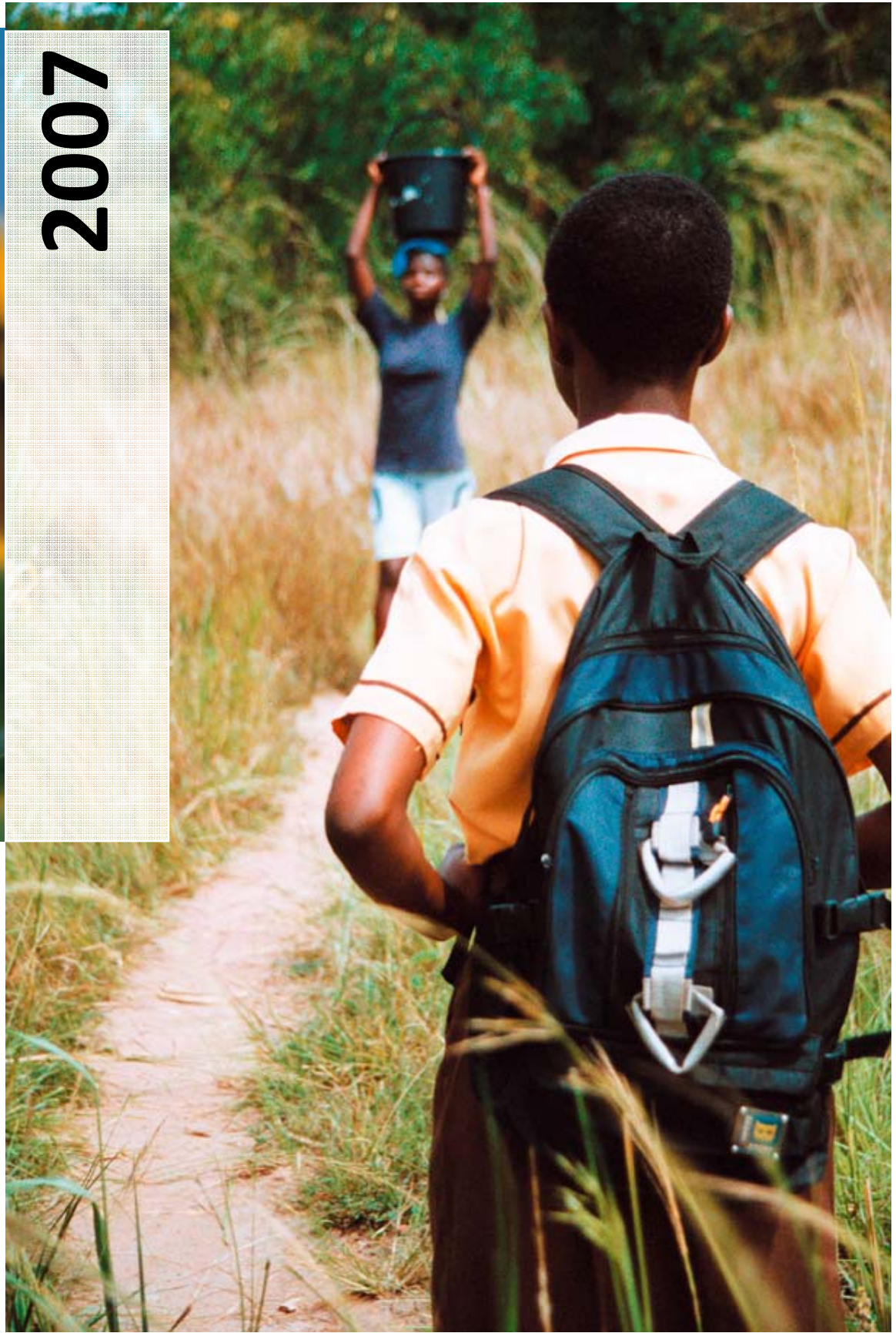


CoFa Education Camp Launch at Ashesi University

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Grounding the girls in the subjects considered critical for their education and development

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COFA EDUCATIONAL CAMP AT ASHESI UNIVERSITY

ARRIVAL – AUGUST 7-20/08/2007

Thirty girls from Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abirim (KEEA) and Abura-Asebu-Kwamnakese (AKA) districts in the Central Region were selected for the 2007 summer camp. The Central Region was chosen because although it boasts of excellent high schools, it is the fourth poorest region in Ghana. The CoFA team realized during one of its visits to the Central Region that the dropout rate in basic education was very high and most girls aimed at completing their education at class six. There had also been incidents of a 100% failure rate in the exams in some districts.

A list of the most deprived districts was provided by the Ghana Education Service. With this information, the Management Team in cooperation with the Central Regional Minister, the Regional Girl Child Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, the regional Social Welfare Department and head teachers selected a cluster of schools in the two districts and the most underprivileged girls.

On August 7th twenty eight girls arrived in Accra on the campus of Ashesi University from the Central Region at lunch time. They were accompanied by the regional Social Welfare officer and the Girl Child Education Officers in KEEA and AKA. They had lunch at Ashesi University. After lunch, they went to the Ashesi hostel, approximately 5 minutes drive from the university. Two girls who missed the bus were brought to the camp by a parent the following day.

At the Ashesi hostel, the girls were beside themselves with joy when they realized they would be staying there. They introduced themselves and were given housekeeping rules. The Executive Team also led the girls through the purpose for the programme and hoped that they would play their part to make it successful. The next morning at the campus of Ashesi the girls were introduced to their mentors, students of Ashesi University College. The mentors, in junior and senior years at college, introduced themselves and took the girls round the three campuses of the university.

OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony took place on 8th August 2007 at 1 pm in one of the lecture halls of the college. Present at the ceremony were the Programme Officer of the Department of Children of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, members of the CoFA Board and mentors for the camp. The Opening Ceremony was chaired by the Honorable Minister of Public Sector Reform, Dr. Paa Kwesi Nduom, who is also the Member of Parliament of KEEA, where half the girls hail from.

Professor Nana Araba Apt, Head of the CoFA management team, in her welcome statement gave a brief background to the project. She said the programme was launched last year with the support of Chara Trust in the United Kingdom. She stated that CoFA's main mission is to motivate and strengthen the intellectual capacity of girls in rural and deprived areas to be able to finish secondary school and to go to college. She hoped that through this programme the girls would improve in their studies and in some years to come, be undergraduate students at Ashesi and other universities.

In his speech, the chairperson, the Honorable Minister of Public Sector Reform, said he was thrilled to be part of this program because it was a laudable one. He also mentioned his personal commitment to the education of students in his constituency and has a scholarship scheme in place for any of the CoFA girls who would in future qualify to enter a tertiary institution. He promised to liaise with CoFA to monitor the progress of the girls in his district and pledged 5 million cedis from the Common Fund towards CoFA's work. After his speech, he spoke to the girls in Fante, a local language of the Central Region and encouraged them to take their studies seriously.

Mrs. Elizabeth Aprey, the Girl Child Education Officer for the AKA district gave her remarks and was happy to be part of this programme as she believed that it would improve the lives of many needy but bright girls in her district. She was also happy that the Minister was part of the programme as he had a history of being involved in the human development of people in the Central Region.

The CoFA summer camp (2007) at Ashesi University was formally declared launched. A group photograph was taken and light refreshments followed afterwards. (Check resource center of website for event pictures).

TRAINING PROGRAMME

The purpose of this camp was to ground the girls in the subjects considered critical for their education and development. Each CoFA participant was provided with a folder and stationery.

Understanding English

Dr. Molara Ogundipe, an English professor at Ashesi University volunteered as the English tutor for the girls. English language was a major challenge for the girls. When they were asked to write an essay on themselves, only a few of the girls could write a page. One person wrote two sentences and quite a number of them struggled to construct correct sentences. Prof. Yetunde decided to group the girls in two in order to assist each other. The girls were given story books to read. Again, a significant number of them struggled to read. When they realized that they could not read as expected, some were frustrated and depressed. They were assured that they would see an improvement if only they took their studies seriously, practiced reading and showed an eagerness to learn.

Understanding Maths

Ms. Mamle, and Mrs Kuffour of the Ghana Education Service took the children through basic math instruction. The English language again presented a problem for the girls in math class. When the tutors realized that the children had difficulty understanding English, they decided to teach in their local language. This brought an immediate transformation to the dull class. The girls suddenly awakened from their stupor and participated in the class, answered questions correctly and sang songs that Math was not difficult. This enthusiasm went on till the last day of the class. Basic math topics discussed were – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Your Body and Your Health

Mrs. Elizabeth, Ashesi University's school nurse oriented the girls on health issues. The girls were taught the anatomy of the female body and the changes that it goes through during puberty. They were also taught about personal hygiene and urged to refrain from engaging in sexual activities. Topics such as pregnancy and the sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS were also discussed.

SELF ESTEEM PROGRAM

The girls were motivated to take pride in their identity as females and not to place any limitations on themselves because of their gender. They were motivated not to accept any negative roles assigned to them by society as females and not to perceive themselves as victims. Rather they were encouraged to work diligently in school towards changing their life situation for the better.

Creative Arts.

Children had three classes of creative arts. They were taught beading, doll making and painting.

Beading:

The first session was with Professor Abena Asantewaa, a Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer at Ashesi University, who taught them traditional beading. She supplied the girls with beads, strings and took the children through the techniques of beading. The girls demonstrated their creative skills as each one of them did their own unique necklaces or bracelets. They were allowed to keep them which generated even more excitement. They left the class wearing their traditional beads around their necks or wrists.

Soft Doll Making

The resource person for doll making was Ms. Esi Yamoah of Native Stew Catering. This was more of a project than a session as the children were supposed to continue working on this during their leisure periods. She supplied brown cloth, thread and needles for the girls. The girls were grouped in four and each child was assigned to sew a part of the doll they were working on. Some worked on the legs, the arms and the torso. The girls kept their cloth and were so engrossed in this new found hobby; they rather sewed during the break periods instead of playing as used to be the case. The evening before the closing day, they stuffed the dolls, assisted their resource person to sew dresses for the doll and exhibited their finished work at the closing ceremony.

Painting

The girls were provided with paint, brushes and a canvas which was divided into thirty parts. Each girl was asked to paint/draw anything that was tied to their identity. Most of the children had never done any art work before with paint so it was a novel but enjoyable experience for them. The first group of four girls struggled to paint, but those who followed had time to conceptualise what to draw so they really enjoyed the class. They used different colours of paint

to create their own impressions which resulted in a beautiful painting afterwards. The girls were impressed with their accomplishment. This project culminated in a beautiful collage which was also exhibited at the closing ceremony.

Time with Mentors

One reason why girls drop out from school in rural areas is because they do not see role models in their area. CoFA's aim is to encourage the girls to attain higher education. The programme deemed it necessary for the girls to have mentors in the university to motivate them. Ten female students from Ashesi University volunteered to mentor the girls. They bonded quite well with the girls and had a number of sessions with them. Each mentor was assigned three girls and a couple of hours during the course of the week. They acquainted themselves with the girls and motivated them. The mentors also assisted them in reading and working math problems. The mentors also donated clothes, books and other items to the girls.

Computer lessons

Information technology is essential in this age of rapid technological advancement. Coming from rural areas, the girls had not had an opportunity to use computers. Four of the mentors who are majoring in computer studies taught them how to type a document and send an email. They had a number of sessions and at the end of the camp, some of the girls were able to type letters to their friends. These letters were exhibited at the closing ceremony.

PLANNED TOURS

Visit to Allure Beauty Parlour:

Most girls in Ghana are familiar with the hairdressing business which is often on the micro level and considered an occupation for girls who do badly in school. In order to broaden their horizon in this field, the girls visited Allure Beauty Parlour and Spa, a classy beauty spa in Accra. The beautiful surroundings and the state-of-the-art equipment were a surreal experience for the girls. The Manager of the spa was patient with the girls, gave them a tour and also explained how Allure moved from hairdressing salon to a spa and encouraged them to think big.

Accra City Tour

As this was the girls' first visit to Ghana's capital, Accra, the city tour was planned on the last Saturday of the camp to provide ample time. Some places of interest they visited were Achimota School, Ghana's first colonial co-ed public school, University of Ghana, the premier public university, the Supreme and High Courts, Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum and Parliament House.

THE CLOSING CEREMONY

The closing ceremony took place on Friday 17th August 2007. Professor Nana Apt, the head of the Management team of CoFA and the Girl Child Education Officer of KEEA district remarked on the success of the programme.

The closing ceremony was chaired by the Deputy Minister for Education, Science and Sports, Mrs. Angelina Baiden Amisah. She congratulated CoFA for this intervention which she believed would move Ghana closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals of gender parity. A picture slide which captured some moments in camp was shown. Hannah Deheer, one of the girls, on behalf of the class thanked the CoFA Foundation for giving them this opportunity.

At the end of the ceremony visitors were shown the exhibition of the girls work which comprised of the dolls, bead bracelets and necklaces, letters by the girls typed on the computer.

DEBRIEFING

On Sunday, 19th August 2007, the CoFA team met with the girls at the hostel. Most of them were in a pensive mood and were coming to terms with the fact that their stay in Accra was almost over. Some begged the team to extend the programme for another week. Prof. Apt told the girls that the reason for this session was to prepare their minds for their return home. She told them that this would be difficult as they had lived a life totally different from what they are used to. She asked the girls how they were going to adapt to these changes. Below are some comments from the girls.

- Back home, we eat the same food for breakfast, lunch and supper which is often insufficient.
- Some of our fathers have the means to make life comfortable at home but they refuse to support the home and rather go in for concubines or more wives.
- When my mom has money she does not share it with the children but spends it on herself to look good without doing the same for the children.
- I look and feel a lot better since I came here. My complexion is brighter and I have put on some weight. Now, just the thought of going home has given me a headache.
- When I was home I was mostly dirty girl but now, look- I'm a beautiful girl wearing dresses with flowers.
- Back home, I hardly take my bath because I have to travel a long distance to fetch water for the house, but I have been taking baths both mornings and evenings here. I will miss that.
- When we were home we didn't have body lotions to moisturize our skin but after using some here, our complexion is brighter.
- When I return home on Monday, I'll have to work on the farm the following day. Here I wake up with my breakfast ready and I'm not expected to do difficult chores.
- I don't have anybody to talk to and play with when I go home but here, I have the opportunity to do so.
- My parents have traveled so please let us leave on Tuesday instead of tomorrow.
- Life can be better if we take our studies seriously
- Some of our parents because of frustration hate their children
- I have to travel quite a distance to fetch water for the house early in the morning which is not the same here.
- I thank God I always eat bread here.
- Due to the magnitude of work back home, I find it difficult to study as I'm always tired.
- The teachers maltreat us when we answer a question wrongly. Sometimes we have to clean the bath room and fetch water just for giving a wrong answer. That has not been the case here so we have enjoyed learning.
- I have to pound fufu and do laundry before 7 am when school starts.

- I will continue to eat gari and “momoni” (salted fish) because I know that after I finish my school I will be able to afford more nutritious food.
- Some of us drop out of school because we don’t have a school uniform which is a requirement.
- We are given 1000 cedis (10 cents) when leaving for school to buy food.
- Due to poverty, we wear bathroom slippers to school but our teachers seize our slippers because we are supposed to wear shoes to school. Most often, our parents cannot afford to buy the shoes so we have to walk home barefooted. Sometimes, they destroy our slippers. This upsets our parents and they stop buying slippers for us.

EVALUATION

The girls were asked to evaluate their experiences in the past two weeks living together in the Ashesi hostel. The girls responded that there had been instances of:

- Misbehavior
- Quarrelling
- Bullying especially by the bigger girls
- Thefts in the hostel

The majority felt the duration (2 weeks) of the camp was too short.

All the girls said they now understood the concepts of math and English better. They wanted a follow-up camp soon so that they do not forget what they had learnt. CoFA assured them they would look for funding to have a follow up camp at Easter time to further build up on their Math and English abilities. They promised to study hard to make it for the next camp. Most of the girls said they wanted to be like the CoFA team so they were told to study hard, stop quarrelling and be disciplined. They were encouraged to endeavor to finish Junior Secondary School, enter into Senior Secondary School so that they can make it to college.

FINANCING THE TRAINING CAMP

CoFA’s first summer camp would not have been possible without the financial support of the following:

- **Ms. Sarah Cannon**, a friend of COFA, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and was able to successfully raise \$2215 for the camp.
- **GEODRILL**, a company in Ghana donated \$1000
- **Aviation Alliance** also in Ghana donated 3,000,000 cedis
- **Professor Luversa Sullivan** donated \$1000.
- **Ms. Rebecca Amooh Aboagye** contributed 500,000 cedis
- **Dr. Paa Kwesi Ndoum** pledged 5,000,000 cedis
- **Dr. Abena Asantewaa and Mrs. Lydia Bedwei** bought foodstuff and toiletries for the camp.
- **Ashesi University** provided a highly subsidized hostel accommodation and classroom facilities at no cost for the girls