

Dear **fhn** supporters and friends,

June 2007

I have recently returned from Ghana after two weeks at the project and am pleased to enclose an update of our activities:

fhn began in 2001 and we took over the Ghana project in 2003 from Mrs Huttel of Germany. As the older supporters will know, we inherited a destitute project with no staff, no equipment and a crumbling building. To make matters worse, large sums of Mrs Huttel's funds had been stolen by a particular church and there was a feeling of anger in the communities towards the crumbling institution since locals had been deprived of health care and other services that would have been provided to them if monies had not been misappropriated. This was the mountain we had to start climbing in 2003.



From spending many months in Ghana in 2003 and subsequent trips, there have been many times when I wanted to throw the towel in. Government corruption, staff issues, community motivation, combining running a charity and the pressures and time constraints of normal working life to name but a few. So every trip to Ghana fills me with mixed emotions. A lot of work goes in year round and you become very emotionally involved in running a project such as this - hence the dread of real difficulties and complications when you visit. However, every trip strengthens friendships and ties in the country and most importantly you see the community projects grow from the bottom-up.

Little ones on their way to market to sell a bird

2006 was a particularly important year for **fhn** in Ghana since a 'big push' was started on the next phase of our community development programme. We had a stable number of Health Centre staff, started recruiting volunteer doctors again and wanted to really make a sustained impact into community health. The satisfaction of this trip is tangible as everything is now starting to come together.

The effort we have put into recruiting and training local people to fill staff shortages and engaging communities to enable them to act together to sustain the project is now working well. Development and sustainability are words that are often bounded around; these are the concepts we are striving for and why building a work environment and work ethic like we have in Ghana is so important. We are very careful to make sure that **fhn's** primary role is that of a facilitator and an educator to the communities. This is much more difficult and time-consuming than the 'verticalness' and quick-fix approach which achieves quicker short-term results but is not based on forming longer-term partnerships with communities. Most importantly the communities know what they have to do and the efforts required and at the same time understand that we will honour our commitments to them.

Health Centre and Staff

We have had a full complement of local staff throughout the year. It was therefore time to recruit volunteer doctors again to augment, not replace, the Ghanaian service we were offering. Sophie Kuhn, a GP from London has just returned from working at the Health Centre and she has been wonderful!

Her brief was essentially two fold: to act as quality control and educator to all Health Centre staff members and to start taking healthcare out into the communities on medical brigades. She has achieved far more than this due to her hard work and enthusiasm, and to no small measure by the wonderful company of Kacie Mutscheller from California. Kacie started to email me over two years



Sophie and Kacie enjoying Avocado season



ago - she was unsure whether a life as a midwife was her calling and wanted to undertake an apprenticeship before committing to a University degree.

I thought she was nuts.... Can you imagine, a young lady from California hounding me to go and study midwifery in the African bush with our steely 'Ma' the midwife, instead of enjoying the comforts of home and spending some time in a local hospital? I eventually conceded to her requests and I am very glad I did. She is a revelation; an experienced African traveler, fluent in the local language (Twi), a social butterfly in the village, a champion footballer and a great support for Sophie in her demanding role.

These two were an absolute joy to be with and added so much to the trip. There are few things that fill me with so much contentment as the happiness and engagement in the project of committed volunteers. To see like-minded people gaining invaluable experience and interacting with the local communities, thousands of miles away from home, is bloody marvelous!

Medical Outreach

With the health volunteer structure in place (a man and a woman from every community that meets once a week at the clinic for education, discussion, communal labour etc), and Sophie's hard graft, **fhn** has been able to take health into the communities. Most weeks, in place of the usual health volunteer meetings and communal labour at the Health Centre, Sophie and the health volunteers have been holding clinics in the various communities. Sophie has offered an outpatient service to everyone and has screened for potentially treatable 'non communicable' diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure etc. Seeing up to 100 patients back to back in intense heat and strange environment, Sophie has done a wonderful job.

Community Volunteers

These people are the key to the sustainability and development of the project.

With the establishment of our health programme and the enthusiasm and drive from the health volunteers, **fhn** is finally able to work more holistically and tackle all the needs of the communities. In the last year we have been building up to take some key decisions in the project direction. We want to expand our community development.



Sophie has helped enormously in the logistics and motivation in this group of people by securing a donation of bicycles (see picture at left). These greatly facilitate their inter-community movement. They are also a real status symbol for the volunteers and act as a reward for their hard work.

Some inspiring words from the local chief also helped a great deal in demonstrating that the communities themselves have a real opportunity at improving the health of their communities.

The community volunteers have also been involved in the demarcation of the Health Centre land. We have around 10 acres of prime farming land, which was donated to us by the paramount chief, when he gave the land for the clinic to be built on. It has always been **fhn's** desire to utilise this incredible resource to put money straight back into the clinic. Building up the health project has taken priority and we did not have the structure or personnel in place for this undertaking. However, we are ready now and will be assembling a farming 'team' to investigate the economic viability of this scheme. This economic input would greatly assist the project's running costs and add to its longevity.



Government and Politics

I was treated to a real surprise as I left the project for the last time to travel to Accra and fly home. Sophie and I had wanted to meet the regional Health Minister. Why? Our ethos is sustainability and therefore engaging local government support should be crucial. They should provide staff and pay their salaries, provide certain free services, low cost medicines etc. During every trip, I meet local government representatives - the faces change but the party line is always the same; lots of “Yes’s” but no further action. I do feel it is essential, even if it is only for **fhn**’s piece of mind that we keep this avenue open.

To my surprise, as I was walking along the little track away from the clinic, a 4x4 arrived and out stepped the regional health team! News of our services had traveled far and after years of asking for help they visited the clinic for the first time to admire what we have achieved! Anyway, they made some positive comments and we will see what results from this visit.

A huge thank you also to everyone who came along to our annual fundraising party in March – we raised over £2000 for the health centre which was an unbelievable effort and will help to expand all our activities there.



Our midwife ‘Ma’ and her assistant

Finally, and most importantly, congratulations from **fhn** worldwide to Nick Trueman and Vicki Bone on their recent engagement.... Everyone who knows these two, loves them dearly, and wishes them every happiness.

Thanks for reading and for your continued support.

Ed and the **fhn** UK team (Nick, Paul & Sally)

