

FRIENDS OF AHOTOKUROM NEWSLETTER

December 2010

Advent is a wonderful time of preparation. The readings at Mass, the atmosphere around all clearly signifies preparation of heart and mind.

Everybody at Ahotokurom wishes to say a big 'THANK YOU' to each one of you for your continued support

Replacing the Toyota Landcruiser "Don't Touch Me"

There have been tremendous efforts to raise funds to replace the long serving, faithful and reliable 14 year old Landcruiser nicknamed "Don't Touch Me", which is now on its last legs and without which Ahoto could not fulfill its mission. Ahoto have now raised nearly two thirds of the cost of replacing it.

Achieving this sum is largely due to a most generous donation of £10,500 from The Jack Petchey Foundation. Without the help of the Foundation Ahoto really would be struggling, but now that the fundraising target is well underway everyone is feeling encouraged!

How about some fund raising efforts in your community to help in raise the outstanding balance? Just under £15,000 to go!



Rainham Scholarships

Your continued support this year has helped 10 new scholars into vocational school and 2 apprentices; 3 of these will finish in May. The

young people really appreciate this start in life and overleaf you can read the reflections of some of those who have been supported through the scheme and now have jobs. **Thank you** to all the parishioners of *Rainham Parish* for continuing to give young people a hope-filled future.

Felix

Felix is a very bright 16 year old who is an expert basket maker. He is training others at Ahoto, passing on this traditional skill. Sadly he has been hit badly by recurring Leprosy Reaction. The damage caused by inflammation of the nerves has left him with drop foot and deformed hands. The feeling is coming slowly back into his hands and all at Ahoto hope that with Endorphin Release Therapy he will improve further. Felix has also lost a lot of weight so needs good nutrition. It is less common to see young people so affected by leprosy these days – however when people like Felix turn up it is a reminder that the fight against Leprosy has not finished yet!

News Bytes

We remember **Mr Sackey RIP**. He was one of the community leaders who had the vision for the housing project (overleaf) and helped to mobilise the community to achieve it. He had seen plenty of suffering and rejection since he contracted leprosy as a young boy, however he was a proud man, he believed in his community and he fought for equality.

Also **Mr Tijani RIP**. He led the residents of St Clare's in making Palm Crosses to send to the UK for Palm Sunday, in return for our donations. May they both now Rest in Peace.

Work on the new **IT Training Centre** is due to start in 2011. We thank all those who have

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contributed to this project over the years. There is now a full plan to implement this project in 2011!

Also in 2011 Ahoto hopes to undertake another new initiative. The plan is to construct guest rooms to be run by disabled students from the **Training Centre**. The centre has 15 young people with learning disabilities (and a long waiting list!) The guest rooms will be used by visitors to Ahoto and maintained by the trainees to generate income for Ahoto. If any individuals or groups from overseas would like to help raise funds and come to spend 3 weeks helping to build the units, they would be welcome! Ahoto needs people to raise £2,000, and then travel to Ghana, live simply with the community and work. Ahoto will provide board and lodgings. For more information, contact Friends of Ahotokurom at the address below.

Advent is a good time for each of us to reflect on our readiness to hear the 'Good News'. Back in Ghana all the children are excited by Nativity plays and learning Christmas Carols in preparation for 'Baby Jesus'. The commercialism of Christmas is not really a feature there!

Costs are soaring in Ghana, but somehow with help through Friends of Ahotokurom and assistance from other countries, Ahotokurom is just about managing. The community at Ahoto thanks you very much indeed - you continue to be very generous!

Every day, supporters in the UK are remembered in prayer and the Ahotokurom family gives thanks for our continuing involvement. **All at Ahotokurom send greetings for Christmas and wish all a happy and holy 2011.**

*To make a donation
Please send cheques/postal orders
made payable to*

'DMJ Friends of Ahotokurom'

*The Treasurer
Holy Cross RC Church
208 Sangley Road
Catford, London, SE6 2JS*

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Celebrating the 10th birthday of Enyindakurom

It is now 10 years since the grand opening of **Enyindakurom** (meaning the village we did not expect). For those who are new to Friends of Ahotokurom, suffice to say that the self build housing project, funded by the UK National Lottery and various parishes in England, was the most ambitious project that we have been involved in.

In just two years (1998 – 2000) over 80 houses were built from scratch (literally every brick was made on site). The only tools were wheelbarrows, buckets and spades. Every man, woman and child worked to ensure the complete transformation of what had been a slum for people with leprosy, into a respectable housing estate.

No one can imagine the horrible conditions for disabled people who had to sleep in poorly constructed mud huts. Occasionally the rats and snakes living in the roof nibbled on a numb diseased limb. Every rainy season the houses were destroyed and it was impossible to get around on crutches or in a wheelchair.

This newsletter brings an update on those who were children at that time & are now in their late teens & twenties!



Children collecting water to add to the mortar mix

At the time of the project **Benedicta Mensah** was aged 10. She worked very hard on the housing project and can only just remember how life used to be “Life was not good, our houses got burnt during the dry season and

fell down during the rainy season. Now we no longer worry about incoming rains. In fact we sleep well in our new houses.” Benedicta also remembers, “I carried concrete, I wanted to help. Our parents suffered and many might have died by now if we had not improved our living conditions”.



Children outside an old house

Amoah Alfred was just a teenager then. He says “I was not living here before the work started but came in later to help. As a young boy I learnt the skill of a mason and I now have a profession. Not only did it change life for my parents, it also gave me a future”.

Erzuah George recalls, “we lived in thatched houses; there was no electricity or lights in the community so it was not possible to do anything after dark. We also had no regular water supply in the village. People looked down on us, but we had strong unity. When we got involved in the building project everyone worked together. We are now living in a beautiful environment and we are proud of our community”. Erzuah later joined the scholarship scheme and studied refrigeration and air-conditioning and is now successfully in employment and supporting his family.

“It was not a happy place to live before the housing project” says **Ama Nadia**, “I was only young but I knew our people were suffering. I now feel an equal working with colleagues at

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school, but before I felt different. If we had not built the new village the bigger society wouldn't have recognised our community and the suffering would have continued”

Victoria Amissah was 13 at the time. She also says “Life wasn't good in those days. We lived in thatched houses and the environment was not as clean as it is today. Not only did I help with the building, but I learned the skills of a team leader because I helped to organise the younger ones. It has made it easy for me to work in a group. Now I am a better person, I have trained as a cook on the scholarship scheme and got a job”.

Not only have individual lives been transformed, but the younger generation has also grown up with hope and ambition remembering how life used to be compared to the lives they live now. It is clear that the housing project lifted the whole community out of despair and rejection and integrated them into mainstream society.

Future generations will live in clean and dry conditions, maybe unaware of the great suffering of the generations before.



Children and Trudy outside a new house

There are many more stories of activities at Ahotokurom on our website Please take the time to

look at

www.ahoto.org

For further information about Ahoto please contact tkilcullen@live.co.uk