

Village Volunteers has a newsletter...finally!

Welcome to the first issue of The Village Volunteers Quarterly. Through this e-newsletter, we hope to keep alumni volunteers, future volunteers, and supporters of VV up-to-date on the latest happenings of the organization and all our partners across the globe. If you have any ideas, comments or contributions to the newsletter we are always looking for stories. Feel free to email devon@villagevolunteers.org.

New Exciting Projects

Dzidefo Women's Cooperative & Sustainable Bebe

In January 2008, Peta Hall, a volunteer from Canada, helped Village Volunteers establish a textile cooperative called the Dzidefo Women's Cooperative. (Dzidefo means "there is hope".) Based in Kpando Village in the Volta region of Ghana, the cooperative consists of 5 hard-working women who use locally designed and printed, traditional Ghanaian fabric to create toddler clothing and home accessories.

Originally from Zimbabwe, Peta reached a point in her life that she felt she needed to "give back to Africa in a concrete way." Within five weeks of being in Ghana, Peta had organized the five seamstresses that make up the co-op. "Their set hours were 10 am to 3 pm but they voluntarily arrived at 8.30 and left at 4.30!"

I wanted them to learn business skills as well, so they are able to keep records, open a bank account, run meetings, record minutes, and keep the books. They were such a joy to work with, hardworking, happy, interactive, and determined. I feel very inspired by them. They are tremendous women." The women work out of the Ryvanz-Mia Orphanage and have been developing the "knowledge and skills needed to produce work for the export market" Peta says.

From Ghana to Seattle, another volunteer, Nora Laughlin has created an online business to help support the Dzidefo Women's Cooperative. A single mom and student at University of Washington, Bothell, Nora was originally involved with Village Volunteers to raise money to fund a ceramic water project run by a women's pottery collective for the community of Kiminini, Kenya. "I gradually became introduced to many different ways in which VV is helping the world's poor" and "the emphasis placed on the empowerment of women was especially close to my heart."

After being inspired by the Dzidefo co-op, Nora created a business called Sustainable Bebe. The mission is simple, "Ethical. Affordable. Beautiful." The online clothing store is "committed to carrying ethically produced high quality fashion for babies, and children and accessories for the home" says Nora.



Peta and the Dzidefo Women's Coop

Message from Executive Director

Shana Greene

Hello all!

Welcome to our first e-newsletter. It has been our long-time goal to share our successes and keep our VV community updated on the progress of programs. I want to thank Devon de Leña, 2007 Kenya alum, for stepping forward to be our E-Newsletter Editor.

There have been wonderful new programs added, improvements and exciting developments on existing programs, and many new projects. If you haven't been on our website in a while, we update it weekly so be sure to visit us at www.villagevolunteers.org.

As many of you know, this year has been very difficult for our Kenyan partners, and therefore for Village Volunteers. Through the post election riots, our good friends in Kenya have been faced with destruction and rapid inflation. To compensate for the lack of funds generated by the Volunteer Program, VV and alumni have worked hard to raise funds to continue supporting the social needs of our partner communities. I want to extend a heart-felt thanks to those of you who donated your time, energy, and funds in support of our friends in Kenya.

Fortunately we are able to send volunteers to Kenya again, and we are thrilled that many alumni are returning to Kenya to volunteer and visit old friends. Our village partners in Kenya are anxious for volunteers, so we encourage you to consider returning or help us spread the word about volunteer opportunities to your friends and community. We have a VV flier that you can download from our home page.

While the events in Kenya resulted in difficult times here in our Seattle headquarters, the friendships that we have made over the years have proved to be vital to the organization. Not only is Devon working in the office and developing her Youth Outreach Mentors (YOM) program (see the story below), but we have also been joined by Kristin Ericson, 2007 Kenya alum, and Kate Harris, a University of Washington student. The time these women have donated to VV has been invaluable and they have been a joy to have in the office.

If you would like to share your ideas or talk about programs, feel free to give me a call or send me a note by email – I would love to hear from you.

Best wishes,
Shana

Stay Involved!

Here at Village Volunteers we are striving to keep our community of passionate volunteers in contact with each other.

Here are some ideas for staying in touch:

- Join our Facebook Group
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?>
- Read the VV Blog and Forum
www.villagevolunteersforum.blogspot.com/ &
www.villagevolunteers.blogspot.com
- Check the website periodically - we are ALWAYS adding new projects
www.villagevolunteers.org
- Spread the word about VV to your friends!

More New Exciting Projects

Youth Outreach Mentors

Youth Outreach Mentors (YOM) is a project founded by volunteer alum Devon de Leña. YOM aims to empower, inspire, and educate youth on HIV/AIDS prevention as well as promote healthy lifestyle practices for HIV positive people.



While volunteering with Namunyak Maasai Welfare, Mama Maria Kenya, and Mama na Dada Africa in 2007, Devon facilitated girls' empowerment workshops with six different schools. She says that "most of the kids were begging for information on their bodies, sex and AIDS...and I was shocked by the myths and misinformation the kids had about their health."

The mission and purpose of this project is to create teams of Kenyan youth and educate them on HIV/AIDS, health education and gender equality so that they may be outreach mentors in their own communities.

Devon, along with in-country coordinator Daniel Rateng (formally of Mama na Dada Africa) composed a 30-page HIV/AIDS education manual, with activities for Village Volunteers trainers. "The idea is that any village volunteer interested in working with youth or in HIV education, can have this manual in-hand to use to create new outreach teams...and hopefully the knowledge will ripple outwards" says Devon.

Caroline Cardosi, a 2007 Kenya alum, is the first trainer and will be returning to Kenya in August 2008. Caroline will be there for five months and will create 10 new YOM groups.

For more information on this project:
www.youthoutreachmentors.com

New Exciting Projects Cont.

Dzidefo Women's Coop: continued from pg 1

Nora's commitment towards these five women "is strong" and her goal "by the end of the first year is to make one large order every month so that the women can achieve an adequate and sustainable income... Being able to provide a good life for one's family is the goal of most parents, I know because it is something that I think about daily. Being able to achieve this goal is empowering and fulfilling, and can aid in ending the cycle of poverty."



Nora and her daughter

The first major shipment of the D.W.C.'s merchandise will be arriving in August and "that is when the real work for me begins" says Nora. At some point Sustainable Bebe plans to reinvest some of its profits back into VV's community partners in Ghana. Nora would especially like to provide more assistance to the children of the Ryvanz-Mia Orphanage, the base from which the co-op operates.

For more information on both sides of this project, check out their websites:

www.SustainableBebe.com

www.villagevolunteers.org/country-ghana/dzidefo/home.php

Pictures from the Villages



A young boy in Kpando Village, Ghana.

Volunteer Kelly Brown hanging out with the kids at Ryvanz-Mia Orphanage in Ghana.



Volunteer Celene Montgomery at Ho Farms Project in Akoefe Village, Ghana.



Volunteer Brad Jamieson playing games with the kids at Missahoe Charity Home in Ghana.



*Have any photos you would like to share?
Send them to Shana at shana@villagevolunteers.org.*