

Aiken New Tech High School Wins 2015 4C Youth Award!

Student-led project exemplifies 'taking action on behalf of children'

CINCINNATI (Nov. 11, 2015)—The children living in Largo, a remote village in Sierra Leone, once attended school in a building constructed of bamboo and banana leaves and were taught by teachers who were paid with rice and vegetables.

That was before the students at Cincinnati's Aiken New Tech High School heard about their plight last year and took action. Actually, they took *many* actions as part of a school-wide service project to raise money to build a school in Largo.

By the end of the year the 650-plus members of the student body raised nearly \$5,000 to support the construction of a new three-room school building named Aiken-Largo.



Sierra Leone education secretary Joseph Porme, left, with Gift Mayambi, Joyce Mayambi and Roman Mayambi, all students from Cincinnati's New Tech High School.

For all their efforts, past and present, the Aiken New Tech students and their Aiken-Largo School Project have been chosen as the recipient of the [2015 Champions for Children: The Next Generation Award](#) from 4C for Children. The award, sponsored by Bartlett & Co., will be presented on Jan. 23, 2016, at 4C's [10th annual Champions for Children event](#) at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza.

The goal of the award is to honor high school students in grades 9-12 who are taking action on behalf of the children of our community—or of our world. "We want to reinforce in the leaders of tomorrow that it's important to invest in the children of today," says 4C President/CEO Vanessa Freytag.

Sandi Horine, a counselor at Aiken New Tech, first visited Sierra Leone two years ago where she met the country's education secretary Joseph Pormai. She traveled to his home village of Largo, which has 450 residents, no electricity or running water, one outhouse and a makeshift bamboo school until it was destroyed by a wind storm. The only other school is three miles away, much too far for small children to walk.

Horine saw the great need and began exploring how much it would cost to build a school in Largo. She proposed this as a service project to principal Lisa Votaw, who endorsed it enthusiastically. The school's Leadership Team of five students then adopted the program and took over. Eventually more than 40 students joined in the effort to plan and carry out the fundraising activities.

"These kids—100 percent of whom are eligible for the free lunch program—picked this project up and ran with it," says Horine. "They are so grateful for their own new state-of-the-art Cincinnati Public School that they wanted to 'pay it forward' by helping the children in Largo gain a basic education."

To raise the initial \$5,000, students held a variety of events, the most successful of which was a walk-a-thon that raised more than \$3,000. T-shirts designed and worn by the walkers were eventually sent to the students at Aiken-Largo, who now proudly wear them to school each Friday.

This summer, local men built the new mud brick and concrete school and have since built desks and benches, a project funded during Aiken New Tech's first term. The Cincinnati students are currently collecting books to create a library at the school in an effort to help raise the country's 37 percent literacy rate.

Next term they plan to work with a partner to obtain solar soccer balls for the children. Solar batteries embedded in the balls are charged during daytime play. Reading lights, which will last five hours, can then be attached to the balls at night to aide in homework and reading.

Among the other ways the students from Aiken New Tech are supporting their friends in Sierra Leone:

- Helping provide tuition assistance (\$4 per student annually)
- Providing school supplies
- Creating relationships by exchanging letters and photos

And these students continue to dream even bigger dreams, including sending a work team to the country to tutor the children and installing solar panels on the school's roof to help provide limited electricity.

Isis Williams, a member of the Leadership Team and now a freshman at the Ohio State University, says seeing the school become a reality was amazing. "We are affecting future generations. Some of these African students might become doctors, lawyers, teachers, world changers. This project made me realize we can accomplish anything when we work together as a team."

The people of Sierra Leone have survived a 10-year civil war and most recently, the Ebola crisis. Everyone involved with this project, says Votaw and Horine, see it as a way of giving hope, showing the people living in Largo that there is a future and there is a brighter tomorrow.

4C for Children has long recognized adult community leaders who champion children—and will do so again at the Jan. 23 [Champions for Children Celebration](#) at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza.

The event will honor the [2015 Champions Leslie Maloney and Pamela Page-Boykins](#) as well as the Aiken New Tech students. To mark this event's 10th anniversary, 4C will also present the first Sallie Westheimer Community Impact Award to John Pepper and James Zimmerman, retired CEOs of Procter & Gamble and Macy's respectively.