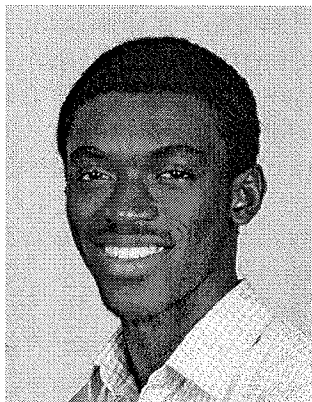


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Wartburg students get Davis grant to fight high Ghana maternal mortality rate

Wartburg College students have received a \$10,000 Davis Projects for Peace grant to implement an innovative plan to reduce maternal mortality in Ghana.



Kwabena Owusu-Amoah '15 from Ghana and Anne Epley Birtwistle '15 from Mason City will represent a team of 11 Wartburg students and graduates who created a project that includes construction of a health clinic and development of a software application to help monitor health during pregnancy.

According to the United Nations, women in sub-Saharan Africa have a 1-in-16 chance of dying during pregnancy and childbirth compared to a 1-in-4,000 ratio in developed countries. In Ghana, the maternal mortality rate is 340 deaths per 100,000 live births and is most pronounced in rural areas.



Philanthropist Kathryn Wasserman Davis founded Davis Projects for Peace in 2007 to celebrate her 100th birthday. Davis, who died in 2013, committed \$1 million annually to fund 100 grass-roots efforts by college students. Wartburg students have received a grant every year since the program's inception.

Amoah, a biology and economics major whose British mother has worked with the World Health Organization in Ghana and elsewhere, said the government has tried mobile health centers in rural areas "but after a week, they'd be out."

The Wartburg students will use the grant to build a two-room clinic in rural Oyibi on land donated by village rulers. A Ghanaian architect with a recent doctoral degree from the University of Michigan will supervise construction. The Ghana Health Service has agreed to provide a community health worker. The Charisbel Health Service (the health charity arm of the Pentecostal Church in Ghana) is partially subsidizing an ultrasound machine. Amoah's father is a Pentecostal minister.

The software application would take advantage of a high penetration of flip-phone usage, as well as some smartphones.

"The irony is that even though the people in these rural areas don't have access to health care, clean water or proper sanitation, they all have cell phones," Amoah said.

"We developed an application called Obaa 2.0, which in local Ghanaian parlance means 'honorable woman,'" he added. "When a community health officer visits a woman at the clinic or in their home, they would take the basic information about their pregnancy and health history — all the vital information a doctor needs to know — and put it into the app. The app would organize the details, which would be presented to doctors in urban areas.

"So the doctors on the other end would examine the woman electronically — based on the data and photos — and then send recommendations back to the community health officer, bridging the gap between women in the rural areas and doctors in the cities."

Epley Birtwistle, a biology and Spanish major who has participated on medical missions and volunteered at health centers since she was 13, said cultural issues must be overcome.

“An example is a belief that forbids expectant mothers from attending formal health facilities,” she said. “Instead, local midwives, who are lacking in formal training, assist during childbirth. Our plan involves incorporating community health outreach programs that take quality healthcare to the doorsteps of those requiring it and will involve sensitizing and educating women and the community on the importance of maternal care.”

They will implement the project between early June and mid-July.

The other students involved are:

- Madison Stumbo '15, Boone
- Ryan Shields '15, Iowa City
- Olaniyi Omiwale '15, Nigeria
- Morgan Sederburg '14, West Des Moines
- Sibusiso Kunene '14, Swaziland
- Kofi Manteaw '15, Johnston
- Nobert Kimario '17, Tanzania
- Yuk Teng Chan '14 (midyear graduate), Tanzania
- Shalom Nwaokolo '12, Nigeria

Dr. Jennifer McBride, assistant professor of religion and project adviser, applauded the students for “doing such sophisticated and meaningful work in the world. I am honored to have participated in this project as their adviser.”