



Newsletter

February 2017



Student Showcase 10:00 a.m. March 29 at St. Andrew Church in NE Portland

Yo Ghana! will be holding another Student Showcase on Wednesday, March 29, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the St. Andrew gymnasium, just South of the church at 806 NE Alberta Street in Portland.

Students from many of our twenty-five Pacific Northwest schools will be presenting their work, including life stories and photography and identity projects from the English Language Development program at Reynolds High School. We shall also be awarding prizes to top letter writers and presenting some of the finest work from our Ghana partner schools.

Yo Ghana! board member Dr. Yves Labissiere and project coordinator Ibrahim Ibrahim, a Leader in Action of the World Affairs Council of Oregon, will share their experiences of immigration and success in the U.S.

Admission is free. Donations toward our very first book: *Yo Ghana! Transformations*, featuring work from some of our 2,500 students, are of course always welcome.

Third Annual Yo Ghana! Celebration 2:00 p.m. May 20 at IRCO in NE Portland

We are again celebrating our Annual Celebration at Africa House in the big hall at 10301 NE Glisan Street, Saturday, May 20, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Come enjoy Madam Todo's fine West African dishes, music and dance from the Obo Addy Legacy Project, outstanding student letters and life stories, and hear from this year's six Yo Ghana! Star Award winners.

Tickets are discounted if purchased ahead of time. Contact yoghana.org@gmail.com for details, or if you or your family need reduced-cost or free tickets. As before, we invite event sponsors at the \$100, \$250, \$500, and \$1,000 levels.



Letters on Life Challenges

We ask our 2,500 students to write each other about a challenge that they or someone they interviewed overcame. Here are excerpts from three.



Nasiata Interviewing Mr. Essieh

[Mr. Pascal Essieh, who eventually became a prominent educator] said his mother, . . . could only afford exercise books and therefore he had to beg for pamphlets from friends to study.

He ended . . . by saying that life is not easy and it is not about who you are but what you can do in life for yourself and for your country. The road to success is not straight, you may meet many mountains, bridges, walk on gravel, and even fall into mud, but you have to stand firm and pray to overcome challenges.

From letter by Nasiata Allah-Kabo, St. Ann's Girls S.H.S. to Riona of St. Mary's Academy

My parents also suffer before they can get something to feed us, because my father is a teacher and at the same time a farmer, and my mother is a trader and she sells water. So they will do some of this before they will get something to feed us. Sometimes, we help them in the farm. So this is the challenge my parents go through so we have to help them. This is why I want to learn hard to be a better person in the future, so that I can also feed my parents like how they suffered for me.

From letter by Attah Anastacia, St. Kizito School to Howry of Neil Armstrong Middle School

When my Mom was a little girl her mother passed away and she was moved to a foster home. She was abused and treated very poorly so she switched homes. My Mom had to switch homes many times after that as well. . . . At fifteen years old my Mom was living by herself, working, and going to school.

Eventually she had to work multiple jobs in order to support herself. Because she had to work so much, school wasn't a possibility any more. My Mom is my inspiration when I'm dealing with things that are difficult for me. As I read your wonderful letter, I began to think, you are very far away from where I am. Our cultures are probably different for the most part, but you and I share a similar way of thinking. You're insightful and believe that children are a gift from God as I do. I think that's wonderful.

From letter by Jason Rebstock, Columbia River H.S. to Agnes of Dannaks S.H.S.

Life Stories



A few of our schools are doing more extensive projects and exchanges. Some students at St. Andrew Nativity School are interviewing elders about their life stories. Here is part of Lexi Leonard-Graham's account of her well-known grandmother's life. The project took ten weeks of steady work.

Carolyn Leonard's Life Story

By Lexi Leonard-Graham

Carolyn M. Leonard was born on November 20, 1994 in Portland, Oregon. . . . she is the oldest out of all five kids including herself. Carolyn has said that the best part of her childhood was playing and learning with her siblings and cousins.

Carolyn was born to Grace Ruth (Searice) and Kelly Miller Probasco. Both Carolyn's parents were born and raised in Portland. After and before Carolyn was born, her mom worked a job like middle class people. Grace worked at a hospital cafeteria. She also did daycare for her grandchildren. That was way after Carolyn had kids, of course. Kelley worked at a dairy. He also owned his own gas station. "Be disciplined, be honest, work hard, and treat people fair" is something Carolyn said her parents passed down as traditions to her and her siblings.

After graduating from college, Carolyn became a teacher. She became both a middle school teacher and a high school teacher for a couple of years. She later became the Assistant Supervisor of ESL, or English as a Second Language, for a couple of months. She was soon the director of state and federal programs. While doing these jobs, she moved from place to place for many years. Her last stop in her journey was to be a supervisor of thirteen principals in the Portland Public School District. After almost ten years of being there, she has retired at the age of sixty-eight.

School to Ms. Leonard was very important because her dream was to become a teacher. In grade school, kids would tease her for being smart and being a black young woman. But nothing was wrong with that in her eyes, so she set out for her dream in college. Along the way she met some obstacles but overcame them. She also had some people who believed in her like Dr. Little, Dr. Hilliard, Dr. Nicholas, and Ben Leonard. These people influenced her to become what she is today. Carolyn learned hard work really pays off and anyone can make a change. Ms. Leonard wanted to accomplish something in life.

"Influencing future teachers by teaching them how to work with people of different cultures" is one of her accomplishments she is most proud of. After college, Carolyn joined an organization that helped rename [a street after Dr. King]. She later became the chair of this committee. In fact she was the person who took down the Union Street sign and put up the MLK Jr. Boulevard sign on May 20, 1994.

Other News

New Partner: Teach for Ghana

Yo Ghana! is thrilled to be working with several Teach for Ghana schools. This is the first year that Teach for Ghana—one of forty-three national organizations making up the world-wide Teach for All movement—has placed its teachers in schools in Ghana. Thirty-three teachers were selected from more than 1,200 registered applicants. Starting with rural schools in under-resourced communities in the Volta Region, TFG is investing in student-focused education and high standards in pursuit of delivering an excellent education to some of the nation's most disadvantaged children.



Research Shows Yo Ghana! Exchanges Decrease Stereotyping of Africa

Two of our most gifted volunteers who also happen to be pre-med students, Sarah Florig and Theresa Nguyen, digitized and analyzed two sets of student questionnaires from three schools and some one hundred students. Among their findings: after completing Yo Ghana! letter exchanges U.S. students are much less likely to associate Africa with wild animals and safaris.

PSU Honors College Course at Yo Ghana! Partner School

Yo Ghana President Dr. David del Mar will be teaching a Portland State University Honors College seminar starting in April: Self, Service, and the Meaning of Life in a Diverse and Turbulent World. The PSU students will help recent immigrants at Reynolds High School to write life stories of their elders.

Yo Ghana! facilitates letter and other exchanges between schools in Ghana and the Pacific Northwest and offers modest grants to projects initiated by Ghana Schools.

Yo Ghana! is a 501(c)3 public charity recognized by the IRS.
Your contributions are tax deductible.

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