



The AACT family in Accra, Ghana. © AACT

Giving a Voice to Autism in Ghana

Meet Serwah Quaynor, the Founder and Executive Director of Autism Awareness Caring and Training (AACT). In 1998 she decided to return to Ghana from the United States, where she was married and lived for 30 years, and was inspired by her young son to start a centre to help children and families affected by autism in Ghana. According to Serway, “sometimes it takes what seems to be a misfortune to show us the real blessings in our lives.”

When Serway’s son, Nortey, was sixteen years old she struggled to cope with his behaviours (self-injurious, aggression, insomnia et.) and a lack of her own sleep. She asked herself, “What was I to do in a country where there were no services for children with autism? I felt like an outcast, dejected, alone and petrified!” Not finding immediate support Serway began speaking to others about her son and autism and soon found another mother and daughter struggling to cope as well. Thus began her awareness campaign and the families support group. “Autism did exist in Ghana and I was finding it.”

After engaging a special education teacher (Mr. Mawusi), Nortey and other affected children were able to receive training and AACT was formally launched in 1998 in the back of Serway’s home. Fifteen years on, AACT works out of a house in Kokomlemlé and currently operate with close to 40 children, ranging from pre-schoolers to young adults.

In Ghana having a child with autism is viewed by most as a curse on the family, or worse still the mother can be

labelled a witch; and mother and child are shunned by society, according to Serway. Many people are not seeking the necessary help that they need; instead they are hiding these children at home, locking them up in their rooms, and denying them their basic human rights.

AACT’s training focuses on behaviour management, functional academics, music and art therapy, speech and occupational therapy and life skills training. Through partnerships with international volunteers, AACT has been able to access speech/language and occupational therapy resources that are not currently available in Ghana. Additionally, a partnership with Awaawaa2, which specialises in communication disorders, has facilitated the training of classroom support staff.

Explaining AACT’s success Serway said, “It has been 15 years since we began and we have travelled down some difficult paths, but still, we are doing our best to help as many children with autism as we can. What began with only two children has mushroomed into about 400 children walking through our doors.”

She continued, “Our dream is to see a society that is more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of persons with autism. It is time to AACT Now!”

AACT is a recognized leader in autism care in Ghana and has received international and national awards. For more information please visit AACT’s website <http://www.aact.org.gh/>