Over the past couple of months, some members of St Peter’s College have been involved in planning and organising a Maths Camp in Cameroon. Christy Pafue Nganjimi (MEng Engineering Science, 2017), Matteo Parisi (DPhil Mathematics 2017) and Oliver Dann (MMath Mathematics and Philosophy, 2014) have recently returned from Cameroon where they worked with local and international volunteers to host 59 secondary school students over a week of maths and fun.

The Kenyan-based non-governmental organization African Mathematics Initiatives (AMI) established the first AMI Math Camp in Kenya 8 years ago in an effort to revolutionise the way in which mathematics is taught and perceived within the African context. Math Camps have since been held in Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania and this year Togo, Rwanda, Uganda and Cameroon.

The aim of the Camp is to expose young minds to new and exciting ideas in mathematics, relevant to the world we live in, in a way that is not just about calculations and passing exams.

The Camp in Cameroon was an initiative of Christy Pafue Nganjimi, a Cameroonian-British Engineering Science student at St Peter’s College, Oxford. She was supported by Balázs Szendrői, Martin Powell Fellow and Tutor in Pure Mathematics at the College, also a Trustee of AMI’s UK partner charity Supporting African Mathematics Initiatives (SAMI).

Led by Christy, the volunteers spent two weeks helping to prepare and run the first ever Math Camp in Yaoundé. The first part of the Camp involved a planning week during which the volunteers created lessons based on ideas they had encountered in their respective fields of study. The students were introduced to programming concepts such as algorithms by playing a route finding game that involved them creating a set of instructions then they tested out these algorithms later in the week on The Blockly Maze computer game. During one of the Geometry and Combinatorics sessions, the student learnt about Catalan Numbers by counting the paths between two fixed points by walking between desks in the classroom.

Matteo, speaking of his experience volunteering at the Camp said, “On the first day, the students arrived very disciplined. They automatically sat in their desks and expected the teacher to teach them maths on the blackboard. They were puzzled when they were divided into two groups away from desks and even more surprised when they were asked to walk around the classroom counting paths. Initially, the student were shy and reluctant to go up to the blackboard to write solutions for their problem but they gradually started going. They tried different solutions and found new ones. It was nice to see them come out of their shell throughout the week.”

Christy received a College travel grant to help towards her travel cost. Matteo was partially funded by a generous donation from the St Peter’s Foundation.