



GHANA TOGETHER

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November 2020

Dear friends,

Usually, this time of year, when we sit down to write our annual “Update Letter”, we look back over the year and share with gratitude and pride all that we, with our Western Heritage Home partners in Ghana, and the help of so many Ghana Together supporters, have managed to achieve. Now, we must say honestly, although **nothing** has transpired as planned back in January 2020, this year has made us even more grateful and yes, proud.

It does seem a cruel irony that back in late 2006 when we, as a small group of friends, joined up with the Seattle non-profit “Global Citizen Journey” and traveled to Axim, Ghana, it was largely because of the struggles there with HIV-AIDs. We were inspired by one of our sons who had made a business trip to Ghana and met with a Ghanaian businessman named James Kainyiah. James was also the Nkosuohene of Lower Axim Traditional Council --- the “economic development chief”. He, Chief Awulae Attibrukusu III, Methodist leader Isaac Bentil, retired teacher Miss Frances Polley, Queen Mom Nana Adjou Sika, and others were trying with all their might to figure out how to deal with children who were what the Ghana Ministry of Women & Children identified as “OVCs”---orphaned or vulnerable children. And why were they doing this? Because of HIV-AIDS, which hit Ghana so cruelly in the early 2000’s, before it was medically well-understood, and left so much suffering in its wake.

We made Axim friends and learned about life in Axim. James had asked that one of our team have knowledge of HIV-AIDS. Suz H. joined us. A retired teacher, she had been trained and was conducting HIV-AIDs workshops for police and firefighters in Northwest Washington State. She gathered a couple of suitcases of condoms, donated by our local health organizations, and gave a number of workshops to young adults in the Axim area. That, and our visit in general, really was appreciated by them and cemented our relationship.

Before our visit, James had formed the NGO “Western Heritage Home” (WHH) to support building a dormitory for Axim’s children who needed shelter---the OVCs. Resources were scarce, so when we returned to the US, some of us formed Ghana Together to help. Thanks to a grant from Boeing Corp, the Western Heritage Children’s Home became a reality. About 25-30 children were taken in during late 2007, and became “WHH Scholars”, living in the Heritage Home and attending nearby Manye Academy. Eventually, some of them were moved out as “extended families” were found. Others transitioned to school boarding dormitories as they advanced in grades---common in Ghana. After ten years or so, as the students matured, AIDs risk in the community diminished, the Heritage became a dormitory for the new Axim Girls SHS. A long story...but WHH has remained steadfast in their support and so have we of Ghana Together.

And yes, ebola came along a few years after our initial visit, but Axim knew the risks---they installed Veronica bucket handwashing stations at stores, churches, government offices, market entrances, etc. They used portable thermometers---we ourselves were tested frequently on visits. They required fishing crews that landed to be tested at the hospital before going into the community. Ebola did not reach Axim, but perhaps helped prepare them for COVID-19.

So, here we are. We say “cruel irony”, because most of the very students we helped in 2006, some of whom we are still supporting, are now young adults. They are again dealing with a pandemic. Will they remember HIV-AIDs and COVID-19 as the “bookends” of early childhood to adulthood? Probably. Thankfully, none have contracted COVID-19 so far.

We know our WHH Scholars are determined! Our five university students are studying, mostly online. Thanks to our support they have computers, internet, and student housing near their universities. Per Peter, our computer science major, the internet is frustratingly slow and there is “dumsor”---literally meaning on/off---losing electrical power, ranging from an hour to a few days with no prior warning.

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Our three vocational students' school is closed except for the final-year students. One is working as an apprentice electrician in a new hotel. Another is with a family in a nearby town apprenticing with his plumbing skills. The third is tapping rubber on a nearby farm. Junior High students Ben and Gladys are with extended family about 50 miles away. Their school, too, is closed to all but the final-year students. The two remotely-located primary schools we are helping are in session, with 31 students total in early grades. The Ghana Educational Authority has for now decided it's worth the risk to these youngest children.

AND, we were really overjoyed to learn that Charlotte and Philomena, our two newly-graduated Nursing Assistants, have been placed by USAID into positions in more remote northwest Ghana as part of our US Embassy's efforts regarding health assistance. And Nurse Dorothy starts week of Nov 9 in Dominase, placed by the Ghana Health Service. Wonderful!

And, maybe the best news of all---the new library construction is going really well---a bit slowed with fewer workers and distancing. As we write, they are installing the electrical grid, and roof beams are in place. At last a home for the 16,000+ children's books we've sent---thank you all! At last a center for lifelong learning and literacy, a children's room, meeting room for adults, and so much more. And, 40+ up-to-date computers (thanks all!). And located in a perfect location, near several schools, thanks to land donated by the Axim Methodist Church! When finished, it will be "handed over" to the Ghana Library Authority, which owns and operates public libraries in Ghana. There is a local funding drive happening now by which churches and other local organizations are donating funds to buy shelving. We love this local effort.

So, you may well ask, what's for next year? To be honest, we don't know. Ghana seems to be dealing with the virus reasonably well, with masks, handwashing, closing schools, etc. The Municipal Executive goes around town with his portable temperature thermometer, testing folks on the spot. They have experience, after all, with disease---consider the ongoing struggles with malaria, typhoid, cholera, potential for ebola always lurking, AIDS, etc. In a recent Whatsapp message one of the group of elders, who are strong community advocates for the new library, said he didn't quite understand in English the difference between "social distancing" and "physical distancing"---could we please explain! :)

One lesson we've learned is that we're all in this together, worldwide. COVID-19 has brought that reality home. We will continue. Certainly students we've helped for 10-15 years are going to finish their programs with our support however/whenever the situation enables it. The new library will be finished in a safe manner and "dedicated" no matter what or when! We have a good business partnership developed over the years. We keep funds in our local bank until plans are agreed upon, per detailed budget requests, and then wire bank-to-bank. This is the first year none of us has traveled to Ghana to review our projects, meet with local leaders, plan, etc. But, thanks to the internet, we communicate every few days. We will work together to find the best paths.

And so, on behalf of Ghana Together and our Western Heritage Home colleagues, we say THANK YOU to you, our generous donors, and also for the administrative skills, financial management, hard work, and caring of local Axim leaders. They are remarkable. We ask for your financial support for our 2021 efforts. We assure you that 100% of your donations go to support our projects. We on the Ghana Together Board handle all administrative costs ourselves, including all travel expenses (including to Ghana), office expenses, mailing, wire/bank charges, communication, etc. We are a qualified US non-profit 501c3, registered in the State of Washington. Our Federal ID is EIN 26-2182965. Your donations are tax-deductible. If you need more info or have ideas to share, please contact us!

You can contribute with a check payable to Ghana Together via US mail, sent to our address at 808 Addison Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273. Or you may be able to use the PayPal link at <http://ghanatogether.org/HTML/Donations.html>. If you are in Ghana, you can deposit funds into the Western Heritage Home account at Ghana Commercial Bank.

Take care all of you!

With our sincere thanks...Ghana Together Directors: Maryanne Ward, Rich Ward, Jerome Chandler, Louise Wilkinson, Diana Franco Ward, Nathan Ward, and our Western Heritage Home associates, especially James Kainyiah (Chair of WHH), and Mercy Ackah (Ghana Library Authority Regional Director)



Western Heritage Home “Scholars” in early 2008. They were the first residents of the newly-constructed Heritage Home for orphaned and vulnerable children. Most are now graduated from senior high or are in vocational school or university, with Ghana Together support. Some found homes with extended families, but they still identify as “WHH Scholars” and now participate in a “WHH Whatsapp Group”. They are “family”!



The new Axim Public Library --- in construction --- as of Nov 2, 2020. Books, computers, internet café, etc. will be on top floor, for security. Bottom sections will be for meeting space, children’s activities, and facilitating the mobile library services to schools. Progress is slowed, because of COVID-19, but...work progresses. Soon this little girl will be finding her books in her Axim Public Library! There is broad community support, and we can’t wait for the all-important “handing over” to the Ghana Library Authority!!