

77-year-old is heading to Africa to help the victims of devastating civil war

# Mary is on a mission to care, and to share

by Gavin Moore

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A 77-YEAR-OLD woman from Towcester has put aside her own disabilities to help deal with the aftermath of a civil war in Africa

Retired teacher Mary Tansley of Watling Street is a member of the Tove Valley Baptist Fellowship and at the beginning of this year she spent two weeks with a group of former teachers helping schools in Sierra Leone with the charity Mission Direct.

Mrs Tansley, who has taught in Whittlebury and Harpole, visited Sierra Leone in 2003 but during her most recent visit she was working with the charity to refurbish dark and mouldy classrooms as well as passing on her experience as a teacher.

Mrs Tansley has a lung and spinal condition which restricts her mobility, and she needed a wheelchair while moving through the airports on her trip to Africa.

Mrs Tansley said: "When you go out there, the one thing you learn is there's no good saying I can't. I



DOING HER BIT: Mary Tansley, Pictured above Left, in Africa

saw a child there badly crippled by polio, there was no medication to treat it during and after the war.

"But that didn't stop them playing football and games with the other children.

"They'd play on all fours, crutches, but the speed and joy they got from it was just as much as an able bodied child would have here."

Despite the war having ended 11 years ago, Sierra Leone is still

one of the poorest countries in the world and is dealing with the aftermath of a generation of children forced to become child soldiers.

Mrs Tansley added: "There was also one man in a wheelchair, paralysed from the waist down because of a bullet in his spine.

"But he put his chair up against the wall and was scrapping mould off the walls with the rest of us.

"It just goes to show there's always something you can do, whatever your situation."

Mrs Tansley added: "It was a great privilege to go out there and share with them, to share whatever we have and to take them practical things and to give them hope.

"You take your experience as a teacher and try to help them use what they already have to start to rebuilding their lives."

Last year 450 people used their holidays to travel to the developing world with Mission Direct.

During each two week trip volunteers help build homes, classrooms and clinics for the poor.

For more information about the charity log on to [www.missiondirect.org](http://www.missiondirect.org) or call on 01582 720056.