

## THE IMPACT OF AFAFANTO SCHOLARSHIP IN NORTHERN GHANA

"Afafanto," a word in the native Ghana Language Twi, "Afafanto" in twi means a butterfly. Our Non-governmental Organization (NGO) was named Afafanto or Leah's Dream Scholarship foundation in honor of its namesake, Leah Horowitz, who was focused on promoting the idea of women empowerment. Leah, a young lady in her twenties, had the passion and compassion to seek to solve or reduce the problems of the world in her own little ways. Leah was likened to a butterfly emerging from her cocoon and hence was referred to as Afafanto in Twi.

Leah struggled to find her identity and position in the world, hoping to accomplish all she intended to achieve. Leah once said she did not fear death, but that dying would sadden her only if she was not able to do that for which she had a passion. Unfortunately, Leah at twenty-nine years old passed away in an accident on the Cape Coast road of Ghana. The early departure of Leah thwarted the accomplishment of her mission to Ghana.

To carry on Leah's legacy of compassion and spirit of giving, the Afafanto or Leah's Dream Scholarship was founded in her honor in Northern Ghana. The NGO was founded to administer a scholarship fund that began in 2011 in the northern region community of Larabanga; Larabanga is now considered part of the Savannah region of Ghana. The NGO sponsors brilliant but needy female students through the course of their Senior High School (SHS) education. The SHS scholarship covers the payment of school fees, provision of books, and some additional material support to enable the girls to study in comfort.

The NGO hopes that these young girls will acquire through their SHS education the knowledge and skills needed to enable them to empower and improve the lives of the women and children in their home communities. For the past twelve years, the lives of many young women have been transformed through this educational support from the Afafanto scholarship program. The Afafanto scholarship program has supported fifty seven successful SHS graduates, who are excelling in a variety of fields, while improving the lives of many in their communities. Graduates from the Afafanto Scholarship program have established careers in nursing, teaching, security services, and many other fields; some graduates

are attending well-known tertiary institutions in Ghana and it is hoped they will join the community development process soon.

Aside from sponsoring girls in SHS, the Afafanto NGO also supports young women in gaining skills training, including shea butter production, soap making, beads, and local necklace making. This skill training is considered significant to the organization because empowerment of women cannot be met only through formal education, but also through enhanced development of the community economy.

Another achievement of the Afafanto NGO is its efforts to keep its beneficiaries in touch with each other despite their disparate geographical and educational locations. The NGO organizes occasional gatherings for all its beneficiaries including both



alumni and students, providing excellent mentors for the participants. These gatherings provide a forum for mentorship, sharing of ideas, and socialization among the participants. Additionally, the Afafanto Scholarship Program initiated a “girls club” program in 2020, in which Junior high school girls

in some communities in northern Ghana participate. The aim of this initiative is to guide and encourage young girls as they work towards preparing for their Senior High School education. Afafanto NGO offers the girls club participants tuition-free lessons taught by experienced teachers and appropriate learning materials, resulting in greater motivation on the part of the girls to work toward achieving their educational goals. These girls are given the preparation necessary to help them excel in their Senior

High School entrance examinations.

Further, this club is used as a tool to trigger the girls’ interest in serious studies and hard work. These girls are motivated to study hard because they are already enjoying the benefits of the sponsorship program and they are assured of being considered for SHS scholarships, assuming that they meet the requirements of their SHS entrance examinations. The Afafanto Girls Club encourages hard work by

these girls, bringing out the best in them, and helping them to discover and build upon their various talents. It is hoped that these experiences encourage them to become great leaders in the future.

Despite all these achievements, the NGO still wishes to expand the reach of the scholarship in such areas as sponsoring tertiary education. However, the available resources are limited, so the NGO is unable to support such expansion at this time. The Afafanto NGO would be delighted to find resources to aid in the expansion of the scholarship program, allowing our organization to empower many more females to contribute to social development in the future.

In conclusion, the Afafanto or Leah's Dream Scholarship has done a great job in the empowerment and transformation of the lives of Ghanaian young females in the past twelve years. Its impact can be seen through such metrics as the reduction of teenage pregnancy in northern Ghana, a decrease in the female illiteracy rate, lower rates of female school drop outs, increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in northern Ghana, and enhanced development in the communities in which this program operates.

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