

MONTHLY REVIEW

MARCH 2013

SOCIAL JUSTICE				
HR CLUBS	SOCIAL WELFARE	SLUM PROJECT	HR FOCAL	POLICE ADVOCACY
ACCRA HIGH	BOYS REMAND	HR DEFENDERS	DODOWA / TEMA	SCHOOLS COMMUNITY
TESHIE	GIRLS CORRECTIONAL	TEACHERS' TRAINING		
		SLUM LEGAL DESK		
		OLD FADAMA		
PRO / PLACEMENTS		OFFICE RESEARCH		
LEGAL AID SOCIAL FACILITY		RIGHTS OF WOMEN	RIGHTS OF CHILDREN	RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



AKWAABA!

March is typically a month for farewells at the Human Rights Office, as most of our undergraduate volunteers commence or resume studies in the home countries. Our team reduced from around twenty volunteers to only seven by the end of the month. But with Easter comes a revitalised office with the prospect of new projects, and the rain-clouds of the wet season, on the horizon.

Here's what happened in the month gone by.

SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

1. HUMAN RIGHTS CLUBS

The Human Rights Clubs Project was created by the Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) through an Amnesty International initiative. It involves teams of our volunteers visiting Accra high schools to lead the student members of their respective Human Rights Clubs in discussion and debate on a broad range of past and present human rights issues.



Caroline E with members of the Teshie HR Club

The Accra High Club held some great sessions this in March. Each lasted nearly three hours and involved some very lively debate. Our resident journalist Sarah accompanied the team to conduct video interviews, and we are looking forward to seeing the final product. The discussion topics included mutilation, teenage pregnancy, abortion, and all forms of illegal trafficking. The Teshie Club finally conducted their first sessions, and there was a very healthy turnout of between 25 and 30 members.

Easter saw the end of the school term, and HR Clubs will therefore be on hold until school resumes in late April. Next term will see a lot of senior HR Club students departing, and Projects Abroad HR Club polo-shirts will be awarded to all members in May as proof of their involvement. Later in the year, Projects Abroad will hold a debate between Accra High and Teshie on the subject of the Death Penalty. May and June will be spent preparing Teshie for this event, as they have never participated in an inter-school debate before.

The HR Clubs team also attended a forum held by the National Commission for Civic Education on their 'Project Alumni' and 'Project Citizen' initiatives, which aim to unify youth-related organisations in educating Ghanaian school-children in human rights. We hope the initiatives will be a success and to make a valuable contribution in the future.

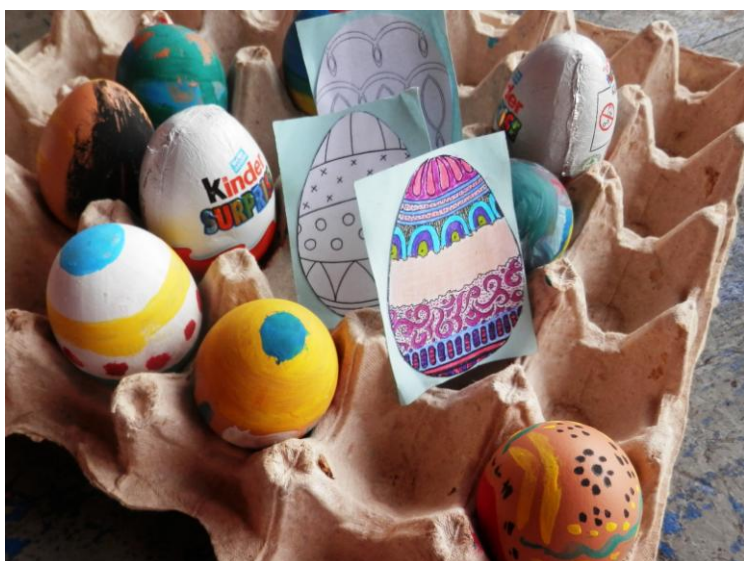
2. SOCIAL WELFARE FACILITY

The Social Welfare Facility is an institution for Ghanaian children who are in trouble with the law, who have found themselves in a dire situation. The Boys' Remand Centre is a detention centre for boys awaiting trial, while the Girls' Correctional Centre is detention centre for girls who have already been convicted of a criminal offence, and the Children's Shelter is for the boys and girls who have been abused or who have run away from home.

The Boys' Remand team opened up their non-curriculum discussions this month. It addressed democracy, the voting system, the death penalty, gang violence, and the ongoing conflict in Mali.

Towards the end of the month, for Josh's final sessions, the team took an alternative approach to teaching English, analysing music lyrics with the students as a way to improve their grammar and listening comprehension. They found the children were far more enthusiastic and engaged with these music exercises than the standard classes. The PAHO volunteers held another football match against the Boys Remand Centre last Friday under the leadership of Ruben, with the fair-play result of three-all at the final whistle. All Projects Abroad volunteers were welcome to participate in or watch the event on the pitch behind the Osu Centre. We hope to make this a monthly event to look forward to.

Lessons at the Girls' Correctional Centre continued to address the concerns regarding life-skills, in addition to the usual academic disciplines. These included self-esteem and role-models in society, which we hoped would have a positive influence on the girls' behaviour. Our team also taught sex education, emergency procedures (fire, robbery and first aid), the history of Ghana's independence and some creative skills. There are still some concerns



Easter eggs painted by the inmates of the Girls' Correctional Facility



A French lesson prepared for the Osu Welfare Facility

surrounding the bullying that some of the girls are subjected to by the others. The new local staff members have been translating for the girls, which has its pros and cons. The girls can be distracted and will not try communicating in English, but the material is being better understood, so for now the positives outweigh the negatives. This will be monitored over time. To bring a little joy into the lives of the inmates, the team prepared a special session for Easter, involving

Easter-egg painting and an Easter-egg hunt. Their appreciation was overwhelming. However, they were constantly disturbed by permanent staff ordering them to complete menial tasks, revealing the indifference to the social and educational needs of children that persists in Ghanaian society.

3. THE SLUM PROJECT

Perhaps the most popular and physically demanding project currently in operation at PAHO, the Slum Project sees two teams of volunteers visiting the Old Fadama slum in the west of Accra, a shanty town of nearly 100,000 residents, on a weekly basis in conjunction with WISEEP (Women In Slums Economic Empowerment Organisation).

The Teachers' Training team held their final presentation, which considered child abuse and child labour. They handed out a feedback



Bec and Leslie with school children in Old Fadama

questionnaire, which was returned with mostly positive comments and requests for more practical training on methods and subjects. This will be considered in time for the project's possible recommencement in April. The Human Rights Defenders talked about the rights of people living with disabilities. They intend to distribute the research questionnaires our Disabilities Research Team has developed, once its content has been approved by our contact in Old Fadama. Their final session for the month looked at forced eviction, which is a concern held by every one of the slum's 80,000 inhabitants, who live in the shadow of the government's ongoing threat to force them out and clear their 3 hectares of land. Although most feel powerless against this threat, our team informed them of the few legal rights they do possess.

4. LEGAL SERVICES DESK

Another PAHO operation in the Old Fadama Slum, the Legal Services Desk is a rudimentary drop-in legal service for a community with effectively no access to legal resolution. It is again run in conjunction with WISEEP, and where possible at least one team-member will be a law graduate or final-year law student.

The strength of our Legal Services Desk grew this month, thanks to the work-ethic of some very enthusiastic volunteers. The team observed an expired-lease dispute mediation being held at Legal Aid early in the month to learn techniques from local legal professionals. The team members were taught how to handle cases and how to recognise what clients really want from mediation. We are hoping to establish a more regular and frequent outreach schedule that will include other communities, as sessions in Old Fadama are still occasionally

cancelled due to unforeseeable circumstances. The Legal Desk handled 5 clients in the second half of March, and held a resolution outreach in the final week. The cases involved domestic violence, forced eviction and rent payment disputes. One party to a domestic mediation did not attend, two clients resolved their issues in private after consulting the Desk, one matter was referred to Legal Aid, and the final one was resolved in a mediation session held by our team. There will be a new intake in the first week of April.



The two Carolines and Kasper working at the Legal Desk in Old Fadama

5. HR FOCAL

Our HR Focal project provides human rights education to focal members of the community, such as teachers or religious leaders, in the hope that their particular influence in society will see our message trickle-down to those who hold them in such high esteem.

A HR Focal session on domestic violence was held in Tema in the second week of March. There was some miscommunication that had occurred prior to our arrival. Those present thought we were there to stage an intervention, and our team were discouraged when some men were present, going against the sense of openness and confidentiality we were hoping to provide to the Women who were brave enough to attend. It did not prove to be an issue however, and the attendees raised many difficult questions following our presentation. Many of these questions our volunteers were not able to answer, particularly those concerning access to welfare and state corruption. They subsequently prepared a database of questions and answers from the outreach that can be added to over time and worked into future presentations in case those questions are asked again in the future. This had an immediate effect on their very next session, which they were able to deliver with much more authority, to the satisfaction of those who attended.

For those interested, the principal questions that were raised at the first session were as follows:

- A woman wants a divorce, but it is not customary for women to divorce their husbands. What can she do?
- If a woman in an informal relationship is a victim of domestic violence, what can she do?

- If a woman is divorced from her husband and he does not provide for the children, is there any social support for a single parent, and is it effective?
- A woman reports a case of domestic violence to the police, but they rule in the man's favour, possibly due to bribery or another form of corruption. What should she do?

Questions asked by the second community included the following:

- A man impregnated a woman during a casual relationship. The child was born, but then the man left the woman and the child. Now he is legally married to another woman. What can the first woman do to support her child?
- If there are victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in one household, people are often reluctant to endanger the family structure by reporting it to the police, but are equally afraid to confront the aggressor themselves. What can they do?
- If a wife denies sex to her husband, and he threatens her and says he will stop providing for her, is this a case of domestic violence?
- Reporting domestic violence can attach a stigma to a woman, and she may be considered an undesirable partner or wife. How can a woman deal with domestic violence if reporting it to the Police causes her to be shamed and discriminated against?

6. POLICE ADVOCACY

The Advocacy project is an initiative jointly coordinated by PAHO, the Ghanaian Police and the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DoVVSU), a police department established in 1998 to respond to cases of domestic violence. The purpose of this project is once again concerned with awareness, and our volunteers visit communities and schools in various villages outside of Accra, with members of the above institutions, to educate citizens on basic human rights, and crimes involving domestic violence and rape.



Kasper, Hanna and Caroline L giving a Community Advocacy presentation

The Schools branch of the Advocacy team conducted a number of domestic violence outreaches to address children predominately between the ages of 12 and 18, some of whom were under 15 and already pregnant. One session saw a crowd of over 60 students, and they did not have enough information packs to distribute, which was at the same time frustrating and encouraging. At another, our media manager Quaye attended to document the outreach. There was a large number of students, and it was difficult for the team to communicate loudly enough. The school was highly appreciative and wants our team to return after the school holidays for follow-up sessions.

The Communities team also had some very successful outreaches. In the second week of March they travelled to Dodowa to address a crowd of over one hundred people, including chiefs and elders. The key topic of their session was rape in marriage, a concept still poorly understood and considered in most Ghanaian communities to be impossible. One of the

tribal preachers asked whether girls who are raped whilst wearing revealing clothing are themselves at fault. Clearly there is still much work for human rights organisations to do in this area, and we were fortunate to have DOVVSU, the domestic violence branch of the police, to back-up our stance. Our team then posed for photographs with the community chiefs at their request. In a follow-up session on rape, defilement and the sexual transmission of diseases, our in-house social work volunteers joined the Advocacy team to assist.

Impact assessments will be held in April, including going door-to-door to discuss the sessions with parents in the communities. The Schools and Communities teams will re-merge due to the reduced volunteer numbers in our inter-peak period.

LEGAL AID

Volunteers requiring a law-focused internship and supervision from an experienced Ghanaian lawyer often join the Legal Aid Placement. This involves full time participation at a government-funded drop-in legal aid clinic in Accra, where interns will shadow and work closely with the co-ordinating lawyer, meet clients, attend court and mediations, draft documents and assist in any other way that is required. Our volunteers deal with legal matters ranging from property disputes to criminal defence to constitutional matters. Volunteers requiring a law-focused internship and supervision from an experienced Ghanaian lawyer often join the Legal Aid

Pascal was our representative at Legal Aid in March. At the end of his time at PAHO he informed me that he really felt like an ordinary well-integrated member of the team, which made his contribution



Leslie, Lydia and Pascal with Justice Mensah of the Human Rights High Court

feel particularly valuable. As an undergraduate law student, and without access to a laptop, Pascal's role was to assist with client registry and new-case management. On occasion he shadowed lawyers during their court appearance. The lawyers would take pleasure in discussing their cases and the problems facing the Ghanaian judiciary. They compared notes on the differences between the Ghanaian and German legal systems, illustrating how well suited this placement would be for a student of comparative law.

PRO SOCIAL WORK

Our professional social work volunteers Bec and Janouk spent time training the staff at the Abused Children's Shelter on recognising and strategies for dealing with autism. They have identified at least one certain case of autism, and suspect there may be one or two other mild cases. At the Boys' Remand Centre they have held trainings on life skills, anger management, teamwork and communication. They used pictograms as an alternative way to connect with the children in their

education. Both social workers also went to Dodowa with or Police Advocacy team to consider future plans with the schools in that community.

We have recently negotiated a new volunteering partnership with BASICS International, an after-school learning centre for underprivileged children in the slums around Chorkor. Traditionally, children in Ghana are educated by rote-learning, particularly in underprivileged communities. Learning is seen as a chore, and children are discouraged from asking questions or thinking creatively. Those who ask questions or do not follow the strict curriculum are labelled 'foolish', are often caned, and have their natural curiosity suppressed. BASICS aims to break down the traditional barrier between teachers and underprivileged pupils in Accra, by making learning 'fun', providing an environment where children are encouraged to express themselves freely and follow their own particular aptitudes. Most of the children who attend BASICS are first-generation students, whose parents do not have the tools to provide adequate educational support at the end of the school day.

From the end of March, our PRO social work volunteers with an interest in child psychology and learning techniques will be attending BASICS two days a week to assist their thoughtful and well-structured program. More information about BASICS International can be found here:

<http://www.basicsinternational.org/>

OFFICE RESEARCH

The Human Rights Office conducts group research tasks for all Social Justice volunteers to investigate the public perception of and laws relating to the rights of women, the rights of children, and the rights of people living with disabilities.

Our Children's Rights research team are considering the issue of Birth Registrations. The number of children born in Africa who are not registered is staggering, with some estimates as high as 50%. For some this can have serious consequences later in life when it comes to welfare, legal rights, education and obtaining a passport.

The team is planning to launch a campaign to educate parents as to why they should make an effort to register their newborn children, as well as how they can do this.

Our Women's Rights research was on hold for March, but with the arrival of volunteers with a particular interest in this matter, the team will regroup in early April and agree on a new direction for their research proposal.

Our Disabilities team refined their community questionnaires to make them shorter and more accessible. Their focus has been on the stigmata related to mental health issues, the treatment of



Ruben with young Teshie Presby school children

citizens in mental health facilities and prayer camps, social equality and anti-discrimination measures. Physical disabilities have also been considered, with discrimination and access to care being the leading issues.

A FINAL WORD

As I mentioned at the start of this report, the Human Rights Office is starting to plan new short-term projects and intensive campaigns to commence at opportune times in the year. Our research into birth certificates has provided us with a good lead for a sustainable and worthwhile project that we may be able to begin as soon as late April. Our long-term forecast includes the possibility of phase two of our Mining Communities Campaign, which addresses human rights abuses in the remote gold-mining communities of Ghana. Mining operations have for many years caused damage and restricted access to land and property, Pollution and contamination of drinking water, restriction of health-care services and increasing rates of tuberculosis, typhoid and malaria. We have every hope of resuming this project around the busy months of June or July.

Happy Easter to everyone, and I look forward to informing you all of our progress a month from now.

Warm Regards,

Oliver Shepherd

Law and Human Rights Coordinator
Projects Abroad (Ghana)

