

They're worth it

Report on the 2016 CofA Summer Camp at the University of Ghana, Legon, from 24 July to 8 August 2016

The 2016 CofA Summer Training Camp saw the largest number of girls since the first Summer Camp in 2006. The cohort of 61 students was made up of 40 new recruits from Berekuso, Ayim (Eastern Rural) and Pokuase (Rural Accra) plus 21 returning girls – five from Junior High School and 16 Senior High School girls.

First-timers

Using our tried and tested curriculum, the girls received additional tutoring in academic subjects: Mathematics, General Science, English and ICT.

CofA developed a more holistic approach to teaching English, covering grammar, to help with constructing sentences; and comprehension and writing, to boost reading and writing skills. Communication skills, public speaking and 'Express Yourself', were designed to build-up their vocabulary so they can speak in front of an audience with confidence. Timidity and shyness is a common problem faced by many of our girls.

During our selection process, the girls often expressed their frustration of not being able to use a computer at school: "The teachers only come to class and write on the board while the actual computers sit in the labs as showcase." Understandably, there was much excitement when each girl had access to their own PC in ICT class. "We were even allowed to touch them!"

Equal importance was given to creativity and innovation: two essential life skills: both personal and professional. The creative arts don't usually feature in the curriculum of schools in Ghana's poorer, rural areas. We saw some very beautiful collages and African print being created. This year's closing ceremony demonstrated some of the achievements. With the help of our talented and dedicated group of volunteers we had some lovely poetry recitals, various performances, including dance and a short drama, as well as a CofA song that the girls wrote for the occasion.



Empowering young women is another promise that CofA makes. A group of successful, professional women – that included professor Nana Araba Apt, Founder and Honorary CEO of CofA – led a number of motivational sessions to instil self-esteem. The girls were encouraged to love themselves and know their worth, vital foundations for building confidence. Other equally important life skills taught included adolescent reproductive health with sex education and physical and hormonal changes during puberty as the main focus); body hygiene and good nutritional values. Needless to say we provided lots of fruits with their meals during their stay. Other activities included a Health Walk to keep fit and alert.

Some of the girls never travelled outside their own communities. So this was a good opportunity to introduce them to Accra's sights and monuments: from the 'temple of shopping', the Accra Mall to the Sports Stadium, Independent Square and the Nkrumah Mausoleum. A great day out for the girls.

The Senior High School group

Studies on the SHS group showed that even upon completion from the Basic School level and entering Senior High School, the girls still had problems with Maths and English. The extra tuition included lots of class and group assignments. They also joined in the adolescent reproductive health talks, the creative arts sessions and the Accra tour with the younger group to share in the fun.

From comprehension to abstinence: what the girls said about the camp

Professor Apt met with the girls to evaluate the camp to find out how the girls benefited, what they liked – and didn't like – and where they think we could do better. Here are some of the observations that we will use to strengthen and improve future training camps:

"We learnt new and simpler methods for solving Maths problems, such as long divisions and multiplication." One girl said that "in order to abstain from pre-marital sex and avoid teenage pregnancy, I must distance herself from bad company and friends who will try to influence her negatively." Others told us that they learnt how to take proper care of herself during menstruation. Our holistic approach to English seems to have paid off: the CofA experience made on girl bolder – in the past she was timid and shy when interacting with her peers. One of the SHS group was grateful for learning how to summarize passages better.



Generally, they all learnt how to live with different people from different places and backgrounds.

Two improvements they would like to see for future summer camps:

- a longer CofA summer camp, so they have more time to learn
- have some time off from their schools before joining the summer camp.

While these wishes may not be easy to implement – the university’s timetable gives us a very narrow timeframe – we are taking this on board and were of course encouraged by their enthusiasm and their confidence in expressing their thoughts!

Professor Apt concluded the feedback session by encouraging the girls to continue to work hard. “CofA can only support girls that contribute to their own development.”

In closing the 2016 summer camp, Andrea Opoku-Dwamena, who chairs the CofA board, encouraged the girls to stay focused and make use of this opportunity given them. She also thanked all volunteers, mentors, teachers, donors, sponsors and everyone who made this year’s camp again a success.

