

BROADSIDE

Volume 83 | Issue 5 | Visit us on the web at CONNECT2MASON.COM for daily Student Media content. | Monday, September 29, 2008

Solidifying Understanding Across the Atlantic

President Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone Meets with University Officials at Mason

JARED TRICE

Staff Writer

George Mason University hosted President Ernest Bai Koroma of the Republic of Sierra Leone on Saturday, Sept. 27. Mason is partnering with Sierra Leone in an effort to establish a four-college community system throughout Sierra Leone.

Mason President, Alan Merten, along with Provost Peter Stearns met with President Koroma and the Minister of Education, Minkailu Bah. The signing of The Memorandum of Understanding took place in Research I building on the Fairfax Campus.

Sierra Leone has donated 800 acres of land for the initial development of the college system. The project is expected to cost an estimated \$40 million for facilities and initial operations.

As a developing country in West Africa, Sierra Leone hopes the college system will promote growth and modernization and provide opportunities for the citizens to join a modern workforce. Students who wish to attend the future university will be required to take an entrance exam. The project is currently



Ernest Bai Koroma, the president of Sierra Leone, along with Minister of Education Minkailu Bah signed a Memorandum of Understanding with George Mason University to establish a four-college community system throughout Sierra Leone on Saturday, Sept. 27.

committee to discuss a possible partnering with Sierra Leone.

As President Merten stated, "What we need to do more of as we move ahead are efforts directed towards Africa. We and other universities have not done as much in Africa as we should. What we now need is the support of the U.S. government and other agencies to help us help Sierra Leone and other African countries." Merten continued, "It adds to the students' understanding of Africa and their understanding of global activities. Every time we do something globally, it helps our reputation."

When asked if the community college system could be eventually expanded, Kettlewell eagerly responded, "I certainly hope so. Sierra Leone is a large country."

Mason is currently the first university involved in the creation of such a college community system.

Although Kettlewell has already visited the future site of a campus in the city of Lunsar, arrangements are currently being made for a follow-up visit.

waiting to receive Mason's higher education program and current project coordinator, Dr. Gale Kettlewell, explained that Mason's relationship with Sierra Leone was initially instigated through a native of Sierra Leone and former Mason student, Dr. Alusine Kanu. Kettlewell was approached by Kanu several years ago with hopes of developing a community-college system in Sierra Leone. Kettlewell agreed to establish a local



Erin Thompson and Jill Egle are the co-executive directors for the Arc of Northern Virginia.

Student's Voice Heard in Richmond

Erin Thompson Seeks Change in Legislation

ERIN THOMPSON

Broadside Correspondent

For my summer break, I have been working at the Arc of Northern Virginia. I am on the payroll and I get my paycheck once a month. Nancy Mercer, Jill Egle and I are the co-executive directors for the Arc of Northern Virginia. We all have been up to Richmond a lot and work really hard getting the word out about mental retardation. We have been meeting with many famous people in Richmond about the funding and about sponsoring our bill. I have been up to Richmond 25 times to get the term "mental retardation" out of the laws. The Arc of Northern Virginia has all our funding and is sponsoring our bill and has the support from our parents. We are trying to get metal retardation out and there is a lot of work that needs to be done. We want to be able to say "intellectual disabilities" instead.

When I was in Richmond I met with a lot of famous people. I was in front of the stage talking about why and how are we going to deal with mental retardation.

Most of us want to be called by our names, but we don't want anybody using or saying "mental retardation." It is really hurtful. Most young adults who do not have a disability will think that it might be funny. Well I have to say it's not funny because it's cruel and it's not nice to say things to people's faces. The Arc of Northern Virginia

is trying to bring self-advocacies in to the community. The Northern Virginia Chapter of the Autism Society of Northern America is trying to raise more money so that people with autism can work. People with intellectual disabilities will have a hard time finding great jobs and earning money to get things they want.

When people are labeled as "mentally retarded" they have problems with transportation. We need to be able to have Metro, CUE bus or a Metro bus access to get around which is better than our parents driving us anywhere. There are at least 200 people on the "mentally retarded" list for two years and who are not finding transportation and jobs. Until we get the stigma out and replace it with "intellectual disabilities," the big issue is transportation.

The Arc of Northern Virginia held a café, which was called "I Have a Dream, I Have a Life, I Have a Name." We also had at least 100 legislators and senators to come in and talk to us about our bill, but we scheduled them on different days. One day was Monday, then we met on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and there was a lot of work, but finally we got it done.

I think the bill will be passed in 2010 or 2011. We all thought it would be passed in 2008, but they did mention that there was a problem with our bill, but I know that it will be passed very soon.

The Mason LIFE Program

Giving Opportunities to Students with Disabilities

CHRISTIAN YINGLING

Mason Votes Content Editor

George Mason University's Learning Into Future Environments Program admits six to eight new students each year in what is a highly selective process. This four-year program allows students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to gain a full college experience through classes like astronomy, employment opportunities, horticulture and exploratory mathematics time and measurement. LIFE Program students also have the opportunity to live on campus.

The LIFE Program, which began its pilot year in 2001, is a part of the Helen A. Keller Institute's work with the College of Education and Human Development. Since its pilot year, the LIFE Program has worked with approximately 35 students who were picked for their potential to successfully achieve their program goals, their learning needs and desires, and their families' commitment to the program's goals. The program prides itself on its commitment to personal attention, seen even in the program's small class ratio—one teacher for every four students.

"I just cannot find words strong enough to describe how much I love what the Mason LIFE program has enabled our students to do," said Jenn Labbe, a job coach with the program.

For junior Erin Thompson and alumni Adam Toobin, the program has truly enabled them to make an impact. They both are advocating on behalf of their community. Thompson spent last summer visiting Virginia legislators in Richmond, lobbying to have the phrase "mentally retarded" expunged



Erin Thompson and Jill Egle with Senators Howell and Houck.

from legislation. She has documented her experiences in an article she wrote for *Broadside*, on the left.

Toobin is currently working as an intern for Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign. Toobin, who has cerebral palsy, desires to "show disabled people that they can bring something to the world as well," he said in a recent interview.

The internship program was launched this year and is available to LIFE Program students who have graduated with a certificate of completion. The internships are designed to give hands-on experience in the students' desired fields of occupation. Before students graduate, they also work for on-campus employers during their junior year and for off-campus employers during their senior year.

"I feel that the office environment energizes me to the fullest of my capabilities," Toobin said, "Working gives me a great way to give back to the whole world."

Toobin and Thompson have been recognized for their efforts.

Toobin was discovered by the Obama campaign because of his work with Congressman Jim Moran's campaign; Thompson was just given the Secretary of Labor's New Freedom Initiative Award by President George W. Bush. The award is presented annually to individuals, non-profits, small businesses and corporations demonstrating outstanding and innovative work to further employment opportunities and environments for people with disabilities.

Each week, the students are given what is called a "probe assessment," which measures their development in the areas of reading and math. These results are used to quantify their academic progress.

LIFE Program instructors are Mason graduate students who study special education. The program also allows undergraduate minors in special education to observe and assist.

For more information on the program, visit its website: <http://masonlife.gmu.edu>.

BROADSIDE
GAME
WEEK

Apple
MEMBER CREDIT UNION

Women's Volleyball
vs. Hofstra

Friday, October 3rd, 7:00 p.m.
Field House

*** FREE USB Jump Drive**
* While supplies last.

Admission is **FREE** with your valid Mason Student I.D.!