

Build for Ghana

Close-out Report

March 2024

We would like to express our gratitude for the support that ICO has extended to our Build for Ghana initiative for the past decade! Your dedication and tireless efforts have been instrumental in helping us achieve our fundraising goals and in making a meaningful impact in the lives of many Ghanaians.

The contributions of ICO's volunteers and Project Leads have been invaluable. Your passion and commitment serve as a driving force behind the success of our initiative. Through your shared experiences, we have been able to gather the information and resources necessary to make significant strides towards improving infrastructure and enriching lives in Ghana.

We are grateful for the generosity, kindness, and compassion shown by each member of the ICO team. As we move to wrap up our project, we carry with us a great appreciation for the support you have provided. Thank you once again for your unwavering commitment to making a difference in the world.

Project History

The Build for Ghana initiative with Innovative Communities began in 2014; although, the project was conceived years earlier in 1990 in response to the generous hospitality received from Ghanaians by a young Canadian architectural student, Jennifer Corson. While working on her architectural thesis in Kumasi, Ghana and studying at the Dalhousie University School of Architecture in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Jennifer created a strong bond with the family of Dean of Architecture, Professor Andrew Laryea in Kumasi.

Jennifer and her husband Keith Robertson travelled to Ghana in January 2015 with their children Clay, aged 13, and Lil, aged 9, and spent three months living in the village of Abetenim, population 600. Roughly \$40,000 was raised for the initial build which was a 3,000 sq. ft. library and community centre in the village in the Ashanti Region. Korkor's Library would be named in honour of Dean Laryea's daughter who had originally inspired the entire family adventure to Ghana. The work was locally supported and coordinated by community leader and teacher, Frank Appiah-Kubi, who became the ICO Site Lead for the entire duration of the Build for Ghana initiative. The library was designed and project-managed by Jennifer Corson and Keith Robertson, the two principals of Solterre, a Halifax-based architectural firm. It was built by local labour, mostly young men, who were reintroduced to the traditional and durable rammed earth method of construction.

As a bonus to the project, a new soccer pitch was built as the library displaced the existing muddy, rutted, and sloping field. Over the course of those three months, Keith, Jennifer,

Clay, and Lil (who attended the local school) formed deep bonds with the community, including many friendships that endure to this day. As the library neared completion, it became clear this new building had a multitude of uses, serving as a continuing education, adult learning, and homework centre; a medical clinic; general gathering place; and community centre. There was nothing remotely like it anywhere in the neighbouring villages or even in the larger towns and cities like Ejitsu, Juaben, and even Kumasi, a city of 3.5 million.

The following year, Keith, Jennifer and family returned with fellow architect and friend John Crace. Over two months they completed additional work on the library, building a public composting latrine, and celebrated its official opening in a ceremony attended by Korkor herself, now a young married woman with children of her own. Additional composting latrines were built for the local elementary school, near the library. Jennifer organized a local sewing cooperative to employ young women in the village. Keith and John also built several rocket stoves to demonstrate their efficiency.

The same group returned in 2017, together with solar specialist Alex Ross, to add an off-grid solar and storage system to the library, freeing it from the intermittent and expensive grid power that had only recently reached the village. A water well was cleaned out and returned to working order, adjacent to a former unfinished medical clinic, decaying in the jungle, which was also renovated for a teacher's residence. A rammed earth composting latrine was built for this residence. Several students were identified for educational funding to attend high school and college.

One more trip was made in 2018 before the pandemic suspended travel. This time, Keith, Jennifer and John were hosted by Frank Appiah-Kubi and his wife Christie, along with their two young children, at their home in Kwaso, a nearby town. Keith and John led science classes at the local junior high school, focusing on basic concepts of electricity and setting up a solar-powered battery lending organization. Jennifer distributed "Days for Girls" hygiene kits and visited the nearby village of Korase, where a progressive chief was interested in having a well repaired in the village and setting up a battery charging and lending station. Our list of sponsored students continued to grow, and Canadian sponsors were found to support their aspirations for higher education. Several young people with special medical issues were supported with more Canadian-sourced funding as the relationships grew well beyond the original design and construction of buildings and infrastructure.

Initiative Purpose

The original objective for the Ghana initiative was the opportunity for Jennifer Corson and Keith Robertson to return to Ghana with their children to continue their previous architectural experiences, namely traditional rammed earth construction. With the connection to Frank Appiah-Kubi's community workshops in earth architecture, and his support for his community of Abetenim, the Build for Ghana team was created to support Frank's work with the school in Abetenim. In collaboration with a local non-profit, NKA, a library/community centre was designed and built in the village of roughly 600 people in the Ashanti region of southern Ghana. This initiative then expanded in scope over several years to design and construct

other village infrastructure, stimulate local employment, support students in their aspirations for higher educational achievement, and fund medical expenses for young people suffering from serious and sometimes life-threatening illnesses.

Purpose for Closure

While the original mission to build the library/community centre has been completed, the work has continued during the COVID years, and physical absence from the project sites, with more focus on educational and medical priorities. No further building projects are anticipated and no further trips to Ghana are planned. The team will continue to raise funds on a limited basis to support these other initiatives but has chosen to withdraw from the ICO framework as it winds down its operations.

Initiative Achievements

1. Design and construction of Korkor's Library, a 3,000 sq. ft. solar-powered rammed earth building in Abetenim, Ghana, that also serves as a community centre, continuing education hub, and medical clinic.
2. Construction of a new soccer pitch in Abetenim.
3. Design and construction of several rammed earth multi-station gender-segregated composting public latrines.
4. Installation of hand wash stations.
5. Construction of a drilled community well in Abetenim and in the village of Korose.
6. Rehabilitation of a decaying building in Abetenim as a teacher's residence, accommodating 10 people.
7. Restoration and painting of an abandoned building to establish a women's sewing cooperative, including purchasing sewing machines and associated materials.
8. Construction and demonstration of high-efficiency rocket stoves.
9. Construction and demonstration of a 'tippy tap' hand washing station and funding for the construction of five more.
10. Contribution of funds to build the roof on a children's canteen at a rural school.
11. Establishment of a solar-powered portable battery/light swap community enterprise.
12. Educational instruction on basic electrical circuitry.

13. “Days for Girls” distribution of feminine hygiene kits with educational support.
14. Sponsorship of students to achieve high school and in some cases vocational and college-level education.
15. Funding support for youth with challenging medical issues and serious illnesses.

Details of Project

Start Date: July 2014

End Date: March 2024

Total funds raised, including in-kind donations: CAN \$169,467.









