

## Welcome to this fifth edition of our newsletter!

**Christmas** is a time of hope and joy as we celebrate the birth of Jesus – and the life and light that he brought into our world.

That life and light is visible in all that you have helped us to achieve at Ahotokurom in this year too. Our friends in Ghana want you to know that you are remembered in their prayers.

What follows is a brief overview of all the work that you have supported during this year.

**We start with St. Elizabeth's School because they are busy right now practising their annual production of the birth of Jesus!** It is a miracle really as earlier in the year the schools were **all** closed down due to the fact there was no water in the area – thank God for the rains and the repair of the local reservoir!

Imagine that you are four years old and just learning to speak English when you are invited to star in a play - a public performance entirely in English! As you can guess practice takes over most of the curriculum from October to December! Every song and every spoken word has to be taught in English, as this is the language used in all schools in Ghana. All the children have a role – even those from the Special Unit. Costumes are rustled together, goats 'kidnapped' by the children and in the last days of the school term – the children have their moment of fame and glory! The play is performed for the parents – many of whom don't speak English because they didn't have the opportunity of an education! Still, the parents - proud as all parents around the world - watch as their children enact the Navity scene with all the charm, grace and confusion of four and five olds!

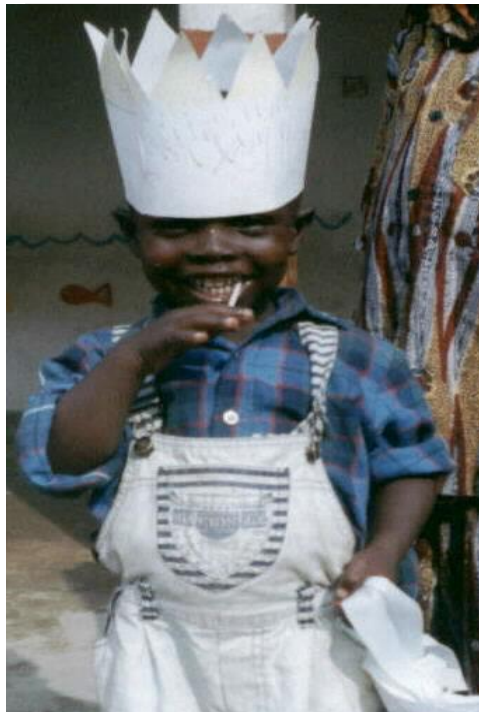
It has been a year of change for the Special Unit (which provides education for 16 disabled children and young people from the age of four to sixteen.

Sr. Margaret Mary a DMJ sister from California has recently moved on after two years working with the teachers

and pupils to expand the curriculum and diversify use of materials. It is difficult for the 'teachers' in special unit who are terribly committed but have never had the opportunity of teacher training. In addition there isn't really much special education provision for children with disabilities – they cannot contribute to the family income and therefore the families can't afford to invest in an education for them! Therefore Special Unit – really is special! A place that believes all children can grow and achieve something – even if they will never make it through school to work.

The unit sent teacher Kofi to England earlier this year for a month long in-service training programme sponsored by St. Thomas of Canterbury School Rainham.

Well...what an impact! The school children loved Kofi and you could almost see him physically grow in confidence as he realised people accepted him for who he was – his deformities from leprosy no barrier.



Picture – 4 yr old Kwame in 'heaven' at Christmas with home-made hat and lollypop!

*Wishing you  
peace and joy at Christmas and  
in the year ahead*

Rectory Paddock Special School in Orpington. He returned to Ghana full of new ideas, & a case full of resources for use in the school. Most importantly he gained a new found sense of confidence to help him and the unit develop the excellent work they do with children who suffer because of the impact of their disability on their ability to be accepted and valued in Ghanaian society.

Kofi himself had a very hard childhood as an orphan and a child with leprosy – his story is inspirational and if you have time you really should have a look at it on the web – [www.ahotokurom.org](http://www.ahotokurom.org)

An accident involving the main vehicle for the project has meant that getting to and from school – (for the 65 children who have to travel around five miles each way) has been difficult this term. Despite repairs- the government has announced that people can no longer be transported in the back of trucks like cattle. It is a good thing really and will save many lives a year – but there are no alternatives! The people offer prayers to St. Jude and St. Pio – but recognise that miracles take a while to achieve!

**Enyindakurom continues to jog along.** The new village brings a respect and openness for people with leprosy that has never been there before and they are slowly waking up to the fact that they can achieve things for themselves and their families!

Some of the families have been taking the opportunity created through the shops and market place to try their hand at small scale trading. This all adds to a family's ability to raise an income – a little more than subsistence and to aspire to school and college for their children. Others are still afraid to try. Used to the negative feelings they have about themselves because of the leprosy, and sure they will be rejected – it is difficult to step out, take risks and be knocked back! However with more and more people being seen to succeed, more people gain hope that things can be different! It is wonderful to see those who are making their houses into homes, developing

gardens, saving for a bit of net curtain, making some basic furniture etc!  
There's no place like home!

**The scholarship scheme.....**

established by Rainham Catholic Church has now supported 21 young people in further vocational training, with 6 more starting in January. The skills and qualifications gained enable them to get employment or establish their own small businesses. In turn they can then support the family. This really is a long-term investment making a big impact on the ability of families to survive.

**Life at Ahotokurom itself continues at a hectic pace! The 23 children in residential care at Childcare are getting bigger and for most – stronger!**

However some of the children suffer ongoing sickness – Kojo aged 8 has an undiagnosed condition that has symptoms similar to muscular dystrophy. It is undiagnosed because there simply aren't the facilities to test and treat these sorts of conditions in Ghana. Here in the UK we would be outraged that the NHS hadn't responded. There children live or they die and nobody asks questions. Kojo continues to lose the power in his legs and has terrible chest infections but just try and stop him joining in the fun and games!

Able bodied and disabled children muck in together supporting each other in doing what they can – it is beautiful to watch the care they have for each other. I witnessed this as 4 year old Bruno had soaped up Kojo from head to toe at bath-time and was struggling to lift a bucket of water high enough to get the soap out of an extremely indignant Kojo's eyes!!

Christmas is a special time for all children and at Ahotokurom every effort is made to give the children **something** extra. Whilst nothing can really compensate for the lack of family – it is important that the children feel loved, supported and special.

**Your sponsorship helps many children** who are suffering the loss of parents, to feel loved and cared for all year around – and especially at Christmas.

*Thank you for helping to make such a difference to the lives of these children.*

**Life at St. Clare's (the home for those who have suffered leprosy and are now too old or disabled to care for themselves) has had it's share of sadness this year.** Three people have died in recent months - leaving a big gap in the St. Clare's family. The 'panyn foe' (the 15 old people) who remain - spend most of the day in prayer (Muslim and Christian together) thanking God for our support which enables them to live out their days in peace and tranquillity.

**Following our last newsletter we know that many of you will want to know how Philip Addo is doing.**

One year on from his intensive rehabilitation in the UK he continues to practice his exercises and grow in independence. New ramps and a path around Ahotokurom enable him to get the wheelchair around and visit people. He still awaits a date for his ordination to the Diaconate and is more confident in his ability to offer something to others despite being a wheelchair user! It is relatively new ground for a disabled person to have a public and useful role in society. In Ghana nothing is geared up for access and Philip is a very positive role model

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[trudy@trudykilcullen.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:trudy@trudykilcullen.freeserve.co.uk) this saves postage costs, all of which comes out of our own pockets!

We want to say a big thank you to **Maddie Ellingham and all at the Stoma Care Division, ConvaTec Ltd.** Who have donated a years supply of some of the essential medical supplies that Philip needs to remain independent. Also to **Richard Knight and friends** who donate an allowance to enable Philip to have the care he needs to remain independent.

**Some people go to extraordinary lengths to support Ahotokurom.** Peta Miller, a volunteer there for six months in 1998, has just completed a trans-Atlantic yacht race for which she raised about £3000! After three training sessions she found herself marooned on a 72 foot yacht for 15 days at the start of October leaving Boston under clear blue skies. Her boat, Spirit of Hong Kong, raced five other yachts 3200 nautical miles to Southampton to finish third on October 13. The boats came in on record time after strong winds of up to 60 knots pushed them and their crews to the limit. Peta wrote a number of articles to attract sponsorship for the race from family friends but also from a number of companies and individuals working in the insurance industry, all of who were extremely generous. She still cherishes her experiences at Ahotokurom as one of the most important influences in her life and misses Ghana as a second home.

Thank you to Peta and all her supporters!

**We thank you all for your care and concern and hope that this small newsletter will help you to understand the very real difference that you can and do continue to make.**

To make a donation to Friends of Ahotokurom please make cheques/postal orders payable to 'DMJ Friends of Ahotokurom' and send to: The Treasurer, 2, Century Road, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent ME8 0BG

For further information on any of our activities please write to:  
**Friends of Ahotokurom, 5, Latham Close, Dartford, DA2 6NS**

Or view - <http://www.ahotokurom.org>

The work of this group is undertaken entirely voluntarily and every penny donated goes directly to support the work in Ghana