

WACSN

WEST AFRICAN CHILDREN SUPPORT NETWORK

Newsletter Fall/Winter 2005

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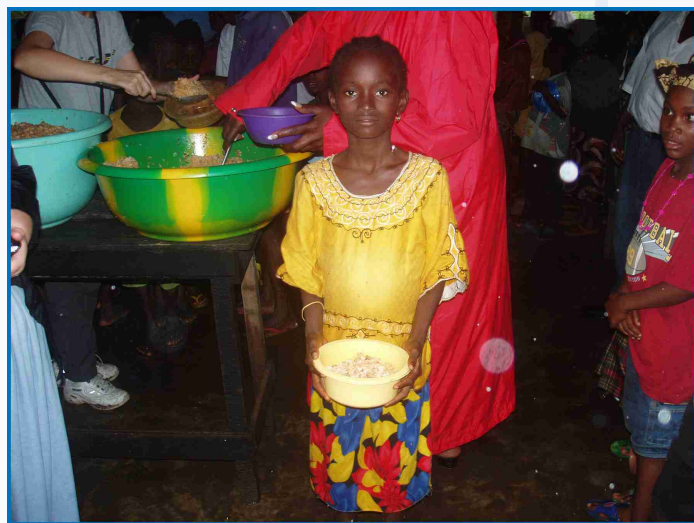
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2005 Marks WACSN's Ten Year Anniversary

Dear Friends of WACSN:

Looking back over our first decade of service to the children of Liberia, we first want to gratefully acknowledge your generous contributions of goods, labor, and funding. **You** have made our programming achievements possible. Thank you!! If you recall back to 1995, WACSN then held the status of "visiting non-profit organization," and distributed relief supplies. Today, we are a permanent NGO (non-government organization), providing ongoing direct assistance to orphaned and abandoned children and to the struggling communities where they live.

Moving ahead into our second decade, we have begun a rigorous re-assessment of both our methods and our scope of operations. An action plan is emerging, and will become WACSN's 21st-Century response to the fundamental need for preparing Liberia's children and young adults to lead self-sufficient, dignified lives which will, in turn, invigorate their nation's economy. Here are three actions already in progress, moving us forward:

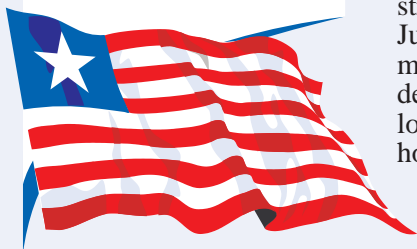


Careysberg school student in line for food

Providing a "reality check" for our U.S. based WACSN support team about operating challenges.

John Luyken (Finance and Operations) and **Heather Cannon-Winkelman** (Administration) each traveled from Minnesota in 2005 for "in-the-field" observations of program growth and changes since their last visits to Liberia. Each participated in extensive site visits and follow-up debriefings with **Maria Luyken** (President / Founder) and **Ernest Urey** (Executive Director/Liberia), and discovered in the process that our programming and services have outgrown the organization's infrastructure.

Making a compassionate response to a dramatic increase in helping children. This past year we stretched our resources to the limit, opening two more age-appropriate children's homes in May and June. We now rent three residences and one nursery in the capital city of Monrovia. Older children moved from our original home into an apartment. Premature babies, whose very survival was dependent on access to their mothers' breast milk, were moved to a home close to the nursery. Our long-term vision for Liberia's children, though, is that they thrive and grow strong in their own homeland.



Centralizing operations to minimize overhead costs and maximize quality of services.

The unhappy consequences of managing multiple, widely-dispersed program sites in an emerging nation are program inefficiencies and the vulnerability of supplies and equipment to looters. WACSN stakeholders (staff, support team, visitors, and contributors) are strongly advising us to develop a multi-building “compound” on two acres of property we already own in Monrovia. The land currently boasts a partially-built warehouse, which will soon replace rented storage buildings that house our humanitarian supplies. Its construction, solely financed up to now by **Maria and John Luyken**, requires a fresh infusion of funds for completion. Alongside it will stand a three-story children’s home, at last unifying our far-flung sites. An office building will bring our staff members together, as well as serving as “home” for some of them. No more purchasing water, when an on-site well is built. Travel time will drastically diminish for WACSN staff, because of the compound’s proximity to hospitals and government offices, allowing them to focus on our site-based feeding and education programs. (See following report for details on those projects.)

Friends, we repeat our deep gratitude for your strong support for our work for children of Liberia.



The warehouse under construction

WACSN Projects Update

Children’s health has been an issue over the past year. We have put great care and effort into helping and supporting children through our various programs. We have been successful in providing clean water and feeding programs that has saved countless number of children of needless suffering. But there have been painful losses, too. Several infants died from inadequate medical care and complications of premature birth. Our hearts were heavy with grief and

feelings of helplessness, until **Anita King**, from Jordan’s Bulrushes, brought a doctor with her in July.

What a blessing that was! **Doc** (also known as Lou) immediately set about examining every child and giving medical treatment to the few who were ill. Deeply touched by Doc’s care and concern for the children, and wanting to honor him in some way, we “adopted” him as WACSN’s Doctor. Mere words could never express our gratitude and appreciation for giving his time to help our children and teaching us some basics about infant and child health care.



Careysberg school outside

Education is central to our mission of teaching self-sufficiency. A rudimentary free school has been established in a rundown building in the town of Careysburg, located 20 miles northeast of Liberia’s capital city of Monrovia. Over 200 students are enrolled in preschool through fourth grade.



Careysberg school inside

Most are orphans of war and range in age from four to 18. Adults also receive literacy education there. Major deficiencies in the school's structure require major repairs to its foundation and its roof. A temporary roof of tarp supported by bamboo poles must be erected before the onslaught of the heavy downpours of the upcoming rainy season. Costs for materials and labor for a permanent roof are \$2,600 and we have raised \$600 toward them. Also needed to create a suitable learning environment within the building, are such items as a diesel generator for lights; textbooks and basic school supplies; clothes and shoes for the students, and funding for desks and teacher salaries.

Feeding children requires a vibrant partnership. Our multi-site feeding program was restarted this summer. Rebel attacks in the last few years had destroyed many of our established centers. With demand so greatly exceeding food supply, and malnutrition weakening so many children, we are committed to expanding this program back to its previous levels of service.

Where some 5,000 children previously received one daily meal, we now serve about 1,500. That is made possible due to a one-year food grant from Feed My Starving Children (FMSC). Under the grant, WACSN provides the food, cookware, and stipend for the cooks; the host sites provide the facility, cooks, bowls, and eating utensils. Current host sites and numbers of children being fed include: WACSN's Careysburg tuition-free school, one meal Monday-Friday; Evangelical Presbyterian Church, two or three meals a week; New Creation Siloam Pentecostal Church in Paynesville, one meal on Fridays; two villages in Todee area (one hour north of Monrovia), three meals a week. We are deeply grateful to our partners in feeding children, FMSC, based in Plymouth, Minnesota, and to **Joe Wilkey** of World Compassion Network, who revitalized our association with FMSC.

WACSN Expands Its Operations into Europe



Sam Merhi

We are pleased to announce the establishment of a support branch in Spain, and adding **Sam Merhi** to head it. His title is Executive Director/Europe. His primary duties are soliciting relief supplies from European organizations, including their shipment to Liberian ports. European organizations have increasingly provided WACSN with substantive support—both in-kind services and deep-discounted supplies. This newest development will, we believe, forge a stronger network with non-profits on the European continent.

Monrovia Church Honors Maria Luyken as "Mother For All Liberian Children"

A belated Mother's Day celebration was held to honor Maria on June 26, 2005, at the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The C. O. Smythe Women's Department had purposely delayed this celebration until Maria's return from the US. She was



Maria Luyken receiving Mother's Day honors

honored with an engraved certificate that cited her dedication and contributions to helping Liberia, by providing "invaluable service to the church, state and community." They called her Mother for All.

Maria was celebrated with songs, prayers, and praise for her countless selfless acts. Sermons were delivered by several religious leaders, including WACSN's own Ernest Urey, an assisted pastor with the church. Rejoicing with Maria on this special day were her daughters, Katarina and Nikita, and friend Heather Cannon-Winkelman, as well as many WACSN employees.

This church also happens to be a WACSN's child-feeding outlet. Fund-raising efforts for repair of its roof and replacement of its ceiling (looted during the war) had fallen short of the sum required to start construction. To demonstrate solidarity with the Church project, WACSN made a financial contribution towards this project.

WACSN Launches Phase I of a Major \$250,000 Fundraiser

WACSN has identified an urgent need to centralize its operations within a compound that we propose building on land we own in Congo Town. Estimated overall cost is for construction of new, weather-resistant buildings designed to house, respectively, our humanitarian supplies, transient home, office facilities, and a fresh-water well.

Our Phase I fundraising goal is \$100,000. Funds raised will consolidate all four children's homes into a three-story building, to be erected near to our partially-finished warehouse. A unified location will measurably improve the efficiency, safety,

and cost of caring for the children. Allows closer access to medical facilities and government offices that in Downtown Monrovia, only a 20-minute drive from the compound. Savings in rent, travel, and staff time will be significant.

To meet our Phase I action goal of improving services to children, we are prayerfully enlisting the talent, time and effort of our devoted WACSN Friends. We ask you to help in the sale of specially designed T-shirts(see page 6) to members of your church, business, and organization members. Later in early November, you will receive an email announcement with further details about when the T-shirts will become available for sale.

Special Recognition of a Valued WACSN Volunteer: Sister Pam Gremillion

We would like to give special recognition to Sister Pam for the tireless dedication and contagiously positive attitude she has provided to WACSN over the past two years. She performs critically important work and gives us the inspiration and spiritual guidance that keeps us going during challenging circumstances.

Sister Pam's contributions to WACSN are priceless and we are ever so grateful that she is part of our team.

The WACSN Education Center

It has been our goal since WACSN's inception to provide educational programs that would give young Liberians the necessary skills to be self-sufficient and empowered to help rebuild their country and contribute to its future. In 2005, we took a giant step toward the realization of this very important initiative by acquiring 50 acres of land near Careysberg for the WACSN Education Center (formerly called the WACSN Farm School.)

The Center's primary focus will remain agriculture, but other skills programs will be offered that are typical of two-year technical colleges. It will provide semester classes to students as young as 12, on up to young adults who seek post-secondary education. Continuing education seminars will be available for teachers, counselors and other professionals needing recertification.

Another focus will be rehabilitation. Programs will target the young men and women who were robbed of their childhood by rebel forces who conscripted them as "child soldiers" during the civil war. WACSN deems it critical to Liberia's future and stability that these "boys and girls"-- who are now young adults -- be given a full chance to participate in their society by learning skills needed to support their families.

In the coming months we will develop construction plans for the Education Center and determine start-up costs that will make it a reality. We believe that with a great deal of work and support, the Center enrolling its first students in 2010. We are currently trying to identify foundations and organizations most amenable to the support of international programs like WACSN. Ideas from Friends would greatly help us.

A Celebration for WACSN in Michigan on May 21

It has been several years since our last fundraising event. Therefore, we were elated when Esther's Voice International, sponsored a fundraiser for WACSN on May 21. WACSN's Maria and John Luyken were celebrated at the event for their substantial contributions to the success of WACSN at helping those in need. Asked to make a presentation, Maria gave a heartfelt speech describing WACSN's journey. Maria and John rejoiced in the support and appreciation of those in attendance, many of whom have visited Liberia.

The fundraiser also featured an auction, which raised over \$4,000 for WACSN. We are deeply grateful for the enormous financial and spiritual support that we received from this celebration. A special "Thank-You" to Noreen Weaver and Gerri Reado, Administration Director who planned this event.

A Family's Story On Visiting Liberia and Bring Home Two Children

By Dan and Kristen Beam



The Beam family

March 1, 2005, was a big day for our family. I kissed my daughter's sweet face for the last time in what I was certain would be the longest 10 days of my life. Her feverish skin radiated heat beneath my touch as hot tears flowed from my eyes how would I ever have the strength to climb onto that airplane? But my husband was calling and my mom gently assured me that Kendra was in good hands. I searched Dan's face for any sign of doubt, but found only a quiet confidence. It was time to go to Africa.

We are the Beam family. My husband, Dan, and I have been married for nearly five years and we have 3 children; Blessing, Jerry, and Kendra. When we began our first adoption last September, we had no way of knowing what was ahead of us.

It was an incredibly exciting time, but we were nervous about stepping out into the unknown! However, when God spoke to Dan's heart that He had a child for us in Liberia, it was time

to move. We received a picture of a little girl who was nearly 3 at the time and knew that this beautiful little angel with such a soulful expression was to be our daughter. I studied her picture for countless hours over the next several months as we waded through the paperwork and jumped through the hoops, which were, much to our surprise, easier than we had expected! Early in December, USCIS approval in hand, we began making plans for Blessing to be escorted home by Christmas. God, however, had a much different plan.

We were surprised by a temporary halt of visa processing at the embassy in Monrovia and told that processing would resume after the New Year. During that time, God began really working on our hearts, pointing us toward Liberia. By the time Blessing's visa was issued in February, both Dan and I had plans to travel. As our departure neared, God added another child to our family. When we arrived at WACSN's Adoption Home we would not only bring our daughter home, but we would meet our son, Jerry, as well.

Life is hard in Liberia. It was dark when we arrived in Monrovia and the first thing one notices (after learning to breath that heavy, moist air!) is the choking darkness born of a land where there is no power other than privately owned generators. It felt strange to be in such darkness! People walked in droves alongside the road as we traveled home that night, our headlights illuminating only a tiny glimpse of the poverty that surrounded us. My heart ached for the people of Liberia.

Over the next week Dan and I met many people and saw many things that have had a profound effect on our lives. Two days after our arrival in Liberia, Maria took us to see the new WACSN school in Careysburg, where we were welcomed by the most beautiful singing I had ever heard. In the heat, under that tarp roof, sweat pouring down their faces, those children learn and sing and grow. I was overwhelmed with emotion as we passed out a single piece of candy to each child, silently vowing to someday do more. We left the school that day forever changed.

The next day we met many of the Liberian parents whom have placed their children in WACSN's adoption program. I had already met most of their beautiful children during our time at the adoption home and it was wonderful to then meet the parents.

They mostly wanted to hear why we chose to adopt from Liberia. Why do we want to help their children? We explained to them that adoption was simply the path that God had chosen to expand our family and draw us closer to Him. Over the last 9 months I've watched as a number of people were touched deeply by the miracle of adoption. I looked around me that day and felt a deep sense of loss and sadness for those courageous parents' sacrifice, mingled with a strong sense of hope and assurance that through their children God would touch more hearts to increase His territory.

Near the end of our time in Liberia, Maria took us to visit Mother Blessing's Orphanage. Our children are tremendously

blessed at the WACSN Adoption Home, and I had previously taken this for granted. We climbed out of the van at Mother Blessing's Orphanage as the children gathered with a song of welcome, followed by an enthusiastic "You are welcome! You are welcome! You are welcome in Jesus' name, AMEN!" Maria had told us that this orphanage was nicer than most, as it was kept clean for the children. I looked at all their beautiful grins and tattered clothing and was overwhelmed with love for these beautiful children. The administrator explained to us that they did not have the money to complete the concrete work on the outside of their mud structure and the rainy season was drawing near. He did not even mention the tarp roof that would obviously not be sufficient for a season of Liberian rain.

The drive to the airport was a great time for reflection. Like many adoptive parents, I desperately wanted to travel to bring my child home, but was terrified to leave our other daughter at home, especially with the fever that began just the night before we left for this far away land! Yet, believing it was God's will for our family, we did travel, and we were blessed!

My mind drifted over all that we had seen and I knew that I would miss Liberia once I arrived home. I held Blessing tightly to me and said a very tearful prayer for Jerry, who had to stay behind until we could finish his adoption. We would be back.

And now, as I write, my dear husband is nearly an hour away from arriving in Liberia to bring our son and our good friends' child home. Dan and I both know that this trip will also be about so much more than just our adoption, it is about connecting with some of God's most precious children and asking ourselves hard questions like, "What is next? What would He have us do?" And so I'll leave you with a piece of scripture that has really been a blessing and a challenge to our family, 1 John 3:17-18 (NLT), "But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help-how can God's love be in that person? Dear children let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions."

Our Liberia Journey

Compiled from a report written by Rebekah Decker

We (the Decker Family from Starland – Joel, Becky, Rebekah and Joel Jr.) began our journey on March 8 as we took off Minneapolis, Minnesota, accompanied by Edward and Judith Kleinsasser from Manitoba and John Luyken from Eden Prairie. With a short stop in Europe we arrived in Monrovia, Liberia, approximately 27 hours later. We all got a surprise when we walked down the steps from the plane... we were hit with a wave of heat and humidity quite different from our homeland where we left winter snow. It was around 8pm (Liberian time, 2pm at home) when we arrived we were greeted by Maria Luyken and Ernest Urey, WACSN Executive Director/Liberia who assisted us in clearing customs. The trip to where we were staying was an hour's drive from the airport.



Children singing at the Careysberg School

We arrived at the house, WACSN's headquarters, which had been equipped with generator for lights and air conditioning at night. Also, the house contained a reservoir of fresh clean water used for cooking and bathing. The generator and reservoir were luxury, since post-war Liberia has no electricity or running water.

Our first full day, we piled into a van after breakfast and headed out to see Liberia. As we approached the main paved road into the heart of Monrovia, we got our first glimpse of the Liberian way of life. Refugee children and adults walking along the road stopped to watch us pass. These families with up to six children lived in 10x10 foot mud huts with dirt floors and tarp roofing. They cannot afford to feed their children or send them to school.

First, we visited WACSN's half-finished, two-story warehouse for future storage of food and supplies we help ship on containers. Our next stop was the WACSN Children's Home. We met many Liberian women who cared for approximately 30 children. The children range in ages from 2-10 years were very excited to have guests! Some of the little ones seemed scared while others came running with out stretched hands wanting to be held. We distributed the dolls and lollipops that we had brought especially for this occasion which they eagerly grabbed from us. We took lots of photos and they loved having their picture taken.

Next we stopped at Destiny in downtown Monrovia, which is owned by WACSN and the income helps support the organization. After lunch we went sightseeing and shopping amidst the booths and shops along the roadside. When we returned we had a delicious supper and we went to bed early like most evenings because we were all tired from the heat and humidity.

On the next day, the men went to work on the drive shaft of a truck that we shipped to Liberia and did some maintenance on the generator. The ladies from our group helped take care of the babies, most were not feeling very well, in the nursery located on the lower level of the house. Many of these children were born to teenage mothers or their mothers died in childbirth due to the lack of proper medical care.

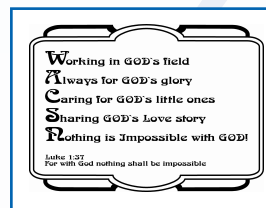
The next day as the men were still working on the truck, the ladies stayed at home to help care for the little ones. One of the little babies had an infected sore on her hand from an intravenous needle that she received in the hospital. The wound was quite large and painful, and her condition was quite serious, but with tender, loving care the wound soon healed. This baby girl was nine months old but was only the size of a 2-month old baby. Her twin brother had died shortly after birth.

After dinner, we went to Carysburg to visit the WACSN School to have a cookout with the students. When we arrived, we were surprised to see how small the building was with about 175 students in a one-room schoolhouse. The students and teachers entertained us with songs, poems, and some solos. When the program was completed we moved outside to receive a bowl of rice and soup. After the kids passed through the line to get their dinner, they went to sit in the shade to eat it, for many this would be their only meal of the day. The children posed for some photos, which they loved having their picture taken.

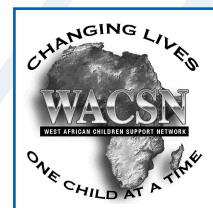
The next day, Sunday, we got up and were invited to Ernest's church for morning services. We sang a few songs, heard a message and enjoyed watching the choir perform. Eddie (Vetter) Kleinsasser also gave a short message because he's a minister. After the service we visited, took some photos and then headed home to get ready for the beach.

Our flight home started out smoothly until we arrived in Brussels. We were detained for about six hours requiring us to change flight. On the 8-1/2 hour flight to Washington D.C., the children kept us busy changing diapers for most of it. When we finally landed at Dulles Airport, we were out of diapers and clean clothing, not to mention we were exhausted. It had been almost 30 hours since we last slept. We caught our last flight of the journey to Minneapolis and slept through most of the flight. With our hearts full of thankfulness, for the manifold blessings bestowed upon us, we went home to our waiting loved ones.

T-Shirts Available in December



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Front



Colors Available

Mission Statement:

West African Children Support Network (WACSN) is a 501(c)(3) organization that is registered and incorporated in the State of Minnesota and the Republic of Liberia. Established in 1995, WACSN is dedicated to the rehabilitation of orphans and abandoned children in West African countries ravaged by war. Our vision is the development of alliances and collaborations with existing organizations to improve the lives of those we serve, especially children and mothers living in difficult economic circumstances.

If you would like to continue to support WACSN, please review the following options:

1. For financial donations, please make the check payable to the West African Children Support Network and send to the address listed below.
2. Project solicitation (funds and/or materials) for WACSN Compound and Schools, or holding fundraisers and donation drives for supplies and/or shipping to Liberia, please email us at wacsn.org@hotmail.com or call 952-937-5738 for more information.
3. In kind donations, the following are the most needed supplies or materials:
 - Vehicles – 4-wheel drive pick-up or SUV due to poor road conditions, and passenger van or bus.
 - 30 or 35 KVA Generator (diesel) – back-up generator for compound
 - 5 KVA Generator (diesel) – Tuition Free Schools
 - Cloth and disposable diapers

West African Children Support Network

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