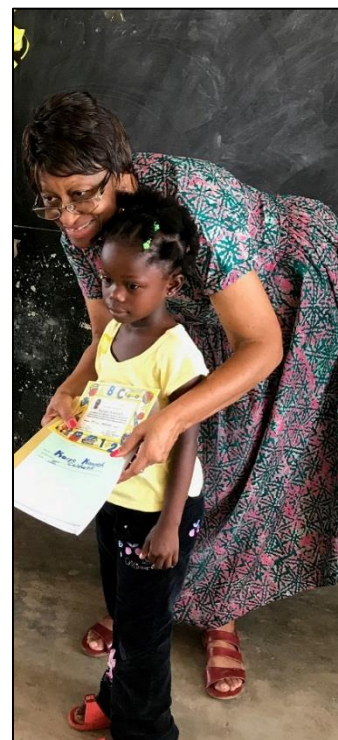
Sia Barbara Kamara likes to point out that she was “kicked out of kindergarten” while a Peace Corps teacher in Tappita, Liberia, in the early 1960s. She was a middle school math teacher when, as a favor to a friend, she “moonlighted” teaching his ABC class so he could finish his own education.

“We don’t let foreigners teach below third grade,” she was told by school officials. The Ministry thought her math teaching was wasted on middle school, too. In order not to lose Sia Barbara to Monrovia, her principal assigned her to the high school. In the summers, she taught higher mathematics to teachers at the Zorzor Teacher Training Institute. But she had learned a valuable lesson in the ABC class.

For Sia Barbara, the seed had been sewn for a career caring about early childhood education (ECE) that would make her a legend in the field. Back in the States, teacher training in her native South Carolina brought her the opportunity to look into a new program, Head Start. She visited every program in the state and codified the board rules for the program, all the while fighting a rear-guard battle against segregationists. In 1978, President Carter’s team persuaded her to come to Washington, D.C., where she would make a big difference.

President Carter appointed Sia Barbara associate commissioner in the Department of Health and Human Services, responsible for the National Head Start Program, the Appalachian Regional Commission child development programs, child care regulations, and research and demonstration programs. She managed a budget of approximately \$1B. When she started, 100,000 children were served in a program that grew to include 122 million under her watch.

When administrations changed at the federal level, she was recruited by Mayor Marion Barry to take care of ECE in D.C. She stayed through four mayors, ensuring safe and reasonable childcare, Head Start, and a lot of what a child needed to grow up smart and have an equal chance at life, as she describes her role. When Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly threatened Sia Barbara’s job during a budget crunch, Marian Wright Edelman and Katharine Graham called the mayor to say they could not do the job without Barbara Kamara.



Sia Barbara Kamara in Liberia.
Photo by Stephanie Vickers.

Sia Barbara, as she prefers to be called, has garnered more awards than this newsletter has room to list. In 2010, UNICEF by chance noticed her Liberia connection and invited her back to advise the Liberian Ministry of Education. More than five decades after getting kicked out of kindergarten, she is helping to redesign the way young children in Liberia learn.

Meanwhile, she noticed that Friends of Liberia, WE-CARE and HIPPO were designing the Family Literacy Initiative, which teaches parents how to work with their pre-school children to get them ready for school. So, she volunteered to help. She visits the FLI sites often and is a key member of FOL's Education Committee.

Four years later, Sia Barbara is particularly touched by the mothers and grandmothers who have come to the Adult Literacy Program that FLI has started at night as a pilot in two communities, Caldwell and Duazon. "It's so impressive to see how enthusiastic they are. One woman could only spell Jesus. Now she can write her own name and those of her children," Sia Barbara says. "They are all women who responded. Most of them work in the markets, so this is helping them do their business."

She says it appears that the women were motivated by the fact that their 3- and 4-year-olds are starting to read and they cannot. Many had not had the opportunity as girls to attend school, or the civil wars forced displacement and abandonment of formal education.

"When the FLI home visitors go to the homes, they are often crowded, so they sit in the yard on a bench with the box of materials each parent has. Other children in the family and friends from the neighborhood come to watch. After the first year, when neighbors saw what the benefits were, it was easier to recruit families." In fact, there is always a waiting list for the available slots in the program. The only barrier to expansion and sustainability is resources. I strongly urge you to read the FLI reports on [our website](#) to see its impact in evaluation results.

Health Professionals' Education

Meanwhile, in response to the many health needs in Liberia, a team comprised of health educators working with FOL performed an assessment that found a need to improve the knowledge base and competency of faculty members at the 20 Liberian schools of nursing and nurse midwifery. They have proposed a project to provide continuing education workshops for faculty members. This will help faculty members do a better job of preparing nurses and midwives for their work and in turn improve the quality of health care in Liberia.

A week-long continuing education workshop for 20 faculty members has been proposed for January 2020. The Health Team in Liberia is designing the workshop content and will lead the sessions. The Health Team in the U.S., which includes health educators and public health experts with extensive experience in Liberia, will provide mentoring and support and will seek funding for the project. To join the FOL Health Committee, send an [email](#) and put in the subject line "Health Project". To support the project, you may make a donation to FOL and designate it for the "Health Project".

The Small Grants program awarded four grants in 2018, among them the Ganta United Methodist Hospital Workers Association -- \$2,000 for the construction of a fence around the Family Care Center, which won an earlier FOL grant. The Care Center is a dormitory adjacent to the largest hospital serving northern Liberia and provides a temporary stay for relatives who have brought patients to the hospital from far-away villages. The fence was needed to protect the building's caretaker and occupants while they sleep from theft of supplies like linens, soap, buckets and food.

SEED Global Health at Phebe Hospital, Gbarnga, was awarded \$3,000 to purchase tablets, which cost less than a professional textbook. These will be loaded with educational materials and teaching modalities otherwise not available. These can be used and updated throughout the country to provide quality medical resource materials to graduates of the anesthetist program.

FOL's 2018 Annual Report is available on the [website](#). You will see the results of our group effort to help Liberians assist themselves in the most effective ways we can, given our resources. You may examine our revenues and expenditures there and how we ensure accountability.



At Phebe Hospital

Mission: Friends of Liberia is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that seeks to positively affect Liberia and Liberians through education, social, economic and humanitarian programs and through advocacy efforts.

We cannot do our work without your

generosity. Your financial contributions are needed to continue these important programs. Please make a gift today and help us carry on our work to support sustainable Liberian development.

The Liberian economy must recover from the Ebola health crisis, years of war, and governance challenges. That requires an educated and healthy workforce to fuel its growth. Liberians' ability to take part in 21st century commerce will hinge on their ability to seize educational opportunities for their children and themselves. Our support makes a positive impact.

Please consider a generous donation to FOL – and it's never too early to include FOL in your will. As many of us age, remember that donations directly from your required minimum distributions (from IRAs and many retirement plans) are not taxed. Yours can be a living legacy! Check out the form on the other side of this letter or our website for donation information. What several of us find easiest is a modest monthly automatic deduction via PayPal, and using Amazon Smile for those purchases ordered from home. They contribute a small percentage of the price, but that adds up, too!

Have a great summer and stay tuned for more results from our Liberian partners. We do appreciate your affiliation with Friends of Liberia and welcome your comments and questions at board@fol.org.

Sincerely,

Pat Reilly, Development Committee
Sally Zelonis, Chair, Development Committee
Sarah Morrison, FOL President

P.S. In addition, we would love to have your hands-on help on one of our committees. Check out the projects on our [website](#) to see how you might become involved.

You may be interested in the premier of a new Peace Corps documentary, "The Towering Task," that is scheduled for the Kennedy Center's new annex on September 22, 2019. Annette Benning is the narrator and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf plans to participate. It is a privately-done film that the NPCA is promoting with a plan to let groups sponsor concurrent cultural exhibits. FOL will certainly work to plan a social event around the visit of the former Liberian President. More to come as plans are more definitive!