

When Dave Banks retired from Sedgemoor School in Lewisham, London, in July 2012, he volunteered to work as an Ashanti Development teacher trainer in Gyeyasi.

He has now produced a documented, piloted programme of professional development, specifically aimed at Ashanti teachers. Starting this autumn, he will teach it to District educational supervisors, providing for them to cascade the training to the teachers for whom they are responsible, who in turn will pass it to their own staff.

The project, which is being promoted with the whole-hearted support of the Sekyere Central education authorities, will involve up to 2,800 primary school teaching staff, 1,200 junior high school staff and teacher training colleges in Sekyere Central, Ejura Sekyedumase, Offinso and Ahago Ano South Districts.

The following article is reproduced from the Times Educational Supplement, 19 July 2012.



THE COCKERELS in the village of Gyetiase have irregular crowing times. Today they start at 2.30am. The church bells get a hammering at 4.30am. A radio comes on at 6am sharp. After six months in the Ashanti village these sounds blend into my dreams. Porridge is served at 6.30am by wonder cook Elizabeth. By 7am I'm walking through the village for my 30-minute ramble across the fields – palms, plantains, cassava, cocoa yams, cashew nuts, oranges – to Bonkrong.

The sky is blue and the morning is a “cool” 20°C. The children, even those being soaped down outside village houses, shout “obruni, obruni” (white man, white man), smiling and waving sheepishly. Older people without exception shout “akwaaba” (welcome) and stop their work to smile and wage. The village market women complete the greeting trilogy, shouting “Hey, obruni, marry me!” accompanied by roars of laughter. My turn to wave sheepishly.



Arriving at the Junior High School – eight staff and 60 children between the ages of 11 and 18 – I'm greeted by the staff with handshakes and smiles. I go through the morning's schedule with Atta, the young head of the school. I'm starting a three-week training programme with observations of four teachers. This morning I'm also working with two of the district supervisors. The aim is to identify and build on good teaching and learning practice. We have agreed to focus particularly on improving pace and engagement, including questioning.

The staff are hardworking and receptive. It is a pleasure to work with them. Tomorrow they will come to the Gyetiase centre for a three-hour training and planning session.

As I move between lessons, two children – the children are also lovely without exception – follow me, one carrying a chair and the other my bag. That's the way things work in Ghana.

Today is market day in nearby Mampong. I need to buy some material for a couple of shirts that Kofi, the village tailor, will make. So after lunch it's a shared taxi into town and back for some good-humoured haggling. The market is big, busy and buzzing. While in Mampong I top up on phone credit and pineapples. I'm usually the only obruni in town, which is still slightly strange and wonderful.

Later, I write up the day's work and prepare materials. I can do this while the electricity is on – it may not be later. I relax on the balcony and watch the sun set and listen to the sounds of the village – mostly people talking and children playing, accompanied by the pounding of cassava being prepared for the evening meal and the bleating of goats. Dinner is groundnut soup with tilapia (a freshwater fish) accompanied by rice balls. Delicious.

The lights do go out and the lanterns come on. I read, practise twi (the local language) and then it's time for bed. In the distance, a roll of thunder heralds the onset of the evening storm and the end of another beautiful day in Gyetiase.



Softwire, who produce high-quality customised software, sponsor the village of Bonkron, near Gyetiase. At present, the villagers are busy constructing household latrines, but Softwire has plans for extremely innovative projects based on their particular expertise. In the meantime, they're busy fund-raising, as described by Jenny Mulholland below.

On 1st June Softwire held its inaugural Charity Saturday. This brilliant idea was dreamt up by one of our directors, Dan, who was one of twenty-five Softwire employees who gave up their Saturday to work for free for charity.



This year we've been raising money for two charities: SCI, who provide cost-effective treatment to eradicate debilitating parasites in the world's poorest countries, and Ashanti Development, through whom we plan to sponsor a village in Ghana, starting by providing household latrines and basic sanitation. So far Softwirians have organised various fund-raising (and morale-raising!) events such as a pub quiz and a comedy night, which have got our charitable fundraising off to a great start.

The great thing about Charity Saturday, however, was that just by doing a normal day's work, we could raise thousands of pounds for charity, because Softwire donates all the money we earned. So no need for 117-mile slogs from Bristol to London, or scary throwing ourselves out of planes; we just spend an extra day doing the jobs that we enjoy, and the charities benefit!

On the day itself everyone turned up bright and early (ok, rolled in at their usual hour...) and got down to business. Our extra day in the office was made much more enjoyable both by Dan, whose role in the process was to buy lunch and generally wait on us hand and foot (although any overly taxing requests incurred an additional fee going to the charities), and Zoe, who kindly kept us well-supplied with pastries and chocolates during the day. Personally, I found Charity Saturday provided extra motivation to be productive – since I was giving up my weekend, then I had better make it worthwhile!

Once we'd done our day's hard work, some of us also went to dinner at the nearby Shaolin Temple restaurant, where the merriment and charitable spirit continued into the evening.

Overall, we raised around £15 000 for Ashanti and SCI – a fantastic result!

The Ashanti Gala Returns to Life

We thought the Ashanti Gala was doomed when Henry Roche retired last year - but not so. Rosie Neave, Head of Ballet Press at the Royal Opera House, has valiantly volunteered to replace him.

The date of the next Gala has just been fixed for Sunday, February 2, 2014, and it will be held as usual at the Britten Theatre, Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BS. (Box Office: 0207 591 4314) Tickets will be on sale by the end of the month, and it's rumoured that Rosie's already persuaded two big stars to take part.

In 2003, when Martha Boadu first asked her friends in London for help, the main thing she wanted was unpolluted water for her village, Gyetiase. After many false starts, trials and tribulations, earlier this year Martha's wish came true.

Antonella Sinopoli of Ashanti Development (Italia) has made a lovely video to commemorate the occasion. She made it in particular for David Williamson, who can't visit Ashanti this year because of ill health. The project only succeeded because of his efforts, supported by the extraordinary generosity of one of our donors.

You can watch Antonella's video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZC4GSYM0mkA&feature=youtu.be>

Volunteer Linda Livni also made a video during her stay in Gyetiase last year. If you've been to Gyetiase, you'll recognise many of the faces on the video.

You can watch 'A Visit to Gyetiase' at:

<http://animoto.com/play/EQdLNC6r9JCwIRd0FONPTw>

A Short Stroll down the Regent Canal

September's sponsored walk, organised by Ashanti Development director Albert Antwi, raised over £2,500 – and that's before any of it was GiftAided. As in several previous years, walkers walked eight miles down the Regent Canal until they reached Limehouse. There they adjourned for liquid refreshment before taking a river boat back to central London.

Judy Keep usually comes on the walk, but this year she couldn't make the date. She decided instead to organise an Alternative Walk around Fleet in Hampshire, and now she's decided to make it an annual event.