

June 2010

14,000 books steam to Africa

The first shipment of nearly 14,000 books has left the docks in a container headed for Ghana thanks to Janice McElroy, a volunteer with WomensTrust, Inc (WT) of Wilmot, N.H., and Stephen Mecca, Professor at Providence College and the University of Ghana, co-creators of the Ghana Project. McElroy, Henniker N.H. Rotary Club District Governor 2011-2012, is a very active volunteer with WT and became aware of the need for books after going to Ghana herself with WomensTrust Inc.

Ghanaian students can hardly afford textbooks while schools here in the United States routinely throw out slightly tattered or outdated ones. As a result, the Ghana Project was born. Ghana, a small African country about the size of Oregon, is a stable democracy with people who are hard-working, hopeful and struggling to emerge from poverty. Education in Ghana has traditionally been focused on male children. Families often can't bear the costs of uniforms and books for all their children, and girls are often kept at home or leave school early to help with the cooking and caring for their younger siblings. Today, only about half of all girls enrolled in school make it past the eighth grade. Literacy rates in Ghana are 49.8 percent for females, and 66.4 percent for males (according to the CIA World Factbook).

WT is trying to make a difference in the Ghanaian village of Pokuase. It started out by offering a unique peer lending program to village women in 2003 and has continued to expand its focus beyond bottom-up micro finance to include health and education for both women and girls. Its program embraces the philosophy that if you educate a girl you educate an entire family. WT has developed a successful model for empowering women that is in demand by other villages nearby and internationally. Among its MANY successes are the recent funding and construction of a badly needed addition to the local school and the near doubling - from 64 to 128 this year - of the number of girls in its Keep Girls In School Scholarship Program. WomensTrust founder Dana Dakin comments, "investing in women and girls is now clearly validated as the place to start when creating long-term change; Africa is considered the place to focus, and it's a critical time to be there."

Of the 14,000 books in the 4,000 sq. ft. container expected to arrive in three or four weeks, 803 have been assigned to the Pokuase Library and 852 to the Nii Otto Kwame School in Pokuase. To find out more information about WomensTrust Inc. and how you can help, please visit WT's website at www.womenstrust.org.

