

Creating safe, inclusive learning environments in Sierra Leone

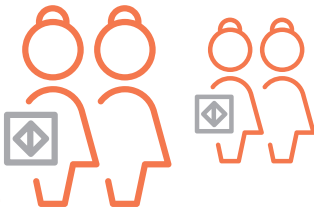
Leh Wi Lan is supporting learners in Sierra Leone's secondary schools to thrive through initiatives that create safe, inclusive, quality learning environments. In 2024, these are a few of the pilots and projects that are underway...

Menstrual Health Hygiene

Girls miss up to 20% of school when they don't have hygienic sanitary products to manage their period safely. We're working with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to provide menstrual hygiene kits – including reusable sanitary pads – to nearly 80,000 girls in 2023 (adding to the 420,000 delivered in previous years). Because when they have a healthy, confident leak-free period, they can attend school and focus on their learning.



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

420,000 
menstrual hygiene kits
given to secondary school girls.

Strengthening Safety

School Safety Committees (SSC) ensure that girls and boys can attend school, learn and thrive without fear of violence. 200 Committees are now in action across Sierra Leone to lead, set up and sustain school-wide safety mechanisms, including guiding staff responsibilities. For example, they play a key role in supporting survivors of violence and referring any reports of abuse to relevant services, in line with the National Referral Protocol. They also conduct an annual school safety self-assessment and, from its findings, create an action plan to ensure improvements are made. Through their work, we're seeing schools start to make toilets and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities safer, build trust with learners (ensuring they feel able to report violence), improve dissemination of violence and reporting methods amongst staff and learners.



Photo: Leh Wi Lan

Child and Adolescent Health and Life Skills learning

Learners in secondary school experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes. The attitudes and decisions they form at this age impact how they think and interact with the world throughout life. Child and Adolescent Health and Life Skills (CAHLS) lessons provide a strong foundation in building healthy habits, progressive attitudes and resilient behaviours. Leh Wi Lan has trained 150 teachers on CAHLS to confidently spearhead a new pilot that provides pupils with classes on topics like Understanding Drugs, My Body & My Rights, Managing Relationships and Challenging Stigma & Discrimination. They are given support through WhatsApp and school visits, to ensure quality and consistency are maintained.

Girls' and Boys' Clubs

Girls' and Boys' Clubs offer an opportunity for learners to access information about violence and sexual and reproductive health in an informal group setting. The Clubs are led by learners themselves, with support from mentors, so they can discuss taboo topics in an inclusive, safe, supportive environment. Through radio and printed resources, they get lively, age-appropriate access to knowledge and resources on sensitive topics. When young people understand their rights, they are empowered to make positive decisions. This has a clear impact on their learning outcomes and their ability to become future leaders for their communities.

Inclusion Champions

By supporting teachers to develop specialist knowledge and skills in disability inclusion, we can create environments that ensure learners with disabilities are supported to attend school consistently and gain quality education. Inclusion Champions have been trained by Leh Wi Lan in partnership with local organisations of people with disabilities, so they can: understand how inclusion policy applies to children with special educational needs and disabilities; identify learners' needs and refer them to services; recognise gaps in school inclusion practices and make plans to fill them and engage with communities and parents to advocate

for learners to attend school. Inclusion Champions are offering school-level support in 200 schools across five districts and already having an impact on learners' and staff's experiences..

Connecting Community Leaders with Learners

Though teachers and learners are increasingly aware of what constitutes violence in school, we have identified a need to strengthen knowledge of the different reporting mechanisms available to survivors of abuse. Alongside our partner Focus 1000, we mobilised health and social care service providers to conduct school assemblies and classes on gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation (FGM). All participants reported that they learnt something new during the sessions and schools made commitments to strengthen their links with service providers and to continue disseminating their messages in schools. This enables schools and learners to better understand the support in place to prevent and respond to violence.

Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices survey

To ensure we're creating education interventions that meet the needs of learners and schools, it's vital that we understand current levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices around topics of safety and inclusion. Every year, Leh Wi Lan will carry out a survey amongst teachers and learners to assess where more work is needed to improve understanding and behaviour in key areas, such as girls' inclusion and classroom safety practices. The first baseline survey has indicated that there is still enduring stigma around pregnant learners attending school indicating the need for further activities on the topic.

To learn more about our projects, research and learning, find us on the Sierra Leone Education Knowledge Platform.

