

# GATEWAY



*Playing with children at the Hour of Grace Orphanage – Koforidua!*

## AKWAABA!

I hope you will all enjoy the August edition of Gateway, the official newsletter of Projects Abroad Ghana.

This month was the end of our busy season, with the last of our two-week special groups coming and going, and most of our summer volunteers leaving!

There was a lot of great work this month – the complete photo albums are posted on Facebook so that you can see all that went on!!

Rainbow Planche – Social Manager,  
Projects Abroad Ghana



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# INSIDE OUT: GHANA IN JUNE

## Update on Festivals!

*It's always so nice to participate in the liveliness of a festival when you come to Ghana. Here is one festival which was celebrated in the Greater Accra region, and a second one which is coming up in September!!*

### Homowo Festival – Greater Accra Region

This harvest festival is celebrated by the Ga people from the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It begins with the sowing of millet by the traditional priests in May. After this a thirty-day ban on drumming is imposed on the land by the priests.

The festival is highlighted at varying times by different quarters of the Ga tribe. The Gasmashie group of the tribe will celebrate theirs' a little earlier than the La group.

Homowo recounts the migration of the Gas and reveals their agricultural success in their new settlement. According to Ga oral tradition, a severe famine broke out among the people during their migration to present day Accra. They were inspired by the famine to embark on massive food production exercises which eventually yielded them bumper harvest.

Their hunger ended and with great joy they "hooted at hunger" this is the meaning of the word HOMOWO.

### Fetu Afahye Festival – Cape Coast

It is said that during the days of the Fante ancestors, there was an outbreak of a disease which killed a lot of people. They prayed to their gods, and as history has it, the gods helped the people to eradicate the disease. Thus the name "FETU", which in the local dialect means "Efin Tu" (dirt cleansing). One can therefore say that the festival is about keeping the town clean and preventing a repeat of the epidemic that befell their ancestors.

Before the actual celebration, the paramount chief of the Ogua Traditional area, the Omanhene, goes into confinement for a week. This is to enable him to meditate with the gods, and seek guidance for the people. He also takes care of his health, by seeking medical attention, to ensure that he is fit for the celebration. Before the celebration, a ban is imposed on drumming, dancing and noise making within the municipality, and a ban on fishing in the sacred Fosu Lagoon. This is to create a peaceful atmosphere for the festival to be a success. There is a prayer and cleansing ritual by the "Amissafo" who are the caretakers of the sacred Fosu Lagoon. They pour libation at the Lagoon to cleanse the people from any bad omen, and pray for a successful festival and bountiful harvest in the coming year. They pray for an abundance of food crops and an abundance of fish for the coming year.

Fetu-Afahye Festival begins on the last Monday in August. On this day, during the night a vigil is kept at the Fosu lagoon. All the citizens of the town come out to witness a procession of the priest and priestesses of the town until day break. This is amidst drumming and singing of traditional songs as the priests and priestesses make their evocations for the coming year. The following day, the Omanhene of the Ogua Traditional area pours libation at the estuary of the lagoon and the priests perform rituals at the Fosu shrine.

"**BAKATUE**" is one of the events that herald the beginning of the festival celebration. This is the lifting of the ban on drumming and noise making, and the lifting of the ban on fishing in the lagoon.

The Omanhene, after casting a net three times into the Lagoon, declares the ban lifted and there are cheers, drumming and dancing all over the town as the celebrations begin. Ironically if the Chief's net catches plenty of fish, they believe that this is a sign that there would be plenty of harvest in the coming year. The next day the people welcome home their relatives and friends who have moved to other towns.

There is a vigil on Thursday at the “**Nana Paprat Shrine**” from 8:30pm with dancing and the pouring of libation, known as “**Adamma**”. The priests and priestess make incantations, invoke the gods and foretell the future. This ends with the ushering in of the first “**Oman**” (**state**) purification ceremony at the shrine. A bull is reserved for the purification. The bull itself is kept at another shrine, the “**Nana Tabiri Shrine**” where it is also cleansed before being used. The purification ceremony comes to a climax when the bull is slaughtered. After the Friday purification rites, the people gather at the public square called Papratam, which is said to be the people's first meeting place. Here the Omanahene sits in state and delivers his annual speech to the people and gives them advice.

He then moves to the shrine, “**HALTS AT THE ENTRANCE WHERE THE BULL IS LYING, POURS LIBATION TO THE 77 gods OF CAPE COAST AND ASKS THEM TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE AND MAKE THEM PROSPER**”. That's the spirit of Fetu-Afahye Festival.

After that he takes a knife and slaughters the bull to mark the climax of the celebration. There is a parade along the streets of cape coast, the Asafo companies (traditional guards), also showcase their art and there is merry making with singing and dancing all over the town.

Ironically, there is a church service on Sunday to thank the almighty God for a successful celebration.

This is the Fetu-Afahye Festival..... Welcome Home.

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*The GhanaWeb site has lots of great information about culture and other events, as well as cute stereotypical descriptions of the different tribes in Ghana! - <http://www.ghanaweb.com>  
Second article cited from <http://www.travel-to-discover-ghana.com/>*

## FEATURE OF THE MONTH



### Summer School in the Hills

*Since school is out during the summer, our teaching volunteers have the opportunity to participate in our summer school program. One of these programs is at Saforo D/A Primary School, one of our teaching placements in the Akuapem Hills.*

During the summer, the schools in Ghana are out, so our Teaching volunteers get to do something a bit different than the regular school program! This month, our volunteers worked from August 1<sup>st</sup> until September 2<sup>nd</sup>, and enjoyed their time with the children – reading, playing, and teaching basic math and language skills, as well as sports and art activities arranged for them and the children!

We had about 12 volunteers overall working with the Children at Saforo D/A Primary School. We provided a free lunch at the end of the program, around 1 pm, as well as free exercise materials! Enjoy some pictures of the great work.



# REGIONAL UPDATES

## Accra

Accra has had over 40 volunteers since the beginning of August doing various placements scattered within Accra. Accra has had a huge number of volunteers doing the Soccer, Human Rights, Care and Medical projects over the summer period.

The Human Rights project is still the most popular placement and almost all the volunteers are happy and find the projects worthwhile. The Medical placement has received a lot more volunteers due to the re-introduction of the HIV/AIDS component and volunteers have been exposed to the various challenges in dealing with the epidemic and other tropical diseases in Ghana. The soccer project is very much on course in building the capacity of our placement(s) to give a better future to many of the young Ghanaian talents recruited at the placement(s). Volunteers continue to find so many fulfillments in their contributions to the lives of the orphans and hitherto neglected children in our orphanages and teaching centers and fund some of the basic needs of these placements- the children have received tuitions in Mathematics, Creative Arts, and English Language besides the basic care and love displayed to them.

Our most popular social event is the quiz night which is organised every Tuesday night at the head office in Accra; with over a 98 percent turnout it is a lively gathering which offers volunteers the opportunity meet each other and or plan trips on the weekends together and, of course, meet staff members that might not have met in the week.



*Teaching about property rights in the village of Soto*

Keep up with Accra on our Facebook page -  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2581495079>

# REGIONAL UPDATES

## Donation

This month, Abigail Padgett funded the painting of our Teaching and Care placement Covenant Day Care! She got together with two other volunteers, Miriam and Harriet to paint the entire building!



*Posing at Kakum National Park!*

## Cape Coast

We received about 45 volunteers for the month of August, out of which 20 were Two Week Special volunteers.

The two-weekers painted the new Children's Home of Hope building at Asebu (you can read more about this in the project update section!), helped in the summer school, played with the kids, planted flowers and trees, plastered and went traveling to Kakum National Park, Cape Coast Castle, Hans Cottage and had good drumming and dancing lessons.

Most of our regular volunteers for August were in our Medical, Care, Journalism and Rugby (sports) programs and had a good time in Cape Coast!



*Learning traditional dance with the FODACH group!*

Keep up with Cape Coast on our Facebook page -  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2450760029>

# REGIONAL UPDATES



*The new 2-block classrooms at Wonderful Love*

## *The Hills*

Summer School in the Akuapem Hills has started, and the 6 volunteers there are doing well.

The Two Week Special programs have finished, and the last group painted the Otwetiri D/A Primary School, as well as the Akropong Presbyterian School. The group also went to play with the children at Mount Zion Foster Home as well as at Adom Day Care.

We currently have one volunteer at our Farming project who is doing well. The corn is now looking nice and ready to eat! We have planted flowers and other vegetables.

Our building is going along fast – once the roofing is finished in Adowso, we will be able to do painting and drawing of the two-block classroom set up there. At our Teaching and Care placement, Wonderful Love Day Care, we have completed the toilets, and have started building two extra classrooms because of the ever-increasing amount of students from around the village who are excited to come learn!



## REGIONAL UPDATES

### *Ho & Hohoe*

Our Care volunteers are spending time with children between 1 to 14 years in both Ho and Hohoe, a city further North, and are doing creativity lessons, leading games, teaching and drawing.

Some of our volunteers continued with the painting of Sokodie Ando M/A School, which was started a month ago on a painting outreach. Stencils from A to Z were made so that we could decorate the walls with colorful letter. For the nursery, drawings have been made according to each letter of the alphabet! The classrooms are very colorful, and that way the youngest ones can practise their alphabet skills on their own!

Volunteers at Hohoe Eugemot Orphanage gave the children the most excitement of their lives when they made an excursion trip to Wli falls and Cape Coast Castle. The children and some of the staff clapped and sang songs happily to and from their destination. They were treated to some deliciously prepared local food and drinks. Franziska Ziaja, Shirley Fraser, Emily Gywnn, Sarah Palsof and Julia Macdonard were also happy to have taken the children to Wli Falls...the trip was payed for by Shirley Fraser.

Children of Sokode Ando community are very excited to attend a summer school organised by Projects Abroad. There are about 55 children between the ages of 3 and 7 years. The programme is ongoing with two French volunteers and two local teachers. Food is served for the children and staff and they all seem very happy with how things are going.

Our usual twice a week community outreach is also ongoing and everything is going well.

Generally volunteers seems very happy and like the way things are going.

# REGIONAL UPDATES

## Donation

Projects Abroad donated 10 bags of cement to Hour of Grace Orphanage in Aid of building a classroom block!!



*Our hardworking med vols ...*

## Koforidua

For the month of August, we had two arrivals Felix, who is German and doing the Medical project, and Yuko, who is Japanese and who had a great time doing care work at the Hour of Grace Orphanage. She also helped with the orphanage's summer school from August 22nd to 26th.

By mid-August we had about 5 volunteers, and we all had good fun at our Wednesday quiz meetings.

Medical Outreach is going well and we have been able to go to many different places despite the summer vacation – we were depending on the summer schools and orphanages for our activities!

At the end of the month, the volunteers joined the children at the Hour of Grace Orphanage twice for a sports program! The children did relay races and the volunteers played with the youngest ones, and the volunteers took some of them on in a heated volleyball match!



Keep up with Koforidua on our Facebook page -  
[http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_189429624434431](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_189429624434431)

## REGIONAL UPDATES

*Kumasi*

We started the month with 22 volunteers. It has been a wonderful with very hard working volunteers. As I write now some of the volunteers have taken it upon themselves to paint some of the wards at S.D.A Hospital in Kumasi, and now the wards are looking very nice and welcoming - especially the children's ward! Aside from this they each do their normal volunteer work: Medical, Veterinary and Care.

Apart from working in the hospitals, the Medical volunteers had Medical outreaches. One of them was a joint outreach with Maranatha Maternity, where they went to a village called Kunsu, near Kumasi. The whole village came to welcome them and the Medical Coordinator had to stop the outreach at 4pm so that the volunteers wouldn't come home too late! They treated illnesses and checked positing of foetuses of pregnant women, among other activities.

Veterinary volunteers also went for outreaches and treated animals such as pigs, sheep, dogs and poultry. They visit farms and render their services to these farmers.

Care work at Kumasi Children's Home gets better day by day as volunteers are there to make sure that the less fortunate ones over there also get some attention and care.

Quiz nights have been very nice and had lots of participants. Volunteers learn how to speak the local language of Twi and some wish that they could have lessons at every one of our Wednesday meetings! There was another night this month where staff and volunteers met at the pool side and it was all fun.

# HOST FAMILY

## Ms. Agnes Danso

Mrs. Danso is a retired educationist with great experience in all stages of education from Primary School up to Teacher Training College.

She is a staunch member of Presbyterian Church and the founding member of the Retired

Teachers Association. She is an advisor to many private schools in Koforidua (Moses School of Account).

Mrs. Danso occasionally visits her children in the U.S.A.

Mrs. Danso lives with her son, Kwabena (1968). Her daughter, Grace (1970), lives in the U.S.A., but does sometimes come back to visit. Occasionally a maid comes over to the house to help with the gardening, cleaning, etc.

Mrs. Danso also has a pet cat. Please let us know if this would be a problem for you, for example if you are allergic to cats.

The house is in the Adweso Estate in Koforidua, behind Anchor's garden spot bar. It is about a ten-minute drive to the main market in Koforidua and a twenty-minute drive to the regional hospital.

Koforidua is the capital of the eastern region of Ghana. It has lots of tourist attractions, stores, banks, a post office, internet cafes and petty traders.

From Koforidua you can visit the Boti Waterfall, Kumasi (the garden city) and other interesting places.

All volunteers in Ghana live with a local family and hence gain a far richer and more varied experience of Ghanaian life. Respecting the family's rules and customs and explaining your own culture are key to a happy home.

Mrs Danso hosts a maximum of two volunteers and your room, shared with another volunteer, will have two beds and space for clothes. The bathroom and toilet are in a separate block opposite the house and are shared with the family.

Meals will be a mixture of local and Western foods. The family are keen for you to try their Ghanaian dishes but appreciate the need for variety and that some people have particular tastes.

Mrs Danso is used to volunteers socialising and going out in the evening. The door is normally locked by 10pm, but if perhaps at the weekend you want to stay out later, you may take a key.



### People You will Meet ...

Agnes Danso  
Kwabena (1968)  
Grace (1970)

*You will get the contact information about your host family once your project is confirmed!*

# PROJECT UPDATE

## Children's Home of Hope

*There are some happy developments at one of our Care placements in Cape Coast – the much loved Children's Home of Hope! Those who go can already hear the children excitedly chattering about the "new site"!*



There are currently 17 children at the Children's Home of Hope, one of our Care placements in the Central Region. There are 10 boys and 7 girls, the youngest is 3 years old and the oldest is 15! There are also three boys from the surrounding community who are sponsored by the orphanage, and who join the children at the home to do their homework with the help of volunteers.

The home was started in 2007, and Projects Abroad volunteers have been working with the children in Care and Teaching projects. There can be up to 4 volunteers working there, and even during the summer our Two Week Special Groups also go to help out at the home.

The place in which the children live now is an old post office which has been loaned by the community of Asebu, and the community has asked for the building to become a police station or library. The NGO running the children's home, Alliance for Youth Development (AYD), decided to build them their own home instead of renting a building. This has been the exciting project going on lately!



The construction for this home began in January of this year and is meant to be completed within the next month. We hope to have the children move there by the end of September, with the help of our hardworking volunteers! Although the building was the initiative of the AYD, Projects Abroad volunteers have been helping it all along the way – some have bought cement, sand and other building materials. The August Two Week Special group helped to plaster the walls, painted the building, and painted flowers and trees. The kids at the home joined in to help with clearing the land (weeding, removing rocks and levelling the ground). All of our Two Week Special groups donated clothes which will go to the kids when they move. We also received enough other donations to get the children new beds, bedding and other items, so the children are excited for the move!!

Because this new home will be much bigger than the old one, the plan is to have more children move in, maybe even up to 40! Also it is planned, in the future, to house children living

with HIV/AIDS, and to set up a clinic, quarantine room and other necessities to care for them. For now there are no water or electricity connections to the house. They will be getting their water from a well, and this is the next big project on the list for them!

An additional update of the Children's Home of Hope is that bank accounts have been set up for the children there. They will not be able to access them until they turn 18, and no one else will be able to access the money. Anyone can donate to the accounts from anywhere in the world. This way, when the children are of age, they can use the funds to support themselves, and maybe to continue their education.

Our Teaching and Care Coordinator, Jenna, says, "The kids are really excited about their new home. They talk about it all the time – it's referred to as "The New Site". And now that it's been painted, they're even more excited!! They think it's the most beautiful home ever!!"



*Check out the Cape Coast page for regular updates about our care placements and volunteers!  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2450760029>*

# OUTREACH OF THE MONTH



## Leprosy Camps

*In Cape Coast and in Ho, our volunteers have the opportunity of going on outreach in Leprosy Camps. Eric, our medical coordinator from the Volta region, tells us about the village in Ho!*

Thirty-five years ago, there was an outbreak of the leprosy epidemic in Ghana. The sickness was thought to come from God, and that the victims were sinful people being punished. For this reason, those with leprosy were even more extremely rejected by their families and communities.

Although the disease was contagious, a camp with a clinic was established in almost every region to cater for the needs of the victims. One of the camps was established outside of Ho, the capital of the Volta Region in Ghana. About 400 patients were gathered to go through rehabilitation by the government.

It took approximately four years for every leper to be cured and rehabilitated. After this time, the government made efforts to reintegrate the cured into their original families, but unsuccessfully. Most ended up back in the village where they had been cured. The government's capacity for funding was reduced, and the people living there now depend mostly on private donations for food and clothing. Luckily they now are part of a Cured Lepers Foundation through which they can channel most of their grievances to the appropriate authorities.

Although they were cured, most of the people were left with some degree of deformity ranging from amputation of limbs, blindness and the wearing out of some fingers and toes. Through the effort of a foundation, a new village was constructed to house the cured lepers, since the land owners of their previous location had been chasing them out. So far, 50 of them reside in the new village in Bokodzi. Projects Abroad volunteers visit them every Wednesday to take care of their wounds, clean their environment and just to interact with the people in the village.

The people from the leprosy village are cured and therefore healthy, but they have lost many of the nerves in their extremities. We can see the degree of deformities they suffered and we can only imagine the pain and rejection they went through, but the most beautiful part is sharing conversations with them and watching them care for one another as a big family, despite all their past hardships.



## VOLUNTEER CORNER



### Stories from Ghana

By Maddy Friga  
(Care volunteer in Hohoe – 4 months)

*To take you into the Ghanaian culture, I have written personal vignettes about my experiences. The first will describe the experience of arriving in Ghana, to my home and to the orphanage and school in which I worked. It will show my own thoughts and challenges as well as the welcoming spirit of the Ghanaian people who I encountered. I try not to generalize traits of an entire culture, but I can say with certainty that the Ghanaians who I interacted with are some of the most genuine and sincerely welcoming and caring people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. The second will describe the unforgettable experience of learning how one of these special children ended up at the orphanage. It describes the struggles of my dealing with inequality and sadness. In the last section I will talk about the pain of leaving those children and you will get a sense of the deepness in which they buried themselves into my heart.*

All my life I have danced comfortably across the familiar landscape in which I was raised. Now, inhaling, I smell the unfamiliar: the heavy scent of rain building in the clouds, the musty smell of dust that coats my arms with red powder, and the sharp odour of burning rubbish. Closing my eyes, I hear the rattle of “tro-tro” buses jostling across the lumpy roads and deep sounds of voices shouting in Ewe, a language buried in this small pocket of Ghana. The voices sound too loud and the intonations tend to sound angry to my unaccustomed ears.

I open my eyes. I am standing in front of my new home for the first time. Expected to walk right in and meet my new life. The rusted red gate in front of me marks the passage into the place I will be living for the next four months. The thought of reaching forward and unlatching the heavy gate intimidates me more than I can say. As I step slowly forward my eyes travel to the faded white writing at the top of the gate. It reads:

“Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me, all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.” Psalm 23.

This comforts my uneasy stomach and with that message I enter my home in Hohoe, Ghana. A home which will bear witness to my growth, my deep sadness, my love, my wonder and ultimately will watch me change into the person I am today.

“You are welcome” says my host Father as he emerges from the house. He looks weathered and kind, with eyes that crinkle in the corners even when he’s not smiling. At first I am surprised by the way he has greeted me. The words “YOU ARE WELCOME” have always been a natural response to the profession of gratitude “THANK YOU”. But now, standing alone, those words take on a whole new meaning. They mean that I, as an individual, have a place here. Like when someone extends their hand to hold, or steps aside to make room for you in a crowd. It may just sound like a collection of words, an expression which is thrown about meaninglessly, but somehow I know that it is more; that I will truly be welcome in this home, in this town and in

this life.

The next few days fly by in the way that only totally new and unfamiliar things do. It takes me a while to realize that I can be happy here. In a place where dust coats my skin and I never truly get clean. In a place where running water is something I don't have more often than do and where the electricity is almost as unreliable. In a place where I am always sticky from sweat and where the children shout the word for "white person" as I walk by them on the street.

I wake up early on the first Sunday after I arrive in Ghana. I put on my best flowered skirt and pretty top. Today I am visiting my Host Fathers church, an experience in which I do not know what to expect.

The first thing I realize is that I am underdressed. The women look like spectacular birds, with long styled dresses made of shining fabrics of every description. The men wear fabulous matching shirts and pants with lace patterns and sequined details. The second thing I realize is that I will not understand a single word of the service, because none of it is conducted in English. The third thing that I realize is that the words don't even matter, because the ENERGY of these people is all I need.

People stand and close their eyes, pacing about, deep in prayer. They say these prayers aloud, each person standing and shouting to themselves all at the same time. There is music and some people are dancing now, frenzied movements like I have never seen before. Some people clap. Some people cry. Some people laugh. And everyone emits energy.

At one point I close my eyes and do what my Mom always suggests that I do. I picture the people I love, one by one. And then I send them all the energy I am feeling around me. I take it all in and try to make it into a ball; a ball that I send over the ocean to each of the people back home. And it no longer matters how far away I really am.

The following day is my first day at the orphanage in which I have been placed. I open the door of my taxi and am instantly enveloped into a little crowd of brown hands and faces and bodies as the children greet me for the first time. They ask me my name and about my family back home, all screaming over each other, clamoring to reach me. Over time I will get to know each of these faces, hold all the babies, make bracelets with all the little girls, play soccer with the older kids. But at this moment they are one entity of entirely welcoming spirit.

I am brought to the back of the orphanage where I find a wooden structure

full of kids staring ahead looking miserable. This is school, or so I am told. I step into a section of the structure where the kids are sleeping on their arms or staring off into space. One of the staff tells me that they have no teacher for this class, but he hopes that I will step in.

I think back to my elementary school, to carpeted classrooms full of multi colored toys and hardcover books. Everything was shiny and new. Just enough for each student. We sat in individual desks that opened up to lines of sharpened #2 pencils, pink erasers and blank notebooks decorated with our favorite TV characters. We were clueless and had no idea that a school could be anything less than the tiled hallways, educated teachers and plentiful supplies that we were accustomed to.

The kids in the classroom that I have just entered know about the word LESS. They sit on chipped blue benches, bare footed on the cement floor covered in orange dust. There are no brightly colored school supplies and not even a teacher can be found. In fact there is barley even a room, just a wooden structure, open to the hot breeze which ruffles my hair as I stand in front of 9 expectant children. I play with the hem of my dress, no idea how to go about the task I have been assigned. Apparently it doesn't matter that I am not an educated teacher, it is simply enough to be a native English speaker.

It is my first day at the orphanage and I have been thrown here; into a place that that is



barely a room by my previous standards, asked to teach the kids now seated in front of me. Nervously, I ask them how they are.

“We are fine” they respond in unison, as one entity, as they were taught. They do everything they are taught perfectly, the problem is they are not taught to think for themselves. My first day teaching we play word games, and I realize how behind these children are. It is through no fault of their own, for they have curious minds and an inspiring ambition to learn. Their teachers tell them to copy notes from a blackboard, so they do, sitting in perfect silence,



copying the individual shapes, all day, everyday.

At the end of my first whirlwind day of teaching a boy from my class taps me on the shoulder. He proceeds to tell me that I didn't teach correctly. I feel my heart dropping. In this moment it doesn't matter how proud my friends and family back home are of me for travelling to Ghana to give to the children there. It only matters what this nine year old boy thinks of me.

“What do you mean?” I ask him, and this is what he says to me.

“I mean, all we did was play. You're not supposed to have fun in school.”

Until this moment I wasn't entirely sure what I was supposed to be doing here, so far from my home and from my place in the world. I had hopes and dreams, but I was overwhelmed by the reality of being in Ghana. It wasn't until this boy, Viktor, spoke these words that I realized the enormity of what I could give to these children. I could give them the gift that I treasure most dearly in my life; an inspiring education and the ability of creative thought.

I continue teaching every day for the next four months. It takes me a while to find the confidence to believe in myself as a teacher, since for the last 13 years I have been the one sitting in the classroom, not standing in front of the students. My relationships develop with my little students and I find myself relaxing in front of them, comfortable with my new role. There is nothing for me to criticize about these nine children. Each of them work in their own way, at their own levels. One boy, Attah, doesn't yet know his letters, but he works just as hard at reading as Vivian who is by far the best reader in the class. Their education so far has failed them, but they have not given up. A few months after I met my class a boy in the front row, Michael, asks me to come with him to see the village, Andokokbe, near the orphanage. The next day, after school I walk with him.

Companionable silence floats around us, intermixing with the dust that we kick up from the path beneath our feet. It's not heavy with the weight of unfamiliarity, but like the dust it is dirty. Dirty with the injustice of inequality.

Villagers of Andokokbe lift their heads slightly to see the Yevou walking with her sober faced companion. Some of them call out to me; for they rarely see white people here, miles back into what they call the “bush”.

I glance to my right in time to see Michael smiling a bit sheepishly at the name he knows I hate. My little guide continues walking. Sometimes he tells me who lives in the mud walled houses that line the path, but usually we are quiet, as seems appropriate in this sleepy little village.

Then Michael points ahead and slows his pace.

“I want you to know my family” he says in his quietly measured English. I look to him, stopping entirely now, but his eyes are down and his face holds no expression.

“Okay”. And so we walk to where his little finger pointed, where I meet his Grandmother, Sister and Uncle. Michael keeps his head down the entire time. I can't tell whether the weight that presses on him is from shyness, respect or shame.

As we walk away from the shaded bench where his family members sit together, I feel the

grimy dust of inequality coat my entire body. I train my eyes to the ground and I feel the unmistakable shame of privilege.

"I wish you could know all of my family." He surprises me with the gift of his voice, even if it is barley a whisper.

"Where are they?" He looks up at me, squinting a bit, but drops his eyes as soon as he meets mine.

"I used to live in Accra with my family. I went to my Grandmother's for Christmas". He points into the distance. "She lives there, Ve Kolonu. I never went back because my Father died." Before I can ask the question forming in my mind, Michael answers it.

"My Mother never came back for me. I think she lives in Korfoidua." He names a place across the country, far from where we are standing. His words are frank and lack the emotion I would expect them to hold. Emotion that is currently flooding my body, pressing onto my throat, eyes and stomach.

"I was too much of a disturbance for my Grandmother, so I live at Eugemot".

Now I cannot even look at him. His words sit on my heart, smothering it completely. And yet the way he says them is hallow as if they have been emptied of any and all emotion they once held.

We're nearing our destination now, the yellow building with the peeling paint. I think back to the people I have just met - Michael's family - sitting a mere 10 minutes walk away and I don't understand. I don't understand how they could abandon this brilliant, gentle and kind child. He has a Mother who doesn't want him. A Grandmother who doesn't want him. Aunts, Uncles, Sisters and Brothers and yet the home that he is returning to is a yellow building with the words **Eugemot Orphanage** printed in fading letters.

The sun is blinding on the day I say goodbye to the orphanage. It is the kind of sun that doesn't just burn your body but sinks beneath your skin. But even more overwhelming than the African sun are my thoughts. They spin in circles and cartwheel over themselves, escaping into periodic tears and laughter. I write 60 letters. I buy candy and snacks for every child. I cry. I shake. I look at each one of the kids I've come to know and hold onto them in my mind, hoping to hold them even after we've separated.

There is no opportune moment to say goodbye. My kids hang onto me all day; orbiting around me as if I am the sun. But to them, the sun is a constant, the one thing they can always rely on, because in Ghana the sun will always shine down on them.

I have been at this orphanage everyday. I have started to blend into life here. But I am leaving. I am no longer going to be a constant for these children.

I can't say for sure how the ones I have become close with feel as we say our goodbyes, but for me it is as though all the light and warmth is draining from the sun, leaving me shaking and disoriented, cold and shocked. I make my rounds, hugging, kissing and holding back tears. It isn't until I make it to the front entrance and see the familiar car coming to take me home one last time, that I feel myself starting to come undone.

Sitting on the front steps is Jane, Adeline, Melody and Michael. The children who I know will stay in my heart forever. The ones I can almost feel when I close my eyes and pretend to hold them. I say goodbye one by one. Jane and Adeline whimper softly. Melody gazes at me with her baby eyes wide, sleepy and uncomprehending. And then I say goodbye to Michael and I feel myself collapsing into his nine year old frame, shaking with both of our sobs. Then I run. Because if I don't I will never convince myself to leave. I run and feel the world spinning out of control, earth being separated from sun.

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# Stories from Ghana

By Camilla Pontalti

(Human Rights volunteer in Accra – 2 months)

Scrivere del Ghana non è così facile, soprattutto non è facile descrivere le contraddizioni di un Paese certamente più ricco dei suoi vicini, ma altrettanto certamente molto più povero del mio Paese di origine. Avevo letto molto prima di venire qui e pensavo di essere pronta: ma in realtà tutto, appena scesa dall'aereo, mi ha colta impreparata, investendomi violentemente come un treno carico di novità.

Provo ad andare con ordine, pensando ai 5 sensi e a come ognuno di essi sia stato colpito da qualcosa di diverso, nel mio primo mese di permanenza ad Accra.

- **Tatto.** Voglio iniziare da un aneddoto: due sabati fa sono andata a visitare il New Life Orphanage ed ho trascorso alcune ore con alcuni dei bambini. Dopo qualche minuto di diffidenza, Martha (8 anni e un sorriso da cartolina) si è avvicinata e ha iniziato a toccare i miei capelli; seguendo il suo esempio altre ragazzine si sono avvicinate e mi hanno sottoposta a una divertente (anche se dolorosa) seduta di parrucchiera, affascinate dalla mia massa di capelli sottili e lisci. Per farmi capire la differenza, Ellen mi ha fatto passare la mano sui suoi capelli cortissimi e crespi come solo i capelli di un africano possono essere. Le sensazioni che dà il tocco sono forse le più primordiali ed è per questo che devo ringraziare la spontaneità dei bambini, che hanno saltato l'ostacolo dell'imbarazzo come nessun adulto sa fare.
- **Gusto.** Penso di essere una dei pochi volontari che adorano il Banku; una volta superata la difficoltà di non poter usare coltello e forchetta, mi sono appassionata a questo piatto locale e quando la mia mamma africana me lo cucina io sono sempre molto felice. Il cibo ghanese mi piace molto e mi è stato detto che una volta tornata a casa i cibi mi sembreranno insipidi, ora che la mia bocca si è abituata (più o meno) al piccante. All'inizio ero scettica ma ora, che non ho più la sensazione che la mia lingua sia in fiamme al termine di ogni pasto, non lo sono più.
- **Udito.** Accra in molti casi è sinonimo di caos; dai clacson che suonano in continuazione (per indicare un taxi disponibile o per invitare i pedoni a togliersi di mezzo) ai venditori di cibo con le trombette; dal camion della spazzatura ai predicatori sulle strade; dai *mate* sui tro-tro ai bambini che in strada ti urlano *Obroni*: il rumore è ovunque. Non parliamo poi della musica locale: che sia un pub o il taxi, appena si comincia a cantare è impossibile stare fermi. Ogni tanto agogno a un po' di silenzio, ma in fondo la rumorosa Accra mi sta molto simpatica e mi mette allegria.
- **Olfatto.** Non esistono profumi delicati in Ghana; il mio naso ha dovuto ben presto abituarsi a questa verità. I gas di scappamento di tro-tro che sembrano sempre sul punto di prendere fuoco e i miasmi che salgono dai canali di scolo più volte mi hanno costretta a coprire la faccia con la manica della maglia. Ugualmente intenso, anche se nell'accezione positiva, è però il profumo del succo di ananas che compro nella pausa pranzo: di quello il mio naso non si stanca mai.
- **Vista:** sono qui da un mese e i miei occhi non cessano di essere colpiti da novità. Da quando sono atterrata in Africa, mi sembra di aver tolto un patina che mi aveva reso impossibile prima d'ora assaporare i colori nelle loro tonalità più piene e ricche. Ho mai visto stoffe così colorate, mangiato banane così gialle, fotografato palme più verdi, immaginato che le strade in terra battuta fossero così rosse, invidiato sorrisi così bianchi?

L'aggettivo che forse riassume quello che per me è il Ghana è: sorprendente. Mi rendo conto che basta un nulla per tornare bambina, in questa città africana; dopo un mese molte cose non sono più inaspettate e anzi mi sono creata una routine che delle volte mi stupisce per la sua naturalità: ma nonostante ciò ogni giorno c'è qualcosa da imparare. Sono partita per l'Africa con il desiderio di raccogliere tutto quanto l'esperienza potesse darmi e a metà del mio percorso devo dire che sicuramente quest'avventura mi sta arricchendo molto. Non è stato tutto facile perché le contraddizioni di un Paese in via di sviluppo mi sembrano tante volte incomprensibili ed inaccettabili, ma allo stesso tempo mi stupisco di come, una volta entrata nella mentalità africana, tutto risulti più naturale. Non mi resta quindi che ringraziare il Ghana e i Ghanesi per la ricchezza che mi stanno donando, ed è giusto farlo con la prima parola che ho imparato appena atterrata: meda ase.

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## ABOUT YOUR STAFF

### Our Kumasi Team

*Here are the guys you'll meet when you go to Kumasi! They work extremely hard so that everything goes well ... but they also know how to have the best of fun!*

#### **Gabriel Fianko – Regional Coordinator**

Gabriel is in charge of our programs in Kumasi, and

does inductions, monitoring and introduces volunteers to their

placements. He grew up in Koforidua and holds an NHD in Marketing. He was working in Accra as a Customer Service Officer before joining Projects Abroad in 2006.

#### **Anthony Gerrar – Assistant Regional Coordinator**

Anthony is 29 years old, and was born in Kumasi. He studied Economics and Geography at the University of Cape Coast. Before joining Projects Abroad in 2008, he was working with Ghana Commercial Bank. In his free time, he likes playing volleyball. His favorite Ghanaian dishes are jollof rice and fufu!

#### **Enoch Tawiah Aggrey – Medical Coordinator**

Enoch is 33 years old and is a nurse by profession. He comes from Cape Coast, and went to the University of Ghana. He now stays and works in Kumasi. His hobbies are reading and watching football, and his favorite food is banku and okro soup.

#### **Richmond Domfeh – Volunteer Assistant Coordinator**

Richmond is popularly called Chief and comes from Kumasi. He attended Sunyani Polytechnic and studied Electronics and Electrical Engineering. He did his National Service at Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly and volunteered at Nkuokua Bouho R/C Primary School. He is now assisting Projects Abroad at the Kumasi office. He loves football – both watching and playing!



*From left to right:  
Gabriel, Enoch, Richmond "Chief", Anthony*

*If you want to 'meet' the rest of our Ghana staff, just go to  
<http://www.projects-abroad.org/about-us/overseas-staff/#ghana> !!*

# MISCELLANEOUS

## Ga Coffins

*Each tribe in Ghana has a different set of practises which distinguish them as a tribe! The Ga tribe, originating from the Accra region, has a special custom that is worth sharing!!*

There is an interesting story in Ghana about so-called “fantasy coffins” which are made to reflect the lives of the deceased who are laid to rest in them. These symbolic coffins are used by a tribe in Ghana called the *Ga people* (Ga-Adangbe), who believe that their loved ones continue into the next world when they die. They also believe that their ancestors can have a positive influence on them from the afterlife. Therefore, making sure a loved one moves onto the afterlife in style will hopefully make the deceased more sympathetic towards them.



Fantasy coffins are usually made up to reflect the kind of life or profession that the dead person had. For example, a restaurant owner might be laid to rest in a coffin shaped like a chili pepper, a taxi driver may be buried in a coffin shaped like an automobile, or a farmer might be buried in a coffin looking like a rooster. Certain coffins made to look like animals (like lions) can reflect that the occupant was a powerful chieftain. A coffin shaped like a sword or chair can mean that the deceased was a priest or royal.

Fantasy coffins of the Ga people have been in use since the 50s, when it is said that a fisherman was buried in a fish-shaped coffin. Pioneers of these detailed, symbolic pieces of functional art include Paa Joe and Seth Kane Kwei. Kwei established the Kane Kwei Carpentry Workshop and is considered the inventor of fantasy coffins, also known as *Abebuu adekai* (“boxes with proverbs”). Recent fantasy coffin artists include Kudjoe Affutu and Eric Adjetej Anang.

Families of the deceased spend enormous amounts of cash on these intricate caskets, sometimes even as much as \$600. Sure, that may not seem like a lot to you, but in a country where the average income is somewhere around \$50/month that’s a lot of money. The wealthier relatives usually put up the most part of the sum with the rest of the families providing the rest.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

*Here's just a recap of the social networking we do so that you can be best updated!!*



Hills: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.hills>

Kumasi: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.kumasi>

Ho: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.ho>

Accra: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.accra>

Cape Coast: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.capecoast>

Koforidua: <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/groups/projectsabroad.koforidua>

*Upcoming Human Rights volunteers, please check out what's up on the PAHRO link:*

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/projectsabroad.hro>

*We've started tweeting from Ghana ! Follow the latest news and events at:*

[http://twitter.com/Proj\\_AbroadGH/](http://twitter.com/Proj_AbroadGH/)



We also have a lot of fun articles on our Projects Abroad blogging site! Everyone is free to contribute, and it's a great way to get a little taste of what you'll experience in Ghana, or in any other Projects Abroad Destination! Catch up and contribute your thoughts at :

<http://www.mytripblog.org/pg/groups/2915/Ghana>

*If you would like one of the pictures from our newsletter, blog or facebook in full resolution just email the request to [rainbowplanche@projects-abroad.org](mailto:rainbowplanche@projects-abroad.org)!*