Ashanti Scholarship Scheme

A new scholarship scheme was launched in July, created and funded by volunteer Y Bill Kim to enable talented students to continue their education regardless of financial circumstances. The launch was attended by parents, headteachers, village elders, representatives of the department of education, and the twelve winning students.

The presentations were made by the district chief executive, amid great excitement and rejoicing. Receiving his award, student Rexford Osei Issah commented “I am very happy and grateful for receiving this wonderful award ... It will help me in many ways, especially in achieving my goal of becoming a teacher,” he added.

His words were echoed by other students. Issah Rakiya of Beposo Senior High School described how excited and happy she was, as the award would enable her to study to become an economist, and so be able to help her family and community. All the students called blessings on Bill’s head.

Bill Kim has just launched his own website at www.ybillkim.com. Below, he sets out the thinking that led him to setting up the scheme.

Ashanti Development is a volunteer charity, paying no wages or salaries in the UK. It was set up by London-based Ashantis who were concerned at the quality of life of people in their home villages.

Promoting secondary school education through a need-based scholarship programme

By Y. Bill Kim

Thanks to countless volunteers and generous donors, Ashanti Development’s area of operation now has access to resources such as clean water, schooling, sanitation, and farm support. As a scientist, I have previously worked with the charity to improve their science education by distributing compound microscopes, developing experiment-based science curriculum, and developing potential lessons using paper-foldable microscopes and I’ve come to appreciate the hard work that goes into lifting a community – it takes trust, teamwork, and time.

The Price of Learning

The education outlook of many students was still grim due to the need to support their families and the financial burden that comes with attending school. Often, students do not continue their education beyond junior high school. I believe that continued education towards senior secondary school and beyond is a key that enables them to develop technical skills that will eventually lift the community. Therefore it is especially tragic when students are denied an education through
poverty. To address this, we sought to develop a scholarship program dedicated to support needy students who have a desire to further their education but are held back financially.

![Receiving Their Awards](image)

We designed the scholarship to be awarded to students in their final year of junior high school. We identified promising students by evaluating exam scores from the six schools within the region. We assessed their household income to identify candidates who would best benefit from the scholarship and otherwise risked dropping out of senior secondary school due to financial instability. One boy and one girl from each school were chosen and awarded GHC300 for the school year to support their education. Their performance in senior high school will be monitored during the year and we are prepared to support them each year throughout their secondary school tenure.

The Ashanti Development Scholarship program will motivate students to strive for academic excellence. Knowing that financial support is available for them, students will be more inclined to pursue studying without worrying about challenges beyond their control. We hope to create a positive-feedback loop where education is further prioritized and cherished by the villages, inspiring the next generation of motivated students.

### Growing The Scheme

In the near future, we hope this scholarship program will grow to support more students. Next year, a new cohort of JHS students entering senior secondary school will join the program as well as the current cohort of awardees who will be completing their first year of senior high school. It is our hope that providing an educational springboard may inspire them to pursue further post-secondary education. We believe this program is complementary to many other programs run by Ashanti Development, and we look forward to continuing to lift the community to new heights.

### Waiting for Daylight

For two days a month the Ashanti Development eye clinic opens in Gyetiase, our home village. A queue starts to form as early as 3am and, undeterred by the cold, grows steadily as the sun rises. At 8am, Ashanti Development staff count out the first 140 in the queue and tell the rest to go home.

Many of the people who are sent away leave in despair. Some are in tears. They include farmers too blind to distinguish a weed from a cassava plant, children with cataracts or deformities round their eyes, people living on charity since they can no longer contribute to the welfare of the community. Some have walked 50km to join the queue. Most need spectacles, and we wrote in Ashanti News 39 how a team of opticians from Leicestershire SpecSavers stores travels to Gyetiase whenever it can, carrying thousands of pairs of prescription secondhand spectacles to distribute.

The clinic has been closed for many months...
because of corona virus. When we opened it again recently one elderly lady was heard complaining bitterly that she had suffered the cold all night so as to join the queue at 4am, and her only reward was to be told to go home at 8am. Our resident optometrist, Dr Agnes Oppong, took pity on her and told her to wait. She called her in for examination at 8pm, after everyone else had gone home.

**Second Optician**

We decided then to take on a second optician to help Agnes and are immensely grateful to BasAid, a Swiss charity which has funded many of our projects, for helping us over this log-jam by collecting secondhand spectacles. These will be calibrated by students in an Ashanti opticians’ college and will eventually help thousands of people regain a useful life.

The treatment for cataract patients is expensive. When Agnes has collected the names of enough people needing cataract operations, she contacts Dr Peter Osei-Bonsu in Komfo Anoye teaching hospital. He brings a team with him and operates on around thirty people a day. He’s also corrected the terrible disfigurements some people suffer.

Until recently, each time the surgeons visited we had to hire various pieces of equipment which were too expensive to buy. Thanks to the generosity of the Christadelphians, we have now been able to buy most of this equipment and the cost of operations has dropped dramatically. The wait for a cataract operation will now be much shorter.

Nowadays we keep records for all eye patients at the clinic but we haven’t always done so. Our best guess would be that we’ve funded around 1,000 cataract operations and distributed about 10,000 prescription spectacles. With all this help, we’re hoping these numbers will grow fast.

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**The Problem is Poverty**

"All the problems associated with the girl child" were subjects of research commissioned by Ashanti Development and carried out in May and June. Based on interviews with parents and girls, the research generated a report on menstrual hygiene and training, teenage pregnancy, female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage.

The project was led by schoolteacher Philomena Minta, accompanied by representatives of the Ghana Health Service and Department of Education. The team visited nine schools, two of which were close to a large town while the remainder were in remote areas of the district. On average, sixteen parents were present on each occasion.

Life is changing so fast in Ashanti, with the arrival of thousands of migrants from the Sahel or further afield, that what a few years ago we felt we knew and understood about local people is not always still valid. We hoped the information we asked Philomena to obtain would be the start of a longer piece of work which might be of help to the girls concerned.
Child Brides

In one of the newer settler villages, Philomena heard how early marriage and female genital mutilation were practised. The parents said "if you are a girl and yours is not cut, it means you are not clean and no man will ever come near you, not to speak of marrying you. You will not be allowed to play with the other girls and even talk to them."

We were told that some of the girls go for holidays in the Northern Region of Ghana but never come back because their fathers have given them in early marriage. One girl described how her father had put juju into her food to persuade her to marry a man of forty-two. (Juju is a spiritual belief system incorporating objects and spells.) Luckily, the girl's mother didn't support the marriage and persuaded the girl to throw the food away. The father then bought a juju spray for the girl to wear, but she refused, after which the father threw her out of the house. She now lives with her sister.

Philomena explained: "Ashantis don't practice FGM and don't approve of the practice. When some were told about the effects of FGM they warned that if they should find immigrant tribe members in their villages had cut their daughters' clitorises, they would 'deal' with them. Some of the girls stressed how their parents were unable to look after them financially and resorted to encouraging them to sleep with boys and come home with money and provisions. They said they were told that "if not she will not eat.""

The Dangers of Plastic

A small lake stands at the Tadjesa turn-off in the market town of Nsuta. Fringed with reeds and free from crocodiles, the lake is visited each day by Nsuta women who come to collect water for washing, cooking and drinking.

To the town side of the lake are the public lavatories. Until recently, the municipal rubbish dump was also situated there. Rubbish piled on rubbish until it reached, perhaps, the height of a two or three-storey house. The lower part of the dump was used as a lavatory for those who couldn't wait for a cubicle to become vacant at the public lavatories. The top was the home of vultures.

We in Ashanti Development were horrified at this situation and spent months lobbying the District Chief Executive to move the dump. He finally agreed; one day we found to our relief that it over the women in marriage and above all lack of education on the part of both the girls and their parents."

After Everything

"After everything," Philomena concluded, "...most of the problems are caused by poverty, lack of proper communication, lack of attention, lack of training among the girls, the men having the power..."
was being loaded onto flatbed trucks and driven away. We made a point of congratulating him and assuring him we would continue to give our best shot at helping his constituency, and then one of us asked what had happened to the dump, where it had gone.

Thinking it over, we could suggest nothing better he could have done. To dispose of plastic in Ashanti one can bury it or burn it – both profoundly undesirable. There doesn’t seem to be a third option unless one lives near enough to Accra to take it to the only plastics re-cycling plant we know of in Ghana. At least, we told ourselves, the rubbish would no longer be piled up near the lake, polluting everyone’s drinking water.

The plastic problem gets worse every day in Ashanti. Sometimes we drive along country roads without a village in sight and see that the roadside is white with plastic. This includes plastic bags and water bottles, including the triangular bottles that people use to store rainwater-harvested water. Snakes hide beneath the plastic waste and mosquitos lay their eggs in the puddles of water that collect on it. People use plastic to help start cooking fires. It is harmful in many different ways.

Any Suggestions?
If we could set up some sort of plastics recycling operation, the District could arrange for people to collect plastic waste. If a little money were to change hands in the process, it would be helpful to the impoverished population. We have been asking for suggestions on how to do this and so far the best option seems to be to set up our own small, standalone operations to produce some form of building materials, possibly tiles. WasteAid produce toolkits showing how to set up this sort of work wasteaid.org/toolkit

To us, this doesn't sound like a great solution. We wondered if any readers could help.

A Village Path
A Far Away Place
“We took it to some far away place and buried it,” was the response.

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A Latrine Made From Recycled Plastic Bottles

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