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The Future's All Sewn Up

Christiana Sarpong's ambition was always to follow in her elder sister's footsteps and become a seamstress. That would be the first step. From then, she dreamed of becoming a successful fashion designer.

"Unfortunately, when I left school the family had no money to pay for me to go to dressmaking college," she says. "They had already spent their savings on my sister. There was nothing for me except to earn my living collecting firewood."

After she had been selling firewood for a few years, Christiana fell in love. She gave birth to three children before the man abandoned her and at that point, everything became much worse. With little help from anyone, Christiana had to support herself and her children. She isn't particularly large or strong, and firewood is only saleable in the market if presented in large bundles of roughly standard size. The standard load was much too heavy for Christiana, and if she had continued this work for a few more years she would have developed severe pains associated with musculoskeletal compression, which would almost certainly have become crippling in old age.

A couple of years ago, Ashanti Development realised there was no satisfactory occupation for young women like Christiana, so they built a small technical school. At present, it teaches dressmaking, but in time other units may be added for catering and hairdressing. The school is heavily subsidised and charges annual fees of around 30p, which is about the limit the students can bear. The flip side is that if a student doesn't measure up in one way or another – if they

turn up late or their work isn't up to standard – they will soon find themselves replaced.

Right

Christiana at the
Technical College



Ashanti Development's Ghana Director, Nicholas Aboagye, explained that when leaving school young women like Christiana, who weren't particularly academic, were faced with the choice of a rock or a hard place. "Either they could stay at home and help on their parents' farms, or else they could marry and help on their husbands' farm," he says. The technical school offers a much needed third option.

As for Christiana, enrolment in the school means her life has taken a new turn, not least because her mother has agreed to look after the children while Christiana studies. There is plenty of dressmaking work available in Ghana, and as a qualified dressmaker, she can look forward to a secure future.

I would like to send my thanks to everyone at Ashanti Development who helped give me a new life," says Christiana. "I wish Ashanti Development would bring them all to Ghana so that I could thank them in person," she adds.

Volunteers provide a brighter vision for the Ashanti people

By Nigel Davidson BScMCOptom, store director at Specsavers, Sutton-in-Ashfield; the winner of the Multiple Practice of the Year 2015 Optician Award

It's estimated that 670 million people in developing countries need glasses to lead a normal life but have no means of accessing them. And three in four cases of blindness are avoidable.

Back in 2013 a group of optometrists, dispensing opticians and optical assistants from Specsavers stores in the East Midlands embarked on a trip to Gyetiase in the Ashanti Region of Ghana to provide eye examinations and spectacles to the local population. The visit was instigated by Abhijit Roy BSc MCOptom, DCLP, Ashanti Development's UK eyecare ambassador and store director at Specsavers in Hinckley and Lutterworth. A short film of the visit can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KE-IGNKHwpk>

Over 1200 eye examinations were performed, and more than 2500 pairs of spectacles were provided during the week long visit.

Nigel Davidson, one of the optometrists, attended a meeting of the Forget-Me-Not dementia group in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire earlier this year to tell them about the visit.

"I think it fair to say that everyone in the group found the visit an incredible experience and were captivated with the sounds, smells and 'feel' of Ghana," he said. "The smiles of the people, despite obvious hardships, and their positive outlook on life were a great lesson in how to live in the moment and 'go with the flow' in life generally," he added.

Ashanti Development made the seven member team welcome and put them up in the visitors' accommodation above its clinic. The optometrists were amazed to look out at 8am and see some two hundred people already queuing

up to see them. Those that could not be seen the same day were often put up in local homes and seen the following day!

The team managed to bring some 3500 pairs of donated glasses over from the UK, along with assorted optical equipment including trial lenses and trial frames. One of the group's suitcases was accidentally sent on to Nigeria, but luckily it was reunited with its owner after several days.

One interesting point is that because of the humidity in Ghana the lenses used to test eyes can become cloudy after a while, as a fungus grows on their surfaces. This makes it particularly challenging to work out the correct prescription - there is always a need for fresh equipment!

For 2016 we are in the process of gathering volunteers, collecting spectacles and equipment and are looking forward to getting out to the Ashanti area again to provide some further optical care to our Ashanti friends.



Right

Nigel Davidson and Ab Roy

Teak – The Money Tree

If you cut down a teak tree, a replacement trunk will grow in just a few years. There are many wild fires in Ashanti, but if a teak tree burns down to the roots, it will quickly grow again. What's more, teak trees aren't eaten by village goats – they don't like the taste. All this means that teak is a relatively safe and profitable investment. Seedlings cost 10p equivalent each, and bring a return of £10 every ten to fifteen years,

Nicholas Aboagye, Ashanti Development's Ghana director, has supervised the planting of 4,500 teak trees over the last three years. He's not interested in making a profit for himself, but rather in the benefit they bring to the environment.

“Ashanti Development is a volunteers' organisation in the UK, and no-one gets paid for their work,” he says. “With a wife and child to support, I have to work for a salary, but I'm happy to organise the tree planting scheme voluntarily.”

Nicholas works closely with local secondary schools for the project. During the planting season, which stretches from May to July, he gives a seedling to each child who is within three years of finishing at a participating school. The child must erect a little fence around the seedling to protect it from animals, must water it, and will then receive a tiny reward at the end of each school term – perhaps a T-shirt or a pencil. After three years care, the tree will survive on its own and the school will eventually benefit from selling the teak.

The environmental benefits are that trees reduce carbon dioxide in the air; they serve as windbreaks in an area where large buildings can be razed to the ground by sudden storms; and the roots bind the soil and prevent erosion.

“A long queue of children are asking to join the scheme, including primary as well as secondary school children,” says Nicholas. If we had the money, together we could

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easily plant up to 1,000 trees a year and make a big contribution towards fighting climate change.”

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The cost of 1,000 seedlings plus rewards for the children is around £400 a year. If you are interested in preserving the environment, please could you contribute via our website at www.ashantidevelopment.org or by cheque or bank transfer?



Adam's Second Run

Adam Harrison, a local authority councillor for Bloomsbury in central London, ran a half marathon in 2014 to raise money for his two favourite charities.

In mid October 2015, he did the same thing again, but this time Ashanti Development is lucky enough to be the only beneficiary. Adam and a group of friends are planning to raise enough money to sponsor the village of Owam, in

Ashanti. There will be more about it in the next issue.

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If you feel like adding a little to his sponsorship money, he'd be very grateful and so would we. The website is at:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/adamdkharrison>



Leave a Legacy

By Paul Kalinauckas, Ashanti Development's Head of Fundraising

I was surprised to learn recently that over thirty per cent of charitable donations are in the form of a legacy. So I've changed my will to leave a legacy to Ashanti Development.

If you have a will please consider leaving a legacy by speaking to your solicitor. The suggested form of wording is:

"I give to Ashanti Development, RCN:1133517 of 21 Downing Court, Grenville Street, London WC1N 1LX, the sum of £(amount) to be used for its general charitable purposes and I direct that the receipt of the treasurer or duly authorised officer shall be a sufficient discharge to my executors"

And if you haven't made a will, please do so and remember Ashanti Development. Thank you.