

## Davis 100 Projects for Peace--Final Report Summer 2007

### Peace Through Crafts

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This project took place at three schools in Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, West Africa, and at the Bechem School for the Deaf from June 1 to September 14, 2007. My assistant, Rebecca Berman, and I spent the first part of the project in the USA creating a workbook and researching Ghanaian and African beading. I also trained Becca in beading techniques and we ran a sample workshop for a Girl Scout troop.

We landed in Ghana on July 25. During the first weeks in Ghana we met with school headmasters and bought supplies. All the headmasters were very interested in the project and readily gave permission for us to start 'beading clubs.' When we met with the headmaster of the Bechem School for the Deaf he invited us to join him and the school at a local deaf education event in Bechem. The headmaster also invited us to attend a conference in Accra to celebrate fifty years of deaf education in Ghana with the school, which we did.

While Becca was in Ghana we ran our tolerance workshop over three days at the Ashanti Kingdom High School with the additional support of Ghanaian middle school student, Nana Nyarko Afriyie. This workshop allowed us to refine our methods for the other schools.

Location: four Ghanaian schools: 1) Maria Montessori School (15 students, Christian private School); 2) Ashanti Kingdom High School (30 students, Christian private school); 3) T.I. Amass (15 students, Muslim private school); and 4) School for the Deaf, Bechem (30 students, state school, non sectarian).

#### Participants:

- Two recent Smith College graduates: Kirby Capen '07 (Project for Peace Grant recipient) and Rebecca Berman '06, assistant. I asked Becca to join me on the project to help with planning, logistics, and assist in running workshops. She was recently hired by the Nature Conservancy who graciously granted her a four week unpaid leave to work on the project. Also, Becca is deaf and uses American Sign Language, also used at the Bechem School for the Deaf. Becca helped to illustrate our messages of tolerance and overcoming stereotypes by her very capable presence since many Ghanaians believe deafness is accompanied by disabilities.
- One Peace Corps volunteer, Alison Stow, posted at the Bechem School for the Deaf. We met Alison at the Bechem School, recently arrived for her two years to teach visual arts. She is enthusiastic about incorporating our craft and tolerance activities in her curriculum and worked with us becoming familiar both with beading and our intentions.
- One Ghanaian JSS student, Nana Nyarko Afriyie. Nana, 14, is my host sister from when I was an AFS exchange student in Ghana in 2001. She was on break during part of the project and helped us run our first workshop at Ashanti Kingdom High School.

Other Funding: The Davis Peace project provided initial funding and impetus, but many others helped with donations of services, frequent flier miles, and money. Becca donated her time as did Nana in Ghana. My host family put Becca and me up, sparing us the cost of lodging while we were in Kumasi. The Bechem School for the Deaf also provided lodging and transportation when we went to the conference in Accra. Friends and family in the U.S. donated gifts, beading, supplies, and money, including \$10 from a grad student and \$180 from Smith College Hillel, who annually donate money to a graduating senior for a project for peace. As you can see from the complete list of donations included with the budget attached, we were able to get \$6,848.67 of additional value from the original grant.

The scope of work of this project was to work with three schools, becoming four in Ghana, and to offer a fun activity to student to do while having discussions about identity, religion, differences, and similarities.

The goal intended for this project was to foster world peace by teaching tolerance to young people, teaching about differences, understanding, and fostering self-identity. The way I hoped to do this was by

teaching basic beading techniques as a culturally relevant craft activity, providing an entrée to conversations about identity, differences, and tolerance. We introduced computer skills to help maintain connection among participants. Funds expended in Ghana helped the local economy and beading skills should serve the participants in the future.

Achieved Goals: Positive interactions between students: they all learned about tolerance of differences, basic beading techniques and computer skills. In some of the schools computer classes were already available to students, but with insufficient computers. With the grant money I was able to help by buying a computer for each school. Because the computer classes were already in place I focused on the beading clubs because this was a new club.

We were able to talk about economic differences because the beading club was free whereas most school clubs cost money and so poorer students are excluded from these clubs.

Not Achieved: Once in Ghana we found it would not be possible for the students from the different schools to meet each other. Thus, they were not able to work together on projects, but we did create pen-pal programs between the different schools. This was good because it became part of the clubs we formed. They shared a common experience that could start conversations before talking about more serious subjects. I was not able to communicate in time with the one Jewish village in Ghana to incorporate them in the project as I had hoped to.

Implications for Peace: We helped to foster peace by connecting different religious groups, creating a comfortable setting to talk about difference, encouraging and fostering a desire to learn about differences and not to judge, and educating about differences like deafness and different tribes.

I think also that our being in Ghana, being sensitive to local custom and culture, attempting to provide a culturally appropriate activity that all the headmasters welcomed was a constructive gift from America to all the Ghanaians we came in contact with. While simply buying some computers seems minor, it was a major contribution in a country hungry for them and for computer literacy.

Talking about the project at home, we brought a bit of Ghana and its deaf community to Washington, D.C. and all our families and friends through e-mail updates that we sent home during the project. I truly believe in connections, creating families that span continents and cultures, for their power in helping us seek peaceful global solutions as well as peace at home, on whatever continent that is.

Future Prospects for the Project: This project will not end on my leaving Ghana. The headmasters are committed to continuing the clubs for future groups of students in some of the schools and we are also setting up pen pals between deaf students at Bechem and deaf students at a school in Minnesota.

Alison Stow, Peace Cops volunteer, is also committed to continuing the project while she is teaching in Ghana as part of her syllabus. We hope that the students we taught will educate their fellow students through word of mouth and by sharing the skills they have learned.

What I Have Learned: The importance of being flexible when undertaking any plan. Many original plans had to be revised because of realities on the ground. Ghana's severe and continuing power problems led me to spend some of the grant funds on a generator so the computers purchased could operate. The happenstance of a Peace Corps volunteer stationed at the Bechem School allowed the project to be much more sustainable with her help. I also learned about the importance of flexibility in teaching, getting feedback from the students and my assistants to refine the exercises. Careful planning gave us a good foundation, but then we had to be flexible in refining the plan to adapt to actual conditions.

As always in Ghana, I learned how essential and important the kindness of strangers, friends, and family is. Kindnesses ranged from small children willing to help us in the market for a morning to my Ghanaian family's hospitality, to my friend Becca's taking a month to work on this project.

I learned a lot about budgeting, how to keep track of money, and the importance of flexibility in budgeting. In the course of the project I found I needed things that I had not anticipated needing, like the American Sign Language dictionaries that became gifts to each school.

