



# Newsletter

November 2015



## **In Memoriam: Mr. Brando Akoto**

It is hard to know where to begin or to end in speaking of the life of our dear brother, friend, and Yo Ghana! board member, Mr. Brando Akoto, who passed away October 28 in Vancouver, Washington after a long struggle with a rare form of cancer, at home with his wife, Lilly, and two sons, Seyram and Mawuto, the family he loved so deeply and fiercely. There are so many stories, so many memories. Brando made a deep mark on hundreds if not thousands of people and the life of Yo Ghana!

Brando taught us that although there may be a million and one things to worry about in running a nonprofit or one's life, only one thing really matters: to love and attend to the person in front of you. Whether he was talking to students in Ghana or Oregon, listening to the challenges faced by teachers, administrators, street vendors, or one of his countless friends, no one could doubt that he or she had his complete attention. He insisted that Yo Ghana! was not about money, statistics, or charity but about relationships. If we cared about and for each other, everything else would work itself out.

There are so many ways to spend a life, particularly here in the U.S., countless hobbies or pastimes, no end of distractions to keep us preoccupied until the end of a day—or all of our days. Brando illustrated that we are at our happiest, our best, when we elect to care for each other every chance that we get, that our numbered hours are best shared.

We are relieved that he is free from the terrible suffering that he suffered from over the past year. But his absence is as deep a wound as his life was a blessing. Thank you, dear friend, for lighting the way.

Yo Ghana! will be working with Brando's family and Akalove School to honor him by helping their students, and our annual celebration dinner in May will bear his name.

Brando inspired thousands of Ghana students during our 2014 trip. To see this compelling speaker in action, go to the [Resources section of our website](#).



## Selected Testimonials from the Yo Ghana! Community (Edited for brevity)

Lucy Dawu, Yo Ghana! Coordinator in Ghana

I am sooo sad about Brando's untimely demise that I didn't know how to express my mood since last Friday when I read the news. My deepest condolences to his wife and sons and the board of Yo Ghana!

Jane Carlton, North Marion Middle School Teacher

He was an inspirational and remarkable man.

Madam Regina, Headmistress of Angel's Academy

This is a very sad news and has left a big hole in our heart.

Albert Amoako, Morle JHS Teacher

We are at loss for words during this sorrowful time. . . . Someone special can never be forgotten.

Father Mawusi, Headmaster of St. Kizito School, Kpandai

Our heart is with you all for the loss of this great contributor to Yo-Ghana. May his soul rest in perfect peace. We shall soon organize a service of prayer for him.

Mr. Seth Sarpong, Awisa Presbyterian School Teacher

We have really lost a colleague, friend, father and above all a great mentor. . . .May your soul rest in perfect peace. Yo Ghana will always remember you. Damerifa due!!!!

Nantogma Alhassan, Savelugu Senior High School Teacher

What a great loss! May his soul rest in peace.

Joshua Hurina, Head of ECG School, Tamale

We are sorry to hear that Mr. Brando has left us and gone to The Lord. His testimony has inspired us a lot.

Alhassan Wunpini, JHS Student ECG School, Tamale

[We students] were told the sad and heartbreaking news that our dear Mr. Brando has passed on. No one could believe it, some even began to weep. Just so soon dear Mr. Brando you left us. We were looking forward to seeing you again, but what is done is done and cannot be undone. On behalf of the school we wish you a safe journey to your maker. With the wind in our hair and the sun in our eyes, we cherished our friendship as life's greatest prize. . . . Goodbye and Rest in peace Mr. Brando.



Lucy and Brando



Brando at ECG School, Tamale

## Thank You and Welcome

Our board is saying farewell to one of its first members, Ms. Leeann Bronson. Leeann joined our board more than two years ago, before we became a 501(c)3, and immediately began serving as our Treasurer, a crucial position that is notoriously difficult to fill. She never missed a meeting or a deadline and despite knowing little about Ghana or letter exchanges or development when she began, quickly became a rock. Thank you, Leeann, for steering us so capably through our first years!



We are most fortunate that Mr. Komi Kalevor stepped forward to join our board and become our Treasurer as Leeann decided to step down. Komi moved to the U.S. from Ghana in the early 1980s and earned an MBA at Willamette University. He has worked for many years in a variety of management positions in housing development finance, program management, and banking, including many years with the Portland Development Commission. He is currently the Assistant Director of the Housing Authority of Washington County. He has served on the boards of Portland Habitat for Humanity Metro West, the Portland Guadalajara Sister City Association, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, the PSU Alumni Association, and the Ghana Association of Oregon.



Komi joined us “to do my part to help Yo Ghana! achieve its mission, which I am in full agreement with,” for “meaningful cultural exchanges can go a long way to break down barriers and serve to educate today's youth to become 'citizens of the world.'”

Komi and his wife, Judith, reside in Vancouver, Washington. Son Selali, is a senior at Washington State University, Pullman, daughter Shika a sophomore at Seattle University.

## Our Board Members in Ghana

If you ever feel that life is too hectic, ponder the “to do” lists of Dr. Eric Ananga, Lecturer and Researcher at the University of Education, Winneba, or Dr. Eric Williams, Director of the Aya Centre for Intercultural Awareness and Development in East Legon. And remember that they are often confronted with power outages, poor internet service, and epic traffic jams.

Eric’s responsibilities include: consulting for four Ghanaian or UK organizations on literacy, secondary education, and tertiary education; lead researcher for the British Council on graduate employability and skills development in Ghana; supporting the Ghana Education Service and the Ghana Ministry of Education in educational monitoring, evaluation, and planning. His innumerable research projects include assessing the impact of letter writing on Yo Ghana! students, and he also teaches and supervises students in research methods.

Michael regularly works twelve-hour days overseeing a large staff for an organization that serves hundreds of visiting college students a year while also researching, writing, and publishing. He recently spent two weeks in China coordinating an international education

program for a group of Texas Southern University graduate students and was appointed interim Academic Director of Webster University's Ghana Campus. Many evenings find him presiding at Chez Afrique, his wife Afua's, fine restaurant.

### **Ms. Elizabeth Fosler-Jones on September 2015 Trip**

Yo Ghana! co-founders Elizabeth Fosler-Jones and David Peterson del Mar spent September visiting our Ghana schools, usually in the company of Lucy Dawu, our talented and unsinkable Ghana coordinator. Here are Elizabeth's reflections.

*After four weeks here, I think I can finally say that everything Yo Ghana! does is becoming real for me. The schools I'd only seen pictures of are actual buildings now and the students are becoming laughing, optimistic, curious people I've met and Ghana manifests itself into a dusty, welcoming, kind place. It's rad. I've also realized, even more so than before, that my part in this organization truly is incomparable to the blood, sweat, and tears teachers, headmasters and headmistresses, coordinators, proprietors, and students put in. Our organization is all volunteer based and those who are a part of it participate willingly and enthusiastically. I mean, the people that we work with are incredible. These teachers and proprietors do the impossible every day: they have to deal with a lack of resources and parents who can't pay school fees and inadequate buildings and students that are unable to see their bright future. And yet, every day, they do the impossible thing because it's all they know and there is no option. It's just what's done and it's inspiring.*

Elizabeth's video of the trip is in the [Resources section of our website](#).



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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