

OFF TO RWANDA

After 2 years of waiting, saving and anticipation, during half term 17 students, staff and adults connected with the school finally embarked on the long-awaited visit to Rwanda.

We took off from Heathrow during the big storm on Valentines Day and really wondered whether our plane would take off at all. On the other hand, the bumpy start might actually have been caused by the 900 kilos of luggage we took with us. Thank you to all of you who donated clothes, toiletries, educational materials and toys for us to take and distribute.



One of the first things we did in Rwanda was to visit the Gisimba orphanage in Kigali to distribute gifts. This orphanage has around 200 children from the age of 2 to 20. The children have no electricity or running water. They live in dingy dormitories with little adult supervision. For most of the time, children are left to be looked after by other children. They were so excited to see all the gifts people had donated laid out on tables and they had a wonderful time choosing what they wanted.



Whilst the gifts brought them great joy, what the children seemed to love even more was the opportunity to spend time with us and play games. We took with us bubble blowers, friendship bracelet making kits, balloon modelling and glitter tattoos for a fun filled afternoon. The children, who are starved of love and affection, held our hands and became very tearful when we had to leave – and so did we !!

Throughout our week we met many of the 800 people who have directly benefitted from the Reaching Rwanda project. It was great to see Naomi and Charonne who are doing so well at the school we pay for, to see Eric and Aline who are no longer homeless because our money has provided a safe home for them, and to meet Janvier and Emile who recently finished their studies. Our support has given them the hope for a much brighter future. It was wonderful to see all our past beneficiaries looking so happy and healthy. All of them thanked us from the bottom of their hearts for the support Sandhurst School has given.



We also had the chance to make many new friends. We found the Rwandese people incredibly friendly and curious about us. They loved talking to us and giving us cuddles.

The Reaching Rwanda project has now set up 15 businesses in Rwanda, employing over 70 people. It was fantastic to see how our businesses have transformed the life chances of so many people. We visited one of our sewing co-operatives and delivered a new knitting machine. We also nearly lost Sam on this day as he received a marriage proposal from one of the workers!!



One of the best experiences for us was to be present at the very moment when a person's life changed because of the Reaching Rwanda project. We delivered a cow to a destitute survivor called Juliet to improve the diet of the orphans she cares for. We set 3 women up in a new business making clothes and delivered all the equipment they needed to earn a living. And we met Claudine at the place where her whole family were slaughtered and told her that Sandhurst School would be paying for her education.

It was wonderful to meet Mugisha and Manzi and deliver letters from students at Sandhurst. Since receiving our support, Mugisha and Manzi's house has been repaired and made safe, they are now able to go to school and we have provided pigs to enable their grandmother to earn a small income.



During our visit we also had the opportunity to teach in two different schools. When we arrived at the Kampanga school, 1200 children ran out to meet us. We divided into groups to deliver lessons we had prepared beforehand. We had to take all resources with us to do this. We taught Science, Art and English lessons, as well as organising a traditional primary school sports day, together with sack, egg and spoon, and 3 legged races.

Rwandan schools have very few resources – most don't even have electricity and the children are very hungry as food is not provided. However, the children know how vital education is to their future and they are very well behaved. The Headteacher was able to control a whole school just by blowing his whistle.



Unfortunately our presence reduced these schools to absolute chaos at times. I think the teachers were quite relieved when we left!!

In a week full of amazing experiences, one of the highlights for many of us was the day we spent providing new homes for two homeless families. Two adjoining houses had been built prior to our visit, paid for by donations on non-uniform days. When we arrived, these houses were empty, rough shells. We set about making them into cosy, comfortable homes before handing them over to two homeless families. Before we arrived, one family had been forced to sleep rough on the floor, on top of a filthy pile of rags. Through the generosity of Sandhurst School students, they and another family now have a decent, safe and clean home to live in, in a village full of other orphaned children. We left the village that day very tired but feeling so happy that our efforts had changed their lives forever.



Before



During



After

Throughout our visit we learned a lot about modern Rwandan culture. Of course the friendly Rwandese people were not happy for us to just sit back and watch. They also wanted us to join in.



They even decided that two of us – Chris and Maddie – would be getting married in a traditional wedding ceremony during which the bride is carried to the groom’s house on a Stretcher!



Throughout our visit we experienced a rollercoaster of emotions. We were so proud to meet the many, many people who have benefitted from the Reaching Rwanda project and to see how the kindness of the students at Sandhurst School has completely changed their lives.

We cried many tears when meeting the numerous people who still desperately need our help. But most of all, we felt such enormous happiness to experience this visit of a lifetime – and we hope that many of you will take the opportunity to go to Rwanda during future visits.

Ms S Hunt