

Section 1

Project Goal:

The goal of our project for peace was to build a community learning center for youth living in Dominase, Ghana and its surrounding towns. We want the community learning center to house academic growth and collaboration among youth. By utilizing the facility, our hope is that youth will become motivated to continue their education and lead their communities.

Fundraising:

In May 2012, we fundraised at our school to raise money for our project for peace. In addition to the Projects for Peace grant funds, our partner, Nana Adomako Mensah, Proprietor of Peace International School in Dominase, helped finance construction of the community learning center. At the opening ceremony for the community learning center, students from Peace International School participated in skits and dances to raise more money from members in the community. Generous contributions made by our partner in Ghana, Union College community and our families made our project successful.

Project Details:

In our initial proposal, we planned to renovate a classroom at Peace International School for the community learning center. In July, Nana Adomako Mensah, Proprietor of Peace International School discussed developing the community learning center in a separate building near school grounds. Trying to put up a new building instead of renovating a classroom presented some new obstacles.

As a result of deciding to put up a new building for the community learning center, we faced challenges such as budget and time shortages. In order to accommodate greater expenditure for construction of facilities, we constantly revised our budget. Since we received large book donations from the Albany Public Library in New York and classroom supplies donations from students at Union College, we spent less money on purchasing books and classroom supplies. Funds from our partner, Peace International School also helped to fill budget deficits. Our partnership resulted in administrative guidance during construction and assistance with purchases of building materials. Originally, we anticipated working for one week to renovate classroom space, but putting up a new building took four weeks. Despite changes in our timeline, we prioritized discussing use of the community learning center with students at neighboring public and private schools, organizing a meeting for parents to share about the community learning center's purpose and collaborating with teachers to host a higher education and career opportunities seminar for junior high students. Although we encountered budget and time shortages, we believe that the community learning center will be more accessible to its users as a separate building than classroom.

A part of our project that we enjoyed was conducting a higher education and career opportunities seminar for junior high students at Peace International School. The purpose of the seminar was to prompt discussion amongst students about their aspirations for the future. By teaming up with teachers, we formulated questions to guide students about how to choose a career. At the beginning of the seminar, a teacher asked, "Why do you come to school?" A student responded, "Sir, we come to school to become useful members in our society." The student's response about a desire to be a useful member in society echoed the goal of our project for peace. Other students' answers followed and led further discussion about career pathways to consider. Organizing a higher education and career opportunities seminar was rewarding for us because we shared pieces of advice and our personal career aspirations with students.

On August 17, 2012, the chief of Dominase, elders of the community, principals, teachers, students and their families joined us to formally open the community learning center. Elders of the community led the commissioning of the facility and youth performed skits and dances for their families and friends. Radio

anchors and news reporters also joined us to write about our project. From laying the building's foundation to the opening ceremony, it was gratifying to watch the community participate in the project with us. Students were always eager to unload shipments, carry tiles, paint facilities and mix cement. The community and youth's involvement in the project assured future success in motivating youth to continue their education and creating a generation of aspiring leaders – a generation of cheetahs.

Section 2

On our trips to the central market in Kumasi, Ghana, young persons who were our age knocked on our car window begging us to buy air fresheners, phone credit or passport covers. Others hustled to earn one or two cedis carrying heavy loads of goods. Like commodities, young men and women were replaceable, bought to slog away. Our proposal focused on achieving peace by empowering these younger generations with education. When youth read stories, the lessons that they learn, the questions that they pose and the new vocabulary that they acquire cannot be stripped away from them. The knowledge and skills gained by continuing education are irreplaceable.

Before arriving in Ghana, we worried about achieving our project goals. Surprisingly, even before the completion of our project, we saw leaders emerge and members of the community join together. Students helped us clean the community learning center before its opening; while putting books on shelves, students were eager to begin reading. Members of the community suggested using the center for bible study and town meetings. From the beginning, the community's involvement and youth participation ensured our project's sustainability. We smiled, brushing our worries away because the impact of our community learning extended beyond a single town or school; it brought together older and younger people, teachers and their students, parents and their children.

Now, back at Union College, we share the unimaginable ripple effects of our project with our professors and classmates. We believe that to continue progressing towards peace, we must innovate and share our ideas with others. Through this project, we formed new and unique relationships filled with love. Union College and schools in Dominase and its surrounding towns gained a valuable, life long partnership. We deeply miss our new friends and family in Ghana. We hope to return soon, and who knows when we return, the youth with whom we worked will be pursuing their careers and leading their communities in new projects. They will have become cheetahs, running towards their dreams.

“We stand by our proposed idea that equipping youth with knowledge, “can-do” mindsets and leadership skills will secure good jobs, prosperity and well-being.” – Owusu Mensah and Neha Pirwani



Our second day at Peace International School with our new friends!



Ribbon cutting to formally open the community learning center.