

Friends of Ahotokurom Newsletter

fee; it is also food, shelter, and the tools.

This third edition of our newsletter comes with the sincere thanks of all at Ahotokurom. Our friends in Ghana want you to know that you are remembered in prayer.

How you have helped...

Life at Enyindakurom (the village we raised funds to rebuild over the last three years) continues to improve.

Somehow the new houses have raised the standard of living and reduced the stigma of leprosy. No longer are people seen as 'unclean'.

The motivation and self esteem of the people has increased and they continue to grow and develop as a community. There are many new initiatives for continued self sufficiency - individuals take small steps, starting up petty trading, selling the surplus crops, or small items they have made in order to earn their daily bread.

Our new project to build a market area and shops has begun. Young men from the village are moulding and laying the blocks, the carpenters are fixing the roof and already the building is taking shape. Some of the young women, trained in painting and decorating are on standby to add the finishing touches!

The Market area has been completed thanks to the generosity of the relatives and friends of Kevin Collyer RIP, and will enable small scale traders to develop their business and generate further income.

The shops are being built thanks to the generosity of the Murphy family in memory of Sean Murphy RIP, who started out as a small businessman himself in the 1960s and built up a furniture and removals trade.

The 'lock up shops' will bring a new resource to the whole area. It is hoped to establish a chemist, a grocery store, a tailor's - where the young women's group can sell the clothes they make and a hair dresser's where the young women who have been

sponsored to undertake their vocational training can then establish their business.

It is fitting that both Kevin and Sean will be remembered through an ongoing project to bring some hope into the lives of people in Ghana who have suffered so much through the stigma of leprosy, and who will now be able to generate a little income in order to live increasingly independent lives. We are very grateful to both families for their help.

The scholarship scheme established by Rainham Catholic Church is growing in popularity! The scheme enables the young people to undertake further education or vocational training in order to develop the skills that will enable them to gain employment or establish their own small businesses.

Last newsletter we reported on Dora and Nora, the twins who were enabled to undertake some computer training. This time we are happy to report that Dora has now managed to get a job - as a secretary at Apam Mission Hospital. She is so excited, this is her first ever job and employment is very hard to come by in Ghana. It gives her and her young son a future, the possibility to lift themselves out of hopelessness and poverty.

There are many other students on the Rainham scheme. The scheme involves the parents and family in the whole process as it is important to maintain the cultural tradition. In Ghana a family usually decide how the child will proceed and support him/her in education/training. For most families in Ghana it is a sacrifice, but in this village families can't even contemplate such issues because they simply can't afford to support their children - that's where Rainham come in!

In a carefully negotiated process the staff at Ahotokurom assesses what support will be needed and how to provide it without undermining the family. Often it isn't just the college

Take Kadisah for instance. She is bright, but both her parents have had leprosy and the family are poor. They knew they couldn't afford further education so they asked for assistance. They heard the fees had been approved so they went to enrol with Kadisah. Here they were presented with a list of essential items without which Kadisah can't begin. Educational establishments are big on uniformity in Ghana. It is a sign of your status if you are able to access further education and so they have long lists of minimum requirements. Most places are residential because of the distances people have to travel.

Kadisah needed two pairs of sandals, two smart dresses, a mattress, a sheet, a mosquito net, some cooking pots, pens, books and so on! The total bill was 600,000 cedis, which is around £60, six months of her father's salary! The family assumed that they would have to meet this cost themselves and clubbed all their savings together - 17,000 from the father's farming, 20,000 from the mother's oil making and 12,000 from her brother's part time weeding job (he is also at school). It wasn't nearly enough but undeterred they started to buy the things on the list. Kadisah was downhearted because she knew it would be a long time before they could raise the rest of the money. However there were tears of joy when they heard that the grant was in fact also to cover the items outstanding on the list and her food money whilst she is away during term time. In return she goes out to Ahotokurom during her school holidays to help the children in childcare develop their basic skills.

The day before Kadisah left to start the term, she cried, not only with the emotion of a new start - but also because she had never in her life had two pairs of sandals!

The philosophy of the Rainham project encourages the children to develop a vision and a hope for the future. It makes it possible to aspire to gaining paid employment through education and training. This dream is usually only for the socially advantaged; now it is a real possibility that the disadvantaged can realise their dream too!

Life at Ahotokurom continues at a hectic pace! It has been a particularly busy year at Childcare

A further six children have had to be accommodated since the beginning of the year - Amma, a quiet 8 year old girl whose parents have died and five from one family!

Of these five there are two sets of lively and demanding twins aged 6 and 7 and Bruno aged 4. They have had a bit of a rough start in life! Their parents are both leprosy patients and they haven't been able to cope with the responsibility of family life. The father an alcoholic, loves the children dearly but can't bring any stability into their lives, and their mother left them a couple of years ago. In fact they basically looked after themselves with Monica at age seven providing for them.

When they were admitted to childcare Bruno was so silent, withdrawn and unresponsive that the staff wondered if he had learning disabilities. However after a few weeks he began to come out of his shell and completely transformed into a lively fun loving child! On his recent trip out to Ghana Fr. Doug had the pleasure of taking Bruno on his first trip to the beach - apparently his eyes popped out on stalks at the sight of the sea!

After a few weeks in the stability of a new-found family, where the children can be sure of love, food, shelter and an education they have blossomed. Bruno has even begun to speak - not just Fanti, but he's beginning to develop an English vocabulary too: "sweets, car, go to beach"!!!

Your sponsorship helps children like Bruno and many others, both in residential care and the community. **Thank you for helping to make such a difference to the lives of those who are starting out in life with the odds stacked against them.**

Ahotokurom also operates a nursery school and a special education unit.

The nursery caters for 200 children aged 4 to 6 years. They learn basic skills - English, maths,

reading etc. and for those who are unlikely to get a meal at home they'll get something to eat at lunchtime.

In addition to nursery, there is also a Special Unit - the only one of its kind as there is no state provision for children with special needs. There are currently 15 children aged 5 to 16 years who learn social skills and receive an education to help them reach their full potential as members of society. The pupil teacher ratio is 1:5 in special unit so that the children get some individual attention. Kofi is one of the teachers in special unit. He has had leprosy and suffered in many ways but he wanted to put something back into the project and so has come back as an unqualified teacher. Later this year he will be coming to visit St. Thomas's, Rainham to learn more about special education teaching. The visit is organised and sponsored by the school, in order to try and bring some practical help to the school.



Afua a pupil of the Special Unit learns to weave palms

You have to pay for school in Ghana. It will seem strange to us in the UK that the children have to pay school fees despite being so poor, but in most developing countries education is a privilege not a right and governments can't afford to provide it free.

Ahotokurom keep charges to the minimum but they still charge something, so that they operate within the system and so parents make a commitment to ensure their child attends.

The fees are heavily subsidised, in order to enable children to attend and yet 35% of parents still cannot afford the full cost (just over £1.00 a term), so the school offers these parents an additional subsidy.

A qualified teacher earns £360 a year and an unqualified teacher earns £295 a year. To us it doesn't seem a great deal, but when you can only raise £400 a year in school fees and the salary bill alone is almost £4000 a year then it does become a problem!

Basically without your help the children would not get a chance of an education! **We would like to thank all who support the school but especially the children at: St. Joseph's, Essex and St. Thomas of Canterbury, Rainham, for raising funds to help children of their own age go to school. Well done!**

One last note In the last newsletter we told you about Philip, the young seminarian who suffered a serious back injury in a car accident.

The latest news is that a hospital here in the UK feels that they will be able to help him at least gain enough strength to live reasonably independently. If this is the case - it may be possible that eventually Philip can be ordained. Philip is flying in on 9th July - we want to do all that we can to help him live as independently as possible. Attached to this newsletter you will see an extra appeal and we would be grateful if you could do what you can to get people to support Philip- he deserves every support we can give!

So finally, thanks go to all of you who have given so generously during the year. Without your help none of the above would be possible. We thank you for your care and concern and hope that this small newsletter will help you to understand the very real difference you can make. We will write again in December - meantime

Thank you and may God Bless you all