

Day of the African Child, 11 June 2014

St Patrick's Primary School in Leamington hosted the Day of the African Child on 16 June 2014. 498 children from thirteen schools in Warwick and Leamington with links to schools in the city of Bo, Sierra Leone, assembled in a large marquee to the sound of beating drums. They heard how the Day is a memorial to the many schoolchildren shot by police in Soweto in 1976 when they were protesting at the inadequacy of education in the township. Two visiting teachers from Bo, on the "Connecting Classrooms" exchange programme, exchanged gifts between schools, in the form of photos and letters.



Then the children split into groups and moved to the day's activities. One group stayed in the marquee for singing with Freddie Mansallay, a Sierra Leonean living in the UK. He taught them a song he had written specially for the day and led them in the anthem for our link which begins:

You are my brother
You are my friend
You are my sister
Our love will never end



Outside, on the grass, they were doing sports. Teacher Stephen Peet, who has been to Bo, organised them into relays, starting with bean bags balanced on their heads to simulate taking food to an African market.



Two groups went to learn drumming with Liz Rose of In2Cultures and Jude Winwood of Beatfeet. The rooms were filled with children and djembe drums and soon the air was throbbing with rhythms.



Two rooms were very quiet as pupils thought about more serious issues- the fact that so many children don't enjoy the basic 'right' of education. They watched an ACTION AID video explaining this years theme: "Send ALL my friends to school" - emphasising that, of the 57 million children missing out on school, 24 million are disabled. Children then wrote buddy messages to their MP telling him what they thought.



We made lots of new friends and we learnt about different cultures. I especially enjoyed the singing. I really liked the story teller, Alfred, from Sierra Leone.

Another group sat on the floor listening to traditional African stories told by the visiting Sierra Leonean teachers, Philomina Egujama and Alfred Kanneh. After discussing the morals behind the tales the children had the opportunity to ask our visitors questions about life in Sierra Leone.



Meanwhile the hall was filled with the sounds of drumming and excitement as Devinder, from In2Cultures, taught them a competitive dance that started standing up, progressed until they had their backs on the floor and finished upright again!



Every forty minutes the groups moved round so that everyone participated in each activity. After a break for lunch the schools lined up, each with a banner proclaiming its link with a school in Bo, and they all paraded round the field to the sound of drums.



At the end of the day everybody assembled in the marquee for a grand finale. The buddy messages were all presented to the Mayor of Leamington, John Knight, who promised to hand them on to our MP to join others from around the country asking the government to promote universal education worldwide. The Mayor and the Vice Chair of Warwick District, Alan Wilkinson, spoke of their admiration of the event and its benefits for the children and the community as a whole. The Sierra Leonean teachers presented banners from their schools in Bo to their link schools in Warwick and Leamington.



The climax of the event was all five hundred children singing at the tops of their voices and then performing the dance with vigour and excitement. It is wonderful to think that some 2,000 children have participated in such events over the past five years; they must certainly have gained lasting impressions.



The Day was promoted by One World Link (OWL), the link between Bo in Sierra Leone and Warwick and Leamington. It was organised by Liz Garrett (OWL's Primary Schools Coordinator) and Katy Traynar of St Patrick's School. One World Link acknowledges with much appreciation the generous donation from Leamington International Twinning Society towards the cost of the event.

It was really good fun. We got to learn lots of different African dance and storytelling.

Kip Warr, One World Link