

Diana - How our mission saved her.

Dear Friends,

I bring you greetings from Akrampa, and from my family. As always, I want to send my gratitude to you for the continued support: for me and my family, and more importantly, the people of Akrampa. Yes, the people of Akrampa, especially! They are the reason why I write this letter to you each month. To keep you updated on both current and past events of the mission.

I'd like to tell you about Diana Acheampong. She is just one example of the many people who have benefited from direct interventions in their lives from the Ghana mission as a whole, or from a specific individual's help. Our mission is reaching the hearts and minds of the people with the Gospel of Jesus. But it is also touching their 'physical' lives and making them happier and healthier.

One of the beneficiaries is Diana, a young woman who should be married by now - because of her age (24 years old) - but isn't. Diana has a twin sister, Grace, who sadly dropped out of school and gave birth to two children out of wedlock. Diana's story is very different.

Unlike her twin sister, Diana Acheampong is partially blind and has had physical difficulties and poor physical development. She appears in size more like that of a 10 year old child. Her physical disabilities made it hard for her to participate in school, and learning was very difficult for her inside of the 'normal' classroom setting at the Akrampa school.

Years ago when Diana's case was brought to the attention of FLC for the first time, Marcia G. and her sister decided to accept the challenge of helping Diana. Marcia and her sister began with financial support of Diana but wanted to explore the medical options of helping her with her partial blindness. It was finally discovered that Diana's eyesight issues were genetic. Both of Diana's parents and her other siblings have similar disabilities. They have medical issues with their eyes, physical growth and other disabilities. Although, for some reason, it was only her twin sister Grace who did not have any physical problems.

Even though her twin, Grace, dropped out of school, Diana really wanted to receive an education. Anytime she was unable to participate fully in the lesson that was being taught, she would weep and ask to be allowed to participate. It also became obvious that she couldn't benefit from being taught in a normal classroom situation, because she is severely affected by poor brain development along with her partial blindness. We knew something had to change to help this eager, motivated young woman.

This 'child', now 24 years of age, is currently in one of the two specialized Schools for the Blind in Ghana, which are government assisted institutions. We made a decision to have her

enrolled in their program so that she would not become a victim of circumstances or society. We wanted her to take advantage of this government facility which will afford her the opportunity to become independent of others, as much as possible and help her to be able to 'fend for herself.'

This School for the Blind also has boarding house for both girls and boys. So Diana is able to live there while attending school. The youngest of the students is four years of age. Even though Diana is partially blind she is able to move around without any difficulty. Marcia, her sister and I brought Diana to this special school for two reasons: (1) her eyes were failing her and therefore she needed to be trained in certain skills to be able to function in society, and (2) her family is so poor and they are already so negatively affected by their own peculiar situation. It felt like it was an almost hopeless situation.

Without ongoing outside intervention, none of this would have been possible for Diana. It is the Ghana Mission of FLC and its concerned congregational members who have saved this young woman. We thought that if she could get training to acquire skills for personal and family benefit, she would not slide into the poverty that is so familiar with her circumstances. She could also become economically independent and be able to provide for herself and family.

The school that Diana attends is situated some fifty-one miles north of Accra, in a town called Akropong. (The second School for the Blind is in the northern part of the country, almost to the border of our neighbor country of Bourkina Faso, in the town called Wa.) It is one of my responsibilities to drive Diana to and from school/home at times when the school is on break for a holiday or other scheduled vacation. Otherwise, she is happy living at the school. At the school, the students are taught Braille, with which they can use to go into the study of other non-science related programs. We have a few graduates of this school, some of whom have become teachers and even lawyers. The School for the Blind provides primary/elementary education through junior high and senior high school education. When a student excels and passes any tertiary examination, he or she is enrolled under a special program whereby he or she can pursue a career. The school concentrates on providing education that imparts skills to the students to be business oriented, in the making of art works like basketry, pottery, shoemaking, and other similar products that are sold to make a living. Diana is taking basketry and homemaking. Diana's partial (and not complete) blindness should aid in her getting a better education and then be able to adapt to the 'real world' sometime in the future.

Apart from the government sponsorship, organizations and other agencies are encouraged to 'adopt' the School for the Blind to donate to support the children and the teachers. Some of the teachers themselves are graduates of the school who stayed or returned to serve. The current headteacher is a female who is trained as a specialist in handling children with disabilities such as blindness.

The School for the Blind runs on a system like all normal pre-tertiary educational institutions; the teaching time is divided into terms. Each term covers between nine and eleven weeks. There are breaks for the Christmas and Easter seasons, and a long vacation that starts in early June

and ends in September. Depending on the child's aptitude and proficiency, he or she could go through their entire education there - elementary through senior high school - and benefit. Some children have stayed beyond the required number of years due to very low mental capacity, although they are not allowed to stay indefinitely. At some point they are returned to their families. Our hope and prayer is that Diana will excel and when her time at the school is finished, she will be able to care for herself. Please keep Diana and her family in your prayers.

This is just one story of how the Ghana mission, the congregation of FLC and some very special people have been willing to step up and help the children of Akrampa. Please continue to keep our mission village of Akrampa in your prayers! Also, we are a mission that is fully funded by the giving of the congregation. The needs are great and constant. If you are able to give on a monthly basis or just occasionally, every dollar is a wonderful gift! We cannot continue to help people like Diana, and the many other children and adults in Akrampa, without your help. Please pray! And please give financially if the Lord puts it on your heart.

Thank you again and again,

Blessings, Pastor Ben