

A Short History of the Founding of New Horizon Special School



Helen, my first-born had encephalitis (brain injury) at the age of 22 months, after a smallpox vaccination, a high temperature and a series of convulsions. At age 7 in 1963, she was sent to a special school * in England as there were no facilities in Ghana at the time to help children like Helen to develop. After 4 years in England, she made very little progress both medically and educationally; so in December, 1967, my husband of blessed memory and I decided to bring her home where we would try to help her as best as we could.

At home in Ghana, Helen had private individual lessons from an American lady friend of mine – Mrs. Frances McNulty. The outcome within a short time was very encouraging, Helen was able to read and write simple sentences. This achievement gave me a sense of Hope and I realized that with a special type of education, patience, dedication and love, children like Helen can be helped to develop into happy and productive members of our society.

After a while, Helen refused to have the private lessons anymore and was always crying that she wanted to go to school like she did in England. My friend, Frances and I realized that Helen wanted a classroom situation where she would be with other children.

To make Helen happy, I decided to find other parents whose children needed special educational program so that we could contribute to hire a teacher to teach our children. The urge that I was getting at this time was, so that through your daughter Helen, other children like her might benefit. I was very concerned and troubled, for I did not understand what those words meant. I spoke to my friend Frances and she invited me to an American Women’s Association meeting and after I had told them of my intention, five ladies volunteered to come and help if only I could find the children. It took me quite a while before I was able to locate two mothers, Mrs. Florence Cofie and Mrs. Helena Bannerman whose children had returned from special



schools in England also. I invited them to join me in my campaign to start a day school for our special children. I organised a meeting for the mothers to meet the volunteers, and after few meetings, we were convinced that there was a need for a Day School for the handicapped children who live with their parents at home. Then on 10th January, 1972, the school finally commenced in my house on my verandah with the first three students; - Helen Francois, Zarmel Cofie and Clement Bannerman. Mrs Lucie Roane from the American Women's Association was our first full time volunteer teacher. The mother and the other volunteers assisted in teaching the children.

The First School

When the number of children grew to six, Mrs. # gave us a room in her school of Arts at Osu free of charge. With more children coming, the school was again offered *free of charge, the use of the old church at Christ the King school for four years. Our first hired teacher, Mrs. Adams of blessed memory left after one year because we could not pay him GH300.00 per month. After him, we were lucky to have Mrs. Cathy **, a dedicated Christian volunteer who is a special educationist for three years. She laid a good foundation for the school. As the number of children continue to grow, we realized there was an urgent need for a permanent school building. From the beginning, it was a mothers' affair. We invited the men to join us form the New Horizon School Association, which would look into the possibility of finding a plot of land to build a permanent school. The Association was registered as an Incorporate Company Limited by Guarantee in July 1972 and the first Board of Governors were formed. Some of the Aims of the Association are: -

1. To provide educational facilities for the educable mentally handicapped
2. To promote a better understanding by the general public of the nature of mental retardation, the needs and problems of its victims.
3. To gain support from Ghanaian Society of professionals, businessmen and all its citizens who truly believe there is hope for the mentally handicapped.
4. To promote the formation of Parents Group.
5. To solicit and receive funds for the accomplishment of these aims and goals. The School was registered with the Ministry of Education on 13th July, 1973 and Incorporated under the Laws of Ghana as a voluntary, non-profit making, non-racial and non-sectarian institution with the broad aim of helping mentally handicapped children and their families.



By the end of 1973, it became apparent that the premises at Christ the King School was inadequate as the number increased and more students were on the waiting list. This present site, an old stone quarry was leased from Lands Department with the help of Mr. Edward Francois of blessed memory, a Board member, fundraising activities were organised by parents and volunteers. Special thanks go to Mr. A. Kassadjan, who gave us the first bid donation of C20, 000.00, Mr. Frank Hammond who donated the drawings, Topp Construction who built at a considerable discount and Union Carbide of Ghana Ltd who donated C35.000.00. Other donations came from friends and well wishes and we thank them all for their generous donations and support. The school which moved to this present premises in 1977 is administered by a Board of Governors, the School Management Committee assisted by dedicated teachers and volunteers.

Sheltered Workshops

The second stage of our development is the establishment of the sheltered workshops. In 1986, when I was in Holland I appealed to the Wilde Ganzen Foundation for assistance to build a sheltered workshop for our mature students who were not being accepted in jobs. Nobody will employ them. Together with some of the parents, the school tried to integrate them into various work places but they always came back to New Horizon Special School where they are loved and cared for. They complained that the people outside the school did not accept and socialize with them.

The response from Wilde Ganzen Foundation was favourable. Fundraising activities were started. Donations from individuals and organizations like the Wilde Ganzen Foundation in Holland, Valco Trust Fund, The British High Commission, Interbeton* of Holland, Foundation Helop Ghana of Holland, International Women's Club, British Women's Association, Chez Julie Fashions, Lodge of Research, Shell Ghana Ltd, Mobil Oil Ghana Ltd, British Airways, Pasico Ghana Ltd, Canadian High Commission and many, many more gave generously towards the workshops.

Here, I would like to commend the Architect, Ms Sylvia Francois and African Concrete Products, the Contractors who built the Workshops for good work done. We thank them all very sincerely. The workshops were commissioned in November, 1992. Some of the students who do good work receive allowances at the end of each term. One of them is employed full time by the school.

The school shop attracts a lot of customers from the public as the items are of high quality.



Since then, we have had donations and support from many friends of the school, some of them are Piusoord Help Ghana in Holland, Afromedia Ghana Ltd, Achimota, Golf Club, theHari family in Ghana, Merchant Bank, Central Gospel Church Choir. We are very grateful and thank all our benefactors.

To conclude, New Horizon School has grown from an idea into a successful enterprise today. This success has been for the most part made possible because of the generous donations and support from individual, friends and organisations. We would never have made it this far without the support from our devoted teachers and volunteers for their love, care and dedication for our special children. These volunteers and teachers who come faithfully day after day. Working tirelessly at tasks that tomorrow will have to be repeated all over again and successes are infinitely small. To these volunteers and teachers, I can only quote what our Lord Jesus Christ said in the scriptures: “*In as much as you have done it unto one of these my children, you have done it unto me*”.

I remember at this time, my dear friend Mrs. Frances McNulty who is now back to the United States of America encouraged me and helped me to start the school. If she were here today, I would have shared this place of honour with her. She had always been an inspiration to me.

Words cannot express our gratitude to you all who have left jobs and other commitments to be with us today. Thank you all for your support which had brought us this far, and will no doubt take us further in the year to come.

There is Hope for the mentally handicapped.

Thank you and God bless.

Salome Francois

Early Challenges

Teachers were afraid of our children because of the disabilities that some of our children have. They thought they will have children like them even elderly people, will not accept to teach our children. Parents even hid their children with special needs because of the stigma attached to having such children.



First Board Members

Dr. Carl Reindorf – Chairman

Late Mr. Kwame Sam Essah

Mr. Edward Francois

Mrs. Frances McNulty

Mrs. Florence Cofie

Mrs. Helena Bannerman

Mr. Ezekiel Quarminacofie

Mr. Henry Bannerman

Mr. Herbert Ayikwei-Bulley

Late Mr. William McNulty

Mrs. Salome Francois – Secretary

Present Board Members

Mr. Edward Francois – Chairman

Dr. Frankie Djobanor

Mrs. Helena Bannerman

Mrs. Ellen Essilfie

Mrs. Florence Cofie

Mr. Robert Essilfie

Mrs. Alexandra Amoako – Mensah Mrs.

Salome Francois – Secretary

Silver Jubilee Planning Committee

1. Col. Allotey
2. Mrs. F*
3. Mrs. W* Brew
4. Mrs. Francois
5. Mrs. Abban
6. Mrs. Adjavon

Past Educational Directors

Late Mr. Adams –