

Year 3: 2012-2013

The second year of our partnership was a stunning success. However, the school was left unfinished and school council were eager for us to return to continue the work of refurbishing the school, teaching the children and helping the teachers. Therefore, their target was that our school community should raise £3000 so that we could:

- Finish a second classroom block.
- Give out more shoebox gifts.
- Buy new tables for the classrooms.

So the fundraising began in earnest again. Two highlights were:

Curry night:



Fireworks night:



Having recently returned, the staff team are pleased to report that all of the children's and the camp's goals were met and photos of this can be viewed in the 2013 gallery.



Below, each of the staff who visited this year, or who have been visiting for some time, has written about their experiences. Please take some time to read them.



Mr Christie:



Even though you've seen what the countries in Western Africa are like on TV, there is nothing quite like stepping off the plane into the third world. From the moment I exited the airport, I knew this country would be nothing like I had seen before. I remember My Byrne pointing out to me,

"There's the local supermarket!" I looked round and all I can see was a run down shack made of metal ridging and help up by wooden poles with a few mouldy-looking fruits and vegetables on it. It was at this precise moment I was wondering why on earth I had decided to come to Sierra Leone. However, after a nervy first day, I suddenly found myself having the time of my life – a combination of riding motorbikes to the refugee camp, meeting some of the happiest children ever, paying 45 pence for a coke and seeing the gratefulness of those you've come to help were just some of the things that made the trip worth it. I realised that the people there didn't want my pity, they wanted

my help and having returned I'm proud to say I helped them and learnt two valuable lessons: 1. Living is about being happy with what you've got and 2. an understanding of the phrase 'This Is Africa.'

Mrs Hervey:



This year was my second visit to Sierra Leone so I was a little more prepared for what it was going to be like. I was much more excited as I was less nervous about being in a country so different from ours. Remembering what it was like last year, I had packed more snacks like crisps and made sure I had painting clothes that I didn't mind getting dirty.

When we arrived at the camp in Kissitown I remembered many faces from the year before. It was nice to find out how people's year had been although it was also upsetting to hear some people's sad news. Even though the mosquito nets we gave out last year have made a huge impact on the families in the camp, children are still dying.

I was slightly more prepared for the excitement of the children at the school and thought it would be quite quiet with it being Sunday. However, there were huge numbers of children and all the teachers were waiting for us to arrive. The school looked much better than I had been expecting. I expected the block of classrooms we renovated last year to look more tired and dirty but the community have tried really hard to keep it looking good and have taken really good care of the resources as well. The Greenholm room still has some boxes of paper and the shelves have got story books on them for the children to borrow and share. Mr Sanko, the headteacher, showed us the two class 6 rooms that were our project for this year. One was empty and looked ready for us to start painting but the other room had tables and chairs stacked 2 or 3 high that filled the room. He shouted out of the door and immediately lots of children appeared and started to lift tables and chairs onto their heads and carry them out for us. I tried to help but the children, who were probably only in year 4 and 5, were much stronger and quicker than me.

Painting and decorating over the next few days was fantastic, the teachers got involved, people from all over the community came to see what we were doing and everyone wanted to help. The children at the school really impressed me with how enthusiastic they were to help improve their school. Anything that needed doing, they wanted to do - from holding the ladder to make sure I didn't fall off, to sweeping, to painting. They even scrubbed my arms and feet with kerosene when I got covered in green and black paint, which was a little strange. The class 6 boys were fantastic at

carrying their new desks (which you had all bought) the half a mile from the carpenter's to the school.

Being in Sierra Leone makes me realise how fortunate I am. I feel lucky to teach in a school where I can get anything my pupils need without question and that they have all the books, and equipment they require. I am grateful that I know if my little girl gets ill, I can go to the doctors who can give her medicine make to her better. It also makes me realise how little you need to be happy.

Mr Bird:



This has been the third year that I have been able to go to Sierra Leone and it has been great to see the changes that have occurred as a direct result of children at Greenholm raising money for the project. I really enjoyed being able to see how the mosquito nets we delivered last year have helped to lower the rate of children dying from malaria and also to see the children using their refurbished classrooms. Life is very different out there and there are many hardships but this year it has again struck me by how happy the people we met were, particularly those in the camp we had met last year. It was great to meet with people we worked alongside last year again and it feels like we are building a really good relationship with our school and the people from the refugee camp school. We are already thinking about further ways we can support the project in the year to come!

Miss Gumbs:



I had mixed emotions before I going to Sierra Leone. I was nervous about visiting a new country and scared because my trip would involve having injections.

After a few tears and four injections I was set for the Sierra Leone experience but I was still a little worried. Would I like the country, the food, what about wild animals? After speaking to Mr Byrne and hearing reassuring words from Miss Tsang I felt a little less nervous.

Leading up to the trip I read up on Sierra Leone and the great work that Greenholm had already done for the people of Kissi town. I wanted to also make a difference.

On the Friday morning we headed down to London for our flight. I remember feeling nervous, worried and I was unusually quiet. So many thoughts were running through my head. Luckily the other teachers took my mind off these and reassured me.

The flight to Sierra Leone was great. We met the rest of the team from Great Barr and had a nice flight.

I felt excited when the plane landed. Feeling the heat from the sunshine made me happy but in the airport it was very dusty and busy. There were crowds of people bustling around and speaking loudly in their language. It was so different. I stayed close to Miss Yaseen as we waited for our luggage.

Outside in the heat of Sierra Leone I began to look around the capital city. Lots of men gathered around us, throwing our luggage into the trucks. I began to worry what they were doing with our things but they had only come to collect us.

The drive to the ferry port was amazing. As we travelled through the main city, I began to relax as I noticed the houses, shops, schools, churches and the people. They were all so friendly, waving as we drove past.

At the ferry port we had to wait hours and hours for the ferry to the other side of the country. As it got darker and later I began to feel anxious. I was thinking about travelling by boat in the night time, not being to see where we were going. To calm my nerves I sent a text to mum and read my book.

The boat ride was entertaining with music and movies to watch. Nothing to worry about.

We arrived at the guest house late into the night. The owner showed us our rooms. The rooms were all newly built. They looked great. So comfortable for my weeks stay. I wasn't nervous or worried now. I was looking forward to experiencing Sierra Leone.

On the Sunday morning we travelled to Kissi town to visit the school. We rode on the back of motorbikes, children all waved and shouted hello as we sped past. As we pulled up to the school, groups of children ran from their homes to greet us. The first thing I noticed about all of the children was their big bright smiles. They wanted to say hello and asked us lots of questions. They were also interested in having their pictures taken. Most children had never seen or used a camera before. There was a lot of posing and smiling going on.

This was just the start of my great experience in Sierra Leone. I went from being nervous and scared to really enjoying my time. Working hard on the classrooms and seeing the finished work was an achievement. Working alongside the children, talking and playing games was fantastic.

The thing I will remember most about my trip was the smiling faces and laughter of the children. They might not have the most expensive games or toys but they are happy with what they have. They enjoy life.

Miss Yaseen:



Upon my arrival at Sierra Leone I was greeted with the smiles from hundreds of children eager to welcome the new faces to Waterloo. Around me I met children who were very sweet and lovable and appreciated all they got. Waterloo is a school which aims to help every child achieve their full potential just like Greenholm however the demands are high and the resources are scarce. There are great community links between the school, places of worship and the hospital. Greenholm not only donated time and effort to Waterloo but were also able to give purchase Qurans and bibles for the places of worship. They were also able to donate £200 for the hospital, however help is still needed. It was an experience which really made me appreciate what I have and what we take for granted. I feel this opportunity to help should not be taken lightly because with perseverance we can truly make a difference. I truly enjoyed participating in art sessions with the staff and the children and also enjoyed decorating and refurbishing the classrooms.

Mr Byrne:



Although this was my third visit to Sierra Leone and Kissi Town, this year I really felt like a member of their community. As soon as we arrived, familiar smiling faces were rushing up to us to asking how we were, how our families were, sharing stories and memories from previous years and eager to hear about how the pupils and staff at our school were. Even the children remembered us: some were wearing the clothes which came in last year's shoeboxes and one child was wearing a Greenholm P.E. t-shirt. Mr Afotey was even wearing the Greenholm Citizenship badge which I gave to him last year! Then after a hard week, as we left the camp for the final time, with the tables in place and refurbishment work done, it was great to see the children trying to pronounce the names on their desks and asking us to say thank you to those who donated them.

I believe that this is what makes our partnership so special and so effective. It is not based on raising money and sending it overseas without ever seeing how it has benefitted the lives of those it was raised to help – it is based on personal, friendly, reciprocal and meaningful relationships between our community and theirs. It is important that our children see the results of their hard work and fundraising and a simple name on a donated table can offer them a profound sense of pride and identity as a global citizen and someone who really cares for others.