

A Weekend to Remember

Issue 11

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The amazing Operation Groundswell team with the HCC family at Wli Falls

This year, thanks to the incredible generosity of Operation Groundswell (OG) and their team of volunteers, our children experienced the trip of a lifetime. Trip leaders Taha Tabish and Misbah Haq organized an amazing excursion, starting with a 24-hour bus ride from Sandema to Wli Falls in the Volta Region.

After taking in views of the lower falls, Taha, Misbah and our older boys climbed to the upper falls to enjoy an extraordinary panoramic view from the top.

Next, the OG team made HCC history by taking the kids across

the border into Togo. With the help of some friendly border guards, the HCC group stepped onto Togo soil for the first time in their lives.

The team took a final detour to Accra, where the kids stood proudly in Independence Square. After a refreshing dip in the Atlantic Ocean, the weary travelers began the long journey back to Sandema.

According to Taha, it was the best weekend of his life. Combining culture, travel, education and adventure, the children of HCC will forever be thankful to Operation Groundswell for this unforgettable journey.

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Fond Memories of Volunteering at HCC



Sara and Kristen strike a pose with HCC kids

Sara DuBreuil and Kristen O'Reilly spent four months volunteering at HCC. Below, they share what this experience meant to them:

It's hard to put into words the emotions we felt upon arriving in Sandema, and even more unexpected how difficult it was to say goodbye. In January 2010, we arrived to Sandema together, excited to start what was sure to

be an incredible adventure yet unsure of what was ahead.

Despite being so far away from home, the people of Sandema and the Horizons Centre could not have made us feel more welcome. Everyone showed an overwhelming willingness to include us in their community, whether it was by showing us where to buy the freshest vegetables, sharing local customs or providing us with a bench in the shade.

We expected to travel and have a new adventure for four months, but we never expected to become part of a new family. The highlight of our time in Sandema revolved around the children of HCC. Through many activities such as a reading program, teaching extra classes and organizing extra-

curricular activities (Field Day, a birthday party for everyone, arts and crafts projects, and bonfires) we got to know each of the children and their individual personalities. To say that each of the children touched our hearts is an understatement. Each day we were amazed by their appreciation for life, their loyalty and love for one another and their openness to sharing their lives with us.

Our decision to volunteer at HCC was inspired by the opportunity to work with and teach the children of HCC. In turn, we realized how much their positive and giving outlook on life taught and inspired us. For that, and all of the memories we shared, our time in Sandema will always be one of the best experiences of our lives.

Each One Teach One

Jeremy Fuller first visited Ghana as a participant in the Operation Groundswell West Africa Discovery Program. A Biology major with a Bachelor of Education degree, Jeremy was keen to share his scientific knowledge with students in the Sandema community. With the help of a do-



Jeremy hanging out with the kids

minated a compound light microscope that he brought with him

to Ghana, Jeremy delighted children in the community with hands-on experiments.

According to Jeremy: "The family at Horizons Children's Centre and the surrounding community members left such an impression on me

that I returned [in June

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Each One Teach One Continued From pg. 2

2011]. During my one-month stay, I worked alongside current teachers and future teachers to build upon and improve the education system in rural Ghanaian communities. More specifically, I led and assisted HCC children in the development of individual science lessons and experiments.

At the end of each week, each student would become the teacher and instruct the science topic to the HCC community and town members. These lessons and experiments not only

increased content knowledge but also improved individual public speaking skills, self-confidence and community relations.”

Thanks to Jeremy’s innovative approach, each of our kids had a chance to become a science ‘specialist’. Jeremy dedicated his time to working with the children one-on-one, helping them to understand their concept well enough to teach it to an audience. We are so grateful to Jeremy for developing our children’s minds and leader-



Awudu explores with a microscope

ship skills at the same time.

Jeremy is currently preparing for his third trip to Ghana in the summer of 2012. We have no doubt that he will be welcomed back to HCC with open arms ...and eager minds!

A Little Knowledge Goes A Long Way



The Berlin Pipes (aka The Perlin Bipes) - Faithful regulars at HCC Trivia Night

Since March 2011, we have been hosting a weekly Trivia Night at Pour Boy Pub, a lively bar located at Christie and Bloor in downtown Toronto (666 Manning Avenue). Teams gather every Monday evening to compete for great prizes and bragging rights as the ultimate trivia champions.

Most importantly, this event is an ongoing fundraiser for HCC. Teams pay \$10 to play, and the management of Pour Boy graciously donates 10% of all food and drink consumed. Alternating weekly hosts Ian De Souza and Sean Wilson set the tone for a jam-packed evening of entertainment. In fact, we were

recently ranked one of the best Trivia Nights in the city by blogto.com.

Louise Stewart, a wonderful HCC volunteer, initially started trivia nights as a way to fundraise for her first trip to Ghana. After covering the cost of her ticket, Louise continued to run the weekly event in order to raise money for our centre. When she finally headed off to Ghana, she handed over to us to keep Trivia Nights in full swing!

Come and join us every Monday at 8 pm for great food and fun while supporting HCC. We guarantee that if you play once, you’ll be back for another round!

Transforming Lives Through Education



Regina is all smiles with an Operation Groundswell volunteer

Each year, HCC reaches needy girls in Sandema through our scholarship program. For girls, the challenges of living in a small rural town are many. In addition to poverty, they shoulder the burden of household chores and are often forced into early mar-

riage. Yet, time and again, studies show that educating girls improves community health, wealth, and safety.

The HCC Scholarship program is currently helping 17 girls in their educational pursuits. According to 2011 scholarship winner Regina Atandek, "I want to use my education to teach other girls in Sandema about the value of education, so that we can all earn greater respect in the eyes of the community."

At 16 years of age, Regina Atandek is mature well beyond her years. After losing both her parents at a young age, Regina and her sister were taken in by their extended family. In order to support herself, Regina worked three jobs: selling food at a local kiosk, selling toffees

in town, and herding sheep and goats for her great uncle. In between these various jobs, she managed to complete her schooling up to the end of junior high school (JSS3). Even more amazingly, she did exceptionally well on her final exams! Regina received an HCC scholarship in September 2011. She can finally put to rest her fears of not being able to go beyond junior high school, since the cost was just too high to bear on her own. Regina is currently attending Bolganga Secondary School, and dreams of becoming a journalist.

It is our hope that through our scholarship program, girls like Regina will not only fulfill their own dreams, but also inspire the next generation of young women in Sandema.

Learning From One Another

In August 2010, the recipients of HCC Girls Scholarship Program gathered at the HCC volunteer house for an afternoon of food, fun and reflection. The girls travelled from various villages to attend the meeting. When the young women got together, they had plenty to share. They told tales of school and dormitory life, and also talked about their

dreams for the future.

These young women were so confident and so articulate. They have clearly established goals and they are putting their whole heart into their studies.

Next year, some of the girls will be embarking on post secondary studies. We



HCC Girls Scholarship winners with Gaby and Joe

will keep you posted about their adventures at university!

My How They Have Grown!

It's hard to believe that twelve years have passed since we took in our first group of children at HCC. Without a doubt, every time we return to Ghana,

we are amazed at how quickly the kids are all growing up. It seems like just yesterday that we welcomed them to our centre and enrolled them in Grade

1 at the local school! This September, Joe prepared 5 of our boys for their start to high school. Below are some 'before and after' pictures:



Left to Right: James (striped shirt), Jonas (yellow t-shirt) and Matthew (white t-shirt)



Left to Right: Bismark, Jonas, Joshua, Matthew and James

The Sandema Resource Centre

The Sandema Resource Centre was set up as a way to generate income for HCC activities. While we continue to search for the most cost-effective and reliable way to establish a viable internet connection at SRC, the computers are definitely being used in other ways.

During Jeanette and Sean's recent visit to HCC, they carried with them 5 laptop computers, an extraordinary gift from an anonymous donor, the same donor who sent 5 computers in May 2011 with the Operation Groundswell West Africa Discovery team.



Sean Wilson surrounded by the HCC kids

puters in textbooks, and never have a chance to put their learning into practice.

With the laptop donations, we can give students and adults in the community an opportunity to develop their skills in technology.



Jeanette is warmly welcomed back to Ghana

The Resource Centre is a place where local community members can stop in to prepare documents, print, scan, photocopy, and most of all, practice their computer skills. For students in Sandema, "Information and Computer Technology" is a mandatory school subject in junior high and secondary school. However, with limited resources at the local schools, many students only learn about com-

Joe Abobtey: An Exemplary Leader



Joe Abobtey manages HCC with great skill

Joe Abobtey has been managing the HCC program since 2004. His work ethic and dedication are simply beyond compare. Whether helping volunteers to settle in, overseeing work at the construction site, or keeping scrupulous records of our finances, Joe can always be counted on to go above and beyond the call of duty.

In a recent phone conversation, we asked Joe to reflect on his achievements over the last year. According to him, "The girls' scholarship program is working very successfully. This year, 4 girls graduated from high school and I feel confident that they will get admission to post-secondary schools for next year". At the centre, Joe noted that the children have also achieved some notable successes in their education. "Matthew and his cohorts per-

formed very well in their exams, and have gone on to secondary schools." With each new student who moves ahead, Joe realizes that "the program is benefitting many people".

When asked about the challenges of managing HCC, Joe recognizes a few key issues. With many more children moving towards secondary school, HCC's yearly education costs will continue to rise. As these students move beyond high school towards col-

"Helping people is the work of God. I cannot be a pastor but one way of serving God is to help my people become independent."

lege or university, "we will need to plan well to ensure that we can meet these needs and help all of our children to attain their goals."

In addition to managing HCC, Joe also supervises staff at the Sandema Resource Centre, a computer centre that provides services and training for the community. According to Joe, "Many students learn ICT as a school subject, but without computers for practice, they are at a disadvan-

tage. The community is proud to use the computers at the resource centre", thanks to the ongoing support of HCC.

Looking ahead, Joe would like to establish a plot of land where the children can plant and harvest their own food. This would not only give them some valuable life skills in farming, but also decrease HCC's reliance on the local market, where prices can fluctuate greatly from season to season.

Ultimately, Joe feels that his work at HCC is more than just a paid job; it is a social responsibility that he takes very seriously. "I am working at HCC to give my time to the children so that one day when I'm not even here, people can say that I was a person who dedicated his life for the benefit of the project. Helping people is the work of God. I cannot be a pastor but one way of serving God is to help my people become independent."



Joe with Christopher, Matthew and Bismark

Wedding Bells for Gaby Commey

This year, we bid a fond farewell to Mr. Gabriel Commey. Gaby has been a dear friend of HCC since 2003, starting out as an after-school tutor and eventually taking on the role of Part-time Education Supervisor.

Born and raised in Accra, Gaby was originally posted to Sandema as a teacher in 2003. To his credit, rather than transferring back to the big city in a hurry, Gaby decided to settle in Sandema, adjusting amazingly well to rural life and even winning an award for his excellence



Nathaniel enjoys Gaby's drumming

in teaching.

During his years at HCC, Gaby worked with our after-school teacher tutors to make sure that our children received the best educational support. Our entire staff counted on him for his wise advice and good cheer.

He recently returned to Accra to get married and start the next chapter of his life with his new wife Lucy. We wish them both all the best and we thank him sincerely for his years of dedicated service to HCC.

New Additions - Richard and Joshua Jr.



Richard and Joshua Jr. bring a sparkle to HCC

Last year, we welcomed two little brothers to our home. And now we could not imagine the centre without them!

After their father passed away, Richard and Joshua Jr.'s mother left them in the care of extended family members and moved away from the village. Shortly afterwards, their rela-

tives reached out to HCC, asking if we could take in the boys.

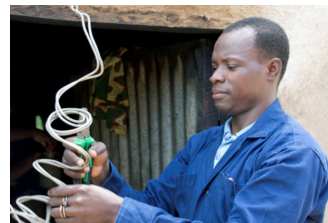
Since settling in, the brothers have become active participants in all aspects of HCC life. They have won over the staff and children with their cheerful dispositions, as you can see from their bright smiles (left).

Hands-On Learning

At HCC, we aim to help each individual at our centre to achieve their potential.

Joseph Ateng joined HCC in 2001. In 2009, he graduated from Tamale Polytechnic. He is currently completing an appren-

ticeship with a local electrician. We have heard rave reviews about Joseph's hard work and skills on the job, and are very proud of his achievements and his commitment to practical learning.



Joseph working his way to independence

Our New Site – A Work in Progress



Only two more course of bricks until roofing level

The construction of our new centre is an ongoing project. Brick by brick, level by level, we are slowly working our way towards a new home for the HCC family.

We need to complete two more courses of bricks before we reach roofing level. Joe Abobtey, our Program Coordinator, has poured his heart and soul

into this project, visiting the site daily and overseeing the construction.

In fact, it is not uncommon to see Joe working alongside the construction workers in the hot sun. In addition, the children at HCC help out when needed, carrying water from the nearby well to the construction site and helping to water the many trees we have planted around

the site's periphery. We know that when our new home is completed, everyone will feel a surge of pride, realizing that all their hard work has finally paid off. For more details on how to contribute to this project, please visit our website.



Our new home is taking shape

Community Partnerships



A happy recipient of a wheelchair bicycle

For some years, we have collaborated with the Sandema Association for People with Disabilities, providing them with support and resources as required. Gilbert Asekabta, the association's founder and president, is a longtime friend of HCC. In

2009, HCC donated several white canes to support visually impaired members of the community.

In 2010, we reached out in a different way. HCC donated 5 wheelchair bicycles to individuals who were previously-immobile due to physical disabilities. The association selected the recipients, who were overjoyed to receive these special bicycles. Each wheelchair bicycle is custom-made to suit the needs of individual recipients. Matthew, the 2010 Chairman of our HCC Children's Council, gave

a truly inspirational speech to members of the association. He received shrill cries and thunderous applause.

During his speech, Matthew commended the members of the association for their courage, adding that all children could learn lessons in determination from them. He praised them as role models for whom he had the highest level of respect.

We are proud of our entire Council for their wisdom, and will continue to teach our children about the value and importance of service to others.

For the Love of Reading

*“The love of learning, the sequestered nooks,
And all the sweet serenity of books.”*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Education has always been the cornerstone of the HCC program. We believe strongly in the power of education to transform the lives of children.

The children at HCC attend a local school called Sandema Preparatory. While it is considered to be one of the better schools in the Upper East region, the school administration continue to face huge barriers as a result of poverty. As just one example, they have been trying to gather resources for a small school library, but have

met a number of challenges along the way.

For some time, while the school continued to receive donations of books, they were housed in a basic room with nowhere to sit. As a result, teachers found it difficult to take their students to the library during the school day.

This year, to express our gratitude to the headmaster and staff for their ongoing educational support, HCC was happy to donate 10 benches for the school library. A local carpenter came to our centre to make the benches by hand.



Andrea Menezes with staff and students at Sandema Preparatory

When they were delivered, the staff and headmaster at the school were deeply grateful.

With this community outreach, we hope that the children at Sandema Preparatory will be able to access the wonderful world of books that so many of us take for granted. We thank all our donors who have made this community outreach possible.

Democracy in Action



The 2011/12 Children's Council

Visitors to HCC never fail to comment on the remarkable confidence of the children at our Centre. Articulate and outspoken, our kids are full of creative ideas. In order to create a more formal forum for their voices to be heard, we established the HCC

Children's Council in July 2010.

To begin, we led the children in a lively brainstorming session to determine the duties and responsibilities of the key council positions. The children then spent one full evening delivering passionate speeches to their peers, all in the hopes of securing votes. With the heavy-duty campaigning completed and votes tallied, the first HCC Council was officially announced.

The Council holds meetings once a week to celebrate the good things that are happening at the centre, and to discuss their concerns. The secretary records the minutes of the meeting, and we touch base with the children by phone on a bi-weekly basis. The Council is a powerful way to teach our children about consensus-building, leadership, responsibility and communication. Now almost two years later, it looks like we may have some budding politicians in the making!

From Determination to Inspiration



David Achuroa at the computer centre

Together with the Presbyterian Community-Based Rehabilitation Program, HCC is proudly supporting David Achuroa in his education. David is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Community Nutrition at the University of Development Studies in Tamale. He first impressed us a humble and hardworking volunteer at the Sandema Resource Centre, and when we learned his life story, we were humbled ourselves.

At the age of 12, David Achuroa's life took a dramatic turn. He officially started school. David suffered from childhood polio, and spent the

first 11 years of life living at home in his village. While his older brother taught him his numbers and the alphabet through song, the local school was just too far away, an impossible distance for a child who could not walk.

With the help of the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program, an excellent NGO in Sandema, David was sent to Accra for an operation to straighten his legs. During his months of rehabilitation, he learned how to balance himself with the help of calipers (leg braces) and crutches. His daily routine also included schooling. Much to the surprise of his teachers, David progressed rapidly within a few short months.

When he returned to his home village in Sandema, David enrolled in Grade 2 at the local school. It did not take long for his teachers to recognize his academic talents, and they encouraged him to skip grades. But David was enjoying every moment of school, and chose to continue his path at his own pace. By the end of junior high school, he had achieved a distinction as the best student in his graduating class. Secondary school brought more distinctions, and David easily gained admission to university in Ta-

male. He had one more challenge ahead: securing funding to cover the high cost of university. When David approached us for assistance, we were more than happy to invest in this talented and determined young man.

One of David's admirable qualities is his sense of social responsibility. In 2010, he volunteered his time to organize extra math and science classes for students in the Sandema community. According to David, "I knew from my own experience that the science and math programs in many of the local schools do not have the resources they need [as compared to schools in the south]. When students go in for their final exams [a standard national exam], it affects them. One of my objectives was to help these young people." In addition to running classes at a local school, David also worked directly with our HCC children, delivering math and science lessons to prepare them for their exams.

When we asked David what advice he could offer to other young people, he spoke about the importance of goals. "If you don't have an aim in life, then determination is a useless entity. But with a clear goal and a sense of determination, you can achieve anything."

Making a Positive Difference

By Andrea Menezes

Each year, we are overwhelmed by the generosity of family and friends who donate clothes and shoes to HCC.

Recognizing how fortunate they are, our children decided that they wanted to share their gifts with needy members of the surrounding villages. While they have very little themselves, their aspiration to serve their community was heartwarming.

One Saturday morning, the centre was bustling with activity. The children each donated items of their own clothing that were still in excellent con-



Matthew working to hand out t-shirts

dition. Together, they organized an assembly line, lathering, soaking, rinsing and hanging to dry all the items. There was so much joy in the

household that morning.

In the afternoon, Matthew, Joshua, and David worked tirelessly to iron little cotton dresses for infants. The love and care that they poured into their work was indescribable. One of my fondest memories was when two four-year-old girls came by and the boys searched for perfect outfits to suit their sizes AND personalities!

The next day, a group of children headed to the village of Sinyensi. The clothes were distributed to extremely needy individuals and the children at HCC really felt that they had made a positive difference in their community. This has become a new HCC tradition.

How You Can Help

- For secure online credit card donations to HCC, please visit www.canadahelps.org. Select "Stanley Francis Foundation" and designate your donation to "Horizons Children's Centre" on the drop-down menu. Visit our website for a direct link to the donation page.

- If you would like to contribute by cheque, please make it payable to Stanley Francis Foundation and write "**Horizons Children's Centre**" on the memo line. The Foundation issues tax receipts

for all donations over \$20. Cheques should be mailed to: Horizons Children's Centre c/o Heather Menezes, 5-3062 Lake Shore Blvd. West, Toronto ON, M8V 4C9

- If your company has an annual **United Way** campaign via payroll deductions, you can direct these funds towards HCC. Designate your donation to the Stanley Francis Foundation on your contribution form, and be sure to include our **Registered Charity # 86964 7347**

RR0001. Receipts are issued by the United Way.

- Organize a fundraiser – visit our website for ideas and further details

- Volunteer with HCC in Sandema...please visit our website for more information about applying to be an HCC volunteer or e-mail jeanette@horizonscentre.org

- For information on donating items to HCC, please e-mail us at info@horizonscentre.org

Closing Remarks

One of the biggest challenges of managing a charity while working full-time is that there never seems to be enough hours in a day! For a very long time now, we have been meaning to publish a newsletter, highlighting our activities, achievements and the many special people who continue to support Horizons. Unfortunately, the demands of working life always seemed to get the better of us.

Now that the newsletter is FINALLY complete, we all agree that it has been very special to sit down and reflect on all the good things happening at HCC. The most obvious signs of progress are in the faces of our children, many of whom have grown into self-assured young men. In the last five years, 9 of our 23 children have started high school. As a result, during certain times of year, the centre has a much 'younger' feel, with the littler members of our family making their presence known. During school breaks, HCC brims with a mix of young and old, as the 'big boys' return with stories of life on residence and the confidence that comes from living away from 'home'.

This year, our first four recipients of HCC girls' scholarships will graduate from high school, and begin exploring options for college and university. We can't wait to find out about their plans, and to help them realize their dreams by continuing to support them.

In October 2011, Jeanette and her fiancé Sean Wilson travelled to Ghana. They took with them 8 (that's right...8!) suitcases, mostly filled with clothes and shoes for the kids, as well as laptop computers. They packed their three weeks in Sandema full of activities, including staff hiring, clothing distribution in the communities, setting up computers at our computer centre, helping to organize elections for the children's council, and countless administrative tasks.

With amazing volunteers like Louise Stewart, Kristen O'Reilly, Sara Du Breuil, Jeremy Fuller and the entire team of Operation Groundswell, our HCC children continue to expand their understanding of the world beyond Sandema. With the incredible support and generosity of donors in Canada and the United States, HCC as a whole is bigger and stronger than ever before.

We hope you enjoy reading all about our program, realizing that every penny we receive is being used to great benefit, and knowing that your contributions are making it all possible!

Thank you.

Heather Menezes
Executive Director



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