



# School Returns to Sierra Leone for First Time Since Ebola

St. Ambrose College students returned to the school they helped to establish in Sierra Leone for the first time since the Ebola crisis.

A party of 10 Year 13 pupils and four staff spent 10 days in Freetown over half term helping the local teachers in lessons and extra curricular activities.



Sale Sharks and St. Ambrose College rugby player Ciaran Booth introduces rugby to children in Sierra Leone.

However as Head Boy Sam Nanda, 18, said: "We probably learned more from the experience than those we were there to help."

St. Ambrose first visited Sierra Leone in 2010 to establish the St. Ambrose Academy to offer the capital city's street children some respite from the aftermath of a bloody and debilitating civil war.

Proceeds from the Hale Barns Catholic college's annual walking the bounds event raised some £10,000 each year towards the fees and capital costs, money that goes at least ten times further in West Africa.

Head of Religious Education Matthew O'Neil said: "In the first years we saw significant progress every year but the Ebola pandemic has certainly put the country backwards again and they are struggling to recover fully."

St. Ambrose no longer pays the running costs of the school but is raising money for capital projects including the construction of a bore hole on site to get clean water and are also committed to paying the fees of six girls orphaned by Ebola, which though only £80 p.a. are completely beyond the reach of their adoptive families.

Sam Nanda added: "It was frustrating that we didn't have enough time to make a physical impact on the school's infrastructure but I feel we left an emotional legacy, The children were all so happy to see us, to know whom their school is named after and to hear that people are so interested in their futures."

Captain of rugby and Sale Sharks product Ciaran Booth, 17, took some rugby lessons: "They play football and you see them kicking around old deflated balls, bottles and even rocks to get a game and were not at all familiar with rugby, but they certainly enjoyed learning the basics and were incredibly enthusiastic."

Charlie Conduit, 18, who is pictured with some of the St. Ambrose bursary students, said: "We had heard about their living conditions and to see such poverty is actually quite tragic, but the lasting impression was how happy they are even though they have so little and how they make the most of everything."