



Exam success

While everyone agrees that there is a special need for girls to be given a helping hand entering into secondary education (see article on next page), friends of CofA have been asking how successful the programme has been so far. In other words: where is the evidence?

The answer can be found in Ghana's Western region in the Shama District. This year, of the 17 girls who attended our special BECE training camp in 2010 and sat the BECE exams (required to enter senior secondary school), 12 passed and now await a place in the schools of their choice. Clearly, there is still a way to go, but without CofA, most would have been unlikely to even attempt sitting the exam as their schools traditionally record a 100% failure at BECE level.

But this is not our first success. In 2010, three CofA girls entered senior secondary schools without our special BECE training and they have just completed their first year in Shama Senior High School, Anaho Senior High School and Diabene Senior Technical High. As part of our on-going support for CofA girls, some of our board members will be visiting them to find out how they are progressing and what we can learn from their experience to help future CofA girls.

Financial support

Earlier pledges from the Lower Pra Rural Bank and the Shama District Assembly mean that this year's cohort will have their school fees paid. However, they will still need further support to buy books and meet their living expenses.

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Friends in high places

Girls who attended this year's CofA training camp in August didn't let a photo opportunity pass them by. When touring the capital, Accra, they stopped at the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, where they were quick to spot former UN Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan (above, centre), who was also visiting with his wife and guests.

The CofA girls were quick to ask Mr Annan to pose with them for a group photograph. It proves that at least one of CofA's objectives – to boost girls' confidence – has been achieved! This chance encounter together with their lunch at top African restaurant and long-time CofA supporter, Maquis Tante Marie, were possibly the highlights of the CofA 2011 training camp.

2011 training camp

This year's training camp was held at Mallam School, in the Ga rural area, close to the capital.

Of the 25 girls selected, 19 joined CofA to prepare for their BECE exam in March 2012 (the remaining six had moved away from Mallam School due to their guardians' relocation to other communities – further proof of the difficulties these girls are facing). Our previous five camps, hosted by Ashesi University College, were all residential. However, Ashesi was moving into its new campus in Berekuso in the Eastern region over the summer break and their new accommodation was not ready. Mallam District Assembly Primary School stepped in and offered

Why CofA?

College for Ama (CofA) provides educational opportunities for adolescent girls in rural areas of Ghana to attain college education. Find out what we do and how you can help by visiting our website: www.cofa-foundation.org

the free use of their classrooms. However, with no nearby dorms or hostels, the girls had to travel to school from their homes, which had a number of implications:

- being in their familiar surroundings, the girls were less attentive than in our residential camps,
- the distractions from outside (the local soccer teams practised outside the school) meant that teachers were constantly having to regain the girls' attention,
- a lower than normal number university student volunteers, due to the distance and lack of accommodation,
- as is typical in most Ghanaian rural schools, there were no toilets or hand washing facilities, presenting the obvious difficulties for teachers and the girls.

Committed volunteers

Nevertheless, this year we had very committed volunteers: **Araba Serwaa Aidoo** and **Walter Kofi Mawusi Asigbetse**. Walter, an old volunteer with CofA, returned to teach Maths and managed much of this year's training activities. Araba was

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Walter (left) and Araba (right) and CofA girls.

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a new volunteer who just returned from completing year 12 at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. She was one of the lucky Ghanaian high school students to take part in the Youth for Understanding programme that takes young students from around the world to study for a year in the US, while living with a volunteer American family. Araba made sure that she was at the camp on time every day to make sure the girls had done their homework. Araba and Walter also quizzed the girls daily on their assigned reading for comprehension.

Yawa Hansen Quao – an Ashesi alumna – led our leadership training and **Joyce Hooley-Gingrich**, a paediatrician from the US, now living in Ghana – instructed the girls on health issues. We also hired two teachers, both recommended as the best for preparing students for BECE exams. **John Okwan** and **Susan Aboagye** instructed the girls in English, Maths and Integrated Science.

Well looked after

Good food, regular refreshments, sufficient study materials and hygienic products are all essential ingredients for our training camps. One of our board members and an assistant professor at Ashesi, **Dr Mikelle Antoine**, gently persuaded many businesses and individuals from the international and local communities in Accra to

donate water sachets, school exercise books, teachers' notebooks and reading books for the girls. She also made sure that all girls received two packs of sanitary pads, assorted soaps, deodorants and dental health products. And if that wasn't enough, Mikelle persuaded a number of businesses to donate some luxury items to give to the girls, such as pieces of fabric, costume jewellery and scarves.

We are grateful to all our volunteers, teachers and supporters for making this year's CofA training camp a success.

Why is educating girls so important?

This question was posed in a recent World Bank's fact sheet. In a nutshell, poverty and gender inequalities are the main reasons why – in many developing countries – girls are disadvantaged. Excluding women from access to schooling leads to a less educated workforce and lost productivity and so stifles economic growth. Better-educated women tend to be healthier, take part in economic activities, earn more and have fewer children.

One of the Millennium Development Goals is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The World Bank recognises that countries with better gender equality are more likely to trade out of poverty. Since the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, the Bank has increased its emphasis on girls' education.

Today, significant improvements have been achieved: more young people are entering school and in Sub-Saharan Africa, the most significant increase has been in girls entering primary education. This endorses CofA's work in Ghana to prepare girls for entering secondary education.

Where are we going?

Previous CofA training camps have concentrated on girls from Ghana's Western, Central and Greater Accra regions. The cooperation from Western Region has been very positive, as reported elsewhere. Our work in the Central Region has been challenging: so far there has not been a great deal of interest from the District Assemblies, which is vital to identifying girls with the potential to take part in the CofA programme.

Our experience from this year's training camp tells us that residential camps work best. The move of Ashesi University – our host of the first four camps – to Berekuso in the Eastern Region may be a happy coincidence.

A future base for CofA

Earlier this year, **Afua Eyeson** and **Nana Apt**, two of CofA's board members, met with **Dana Dakin**, founder and president of WomensTrust and were promised a piece of land near Pokuase. Although discussions on how best to make use of this are at an early stage, creating a permanent base for CofA's residential courses is one of the options under discussion.



Dana Dakin of WomensTrust (centre) showing what could become CofA's future base.

Get involved!

Our immediate need is to secure funding for our 2012 training camp. The cost to feed, house and teach one girl for three weeks is US\$650. We hope to be able to invite 30 girls next August, so we need to raise US\$19,500. You can pledge your support by email to our treasurer, Lydia Bedwei (lbedwei@yahoo.com).

If you want to find out how else you can help, contact us in any of the following ways:
By email: info@cofa-foundation.org
By phone: +233 264452060 (Ghana) or +44 20 7265 0771 (UK)

Helping girls focus on their goals

What it is like to be a CofA volunteer?

"The most rewarding aspect of being involved in CofA is to see how keen the girls are to learn", says **Walter Kofi Mawusi Asigbetse** (pictured far left), a second-time volunteer. He was fortunate enough to receive a good education and received a degree in mathematics in 2010 from Tarkwa University of Mines and Technology. As is often the case in rural schools in Ghana, quite a few of this year's CofA girls needed extra coaching to bring them up to the standard required to pass their BECE exam. Walter was able to solidify their maths foundations and encourage them towards self-exploration. "I also enjoyed being a peer counsellor and discussing with the girls the challenges they face. I encouraged them to focus on their goals, rather than dwell on their problems", he added. Needless to say, we need more volunteers like Walter.