

Ruralite

LOST RIVER

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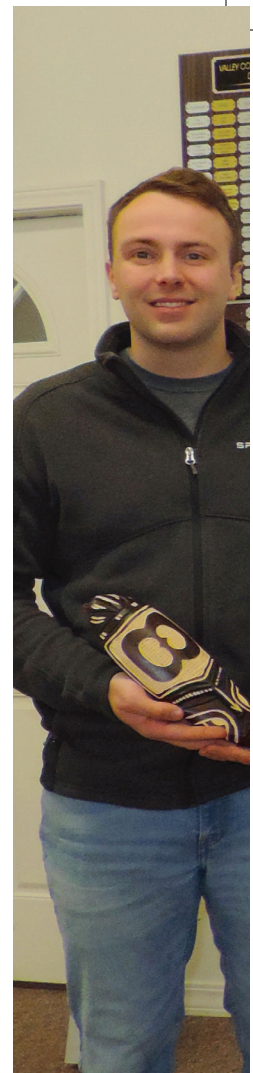
From One to Another

Generosity of readers
and residents makes
feminine hygiene kits for
Ghana a reality **Page 4**

Cindy Gregory was among
50 seamstresses who
transformed donations of
flannel and snaps into
feminine hygiene kits for
teens in Ghana. PHOTO BY
DIANNA TROYER



Teens in Ghana show their gratitude for receiving feminine hygiene kits. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BIRD FAMILY



From One to Another

Generosity of Ruralite readers and Lost River Valley residents reaches all the way to Africa

By Dianna Troyer

Although he was in Africa, Paul Ekpale could see in real-time the generosity of Lost River Valley residents in late January.

Via an iPad, he was introduced to seamstresses at the Moore Community Center who volunteered for a day to make feminine hygiene kits for teens in his native country of Ghana.

“Thank you for your support,” he said repeatedly to volunteers as his friend Lewis Bird carried the iPad throughout the center.

Sewing machines thrummed and

conversation hummed as about 50 volunteers made hundreds of washable, reusable feminine pads. They will be delivered this summer as a project of the Bird family’s nonprofit Ghana Make a Change Foundation. Paul will coordinate distribution of the kits at schools in the capital of Accra and northern towns.

“He sets up transportation and appointments at schools,” says Ginger, Lewis’ wife. “We give talks explaining how to use the hygiene kits.”

Several years ago, Paul met Lewis and Ginger when he was assigned with their son, Keyan, to Las Vegas to serve a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After their service ended, Paul returned to Ghana and kept in touch with the family.

As the Birds, who live in Moore, learned more about Ghana, they felt compelled to

start the foundation in 2017 “to help the citizens of Ghana improve their lives by providing them the resources to become self-reliant.”

One of those resources is attending school.

“Without these pads, the girls stay home for a week from school every month,” Ginger says. “This makes them get behind with schoolwork, become frustrated and eventually just quit school. Our goal is to help make things easier for the girls so they can stay in school.”

Last year, when Ginger started the project, she and her daughters made 120 kits.

“The girls in Ghana were thrilled to get them,” Ginger says. “This year, our goal is to make 1,000.”

The increased number of pads was made possible due to the volunteers and volume of donations. Matt Nelson, who owns Dragon Fly Tarps in Arco, donated



ABOVE: Cindy Gregory, of Mackay, sews a kit. **LEFT:** Keyan, Ginger and Lewis Bird show some of the hygiene kits bound for Ghana and wood carvings made by African artisans. PHOTOS BY DIANNA TROYER

waterproof fabric. Donations of flannel and cotton came from Lost River Valley residents and Ruralite readers.

Kindness of Strangers

As volunteers sewed, Ginger talked about the generosity and planning that made the event possible.

When they heard the news, neighbors and church members donated material. Ginger's friend, J.C. Stevenson, suggested asking the tarp store owner for scraps of waterproof material.

"He not only donated but also offered to cut 1,000 pieces with his machine," Ginger says. "Not having to cut everything by hand was such a huge help."

Another friend, Beverly Beach, suggested submitting a request for supplies on the "Reader Exchange" page in Ruralite.

"I wondered if anyone would even read such a tiny paragraph of a few sentences asking for flannel, waterproof fabric and snaps," Ginger says.

She didn't have to wait long for an answer. After the December issue was published, packages kept being delivered to

her from California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and Alaska.

"We had such a great response," Ginger says. "Along with snaps, someone even sent a machine to attach them to the fabric. Others sent underwear, which is needed too. Some donated money. The tremendous generosity of strangers along with people in the valley was amazing and humbling. We're so grateful."

Many Missions

The pads are one of several projects the foundation coordinates to help provide the resources Ghanaians need to become economically self-reliant.

Other projects include:

- The Orville and Elaine Benson School, established in 2022, has a finished exterior. It still needs plumbing, electricity, a kitchen and bathroom appliances. Lewis says they plan to bring in students who show aptitude for leadership and scholastic and technical achievement, offer them room and board, and teach them their chosen skillset and other life skills.
- Foundation volunteers have provided

wells to seven small villages. In the hot climate, some components of the drills wear quickly, and regular maintenance must be performed to keep the wells producing.

- Honey is a prized commodity, so beekeeping will be taught in villages near agricultural areas. A well-established Ghanaian group, Bees for Development, will train villagers on beekeeping and honey production.
- Chicken production for eggs and meat is being taught at the school as chicken is a major component of residents' diet.
- To provide relief from common ailments, free medical clinics are offered during semiannual trips.

Lewis says for each project and education at the school, financial and physical assistance is available.

"For instance, after a student has learned egg production, he or she may be loaned a sum to purchase the materials for an initial chicken coop and egg-gathering equipment," he says.

"This loan will be repaid over a course of time appropriate for them to start to become more self-reliant and meet their own needs as well as that of their family. By using these principles, we hope to eventually establish a perpetual, rotating fund to continue projects and expect participants to raise themselves out of hunger and severe poverty." ■

Updates about the foundation are posted at its Ghana Make a Change Facebook page.