

Paul e.V. – Partnership for Fostering Life Journeys

"If a lot of little people in a lot of little places do a lot of little things, they can change the face of the Earth." The little association Paul e.V. has adopted this African proverb – and achieved a great deal. In 2017, the founder, Gertrud Schauber, was awarded the Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In 2000, she travelled to Ghana for the second time to visit her daughter, Almuth. At that time, Almuth Schauber, a political scientist, was working for the DED (German Development Service) as a consultant to local organisations in the north of Ghana. Once again, as had happened four years earlier, the contrasts, the poverty, the social problems of marginalised groups, and the initiatives of people who were committed to education, justice, and the strengthening of women's rights and human rights made a huge impression on Gertrud Schauber. She wanted to get involved, to tell other people all about it, and to give her support.

That same year she founded Paul e.V. – Partnership for Fostering Life Journeys. The project partnerships that were then formed with three organisations in Ghana are still going today. The connections have grown and developed – at the personal level as well. This has benefited a lot of people, especially in three target groups: street children in Accra, a city of three million inhabitants; widows and their families, and thousands of other people in the poorly-educated north of the country; and people in the small community of Kreuzwertheim, who have learned a lot. Paul e.V. has succeeded in establishing "Ghana Day" as an annual event in Kreuzwertheim. A lot of people take part: schoolchildren, the mayor, church congregations, choirs and musicians, donors ... all on a voluntary basis. The proceeds go directly to the project partners in Ghana.

On behalf of transfer, Gabi Waibel spoke to Gertrud Schauber about her voluntary work.

Paul e.V. celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. What have you succeeded in doing in Ghana in all those years?

We work together with three partner organisations, two in the north of Ghana and one in the capital, Accra. In Bolgatanga in the north of Ghana, we support the Widows and Orphans Movement, WOMGhana. In this region, which is extremely poor, widows are often dis-

essed and robbed of their rights by the families of their deceased husbands. It is very difficult for them to live an independent life with their children. They are often subjected to humiliating rituals and may even be physically and emotionally abused. When she was working as a nurse, the founder of WOMGhana, Betty Ayagiba, observed that widows were not receiving medical treatment, because no one in the family wanted to pay for it. And yet Ghana's laws guarantee widows the right to an independent life. Accra is 1,000 kilometres away, though. And in the north, people pay more heed to tradition than to the country's laws. There is a need for awareness raising. WOMGhana informs women about their rights and ensures that women and girls are given educational opportunities. This begins with the construction of wells in villages, so that girls no longer have to walk for hours to fetch water and can go to school instead. WOMGhana also offers vocational training courses and start-up assistance for women who want to become self-employed. WOMGhana now defends the rights of about 7,000 widows who are registered with the organisation.

For many years we have also been supporting FISTRAD, a community, training, and education centre which is also in the north of Ghana. Richard Alandu, who is an educator, has built up a team which provides training for a large number of young people. FISTRAD provides social and health education and operates a radio station for this purpose. Unfortunately, the power supply there is far from reliable. So we – Paul e.V. – organised the purchase and installation of solar panels. Now the radio station can broadcast its programmes all day long, reaching a million listeners in the sparsely populated region. People suddenly feel that they have been brought into the 21st century. They ring the station, participate in discussions, and ask questions. There is a lot of lively debate. The resonance is wonderful! The radio station is called "Voice of the Voiceless", by the way.

The third project that we support is the Catholic Action for Street children project, CAS, in Accra. This is our oldest partnership. There are about 50,000 street children in Accra. CAS runs a contact centre for them and encourages them to go to school. CAS also provides a "House of Refuge" and basic medical care and health education.

Gertrud und Almuth Schauber in Ghana (left). Far right: African food is on offer at the Ghana Day in Kreuzwertheim. The other photographs show scenes from the projects that Paul e.V. supports.

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We stay in close touch with all three organisations and support them financially. Over the past 20 years, Paul e.V., thanks to its many supporters, has been able to contribute a total of 500,000 euro to these projects.

How did you manage to gain so many supporters?

Over the years, my husband, Paul, and I built up and maintained a large personal network – involving colleagues in various places of work and people whom we had got to know through our voluntary activities. So, for example, I regularly described our activities and experiences in Ghana in a Christmas letter to my large circle of acquaintances. After my husband died, I led the ecumenical pensioners club here in Kreuzwertheim, and this group became the core group of founders of Paul e.V. in 2000. We got off to a good start with a lot of contacts in our community. Then we kept closely in touch with people and built up the network – through lectures about Ghana, for example.

Once a year we host our Ghana Day here, although this has unfortunately had to be cancelled recently due to Corona. The day includes a bazaar with products from Ghana, a cultural programme with lots of music, a large buffet – on one occasion as many as one hundred cakes were donated – and much more besides. The proceeds of the event go to the projects, of course.

I am also invited into schools to talk about what life is like for children in Ghana. And wonderful partnerships have been formed – with the primary school in Kreuzwertheim, for example, where we launched the “One Euro for a Slate Board” campaign. I showed the children in the primary school some photos and told them about schoolchildren in Ghana who use slate boards made from old lorry tires. The alphabet is printed on one side and a schoolchild can write with chalk on the other side. The children in Kreuzwertheim were invited to donate one euro out of their pocket money to buy a school board for a Ghanaian schoolchild.

Then they rehearsed a short performance which they presented at our Ghana Day, when they also handed over the money that they had donated. There were friends, parents, and grandparents in the audience, who all enjoyed the performance. So the support network keeps growing.

You always made a point of bringing something back from Ghana to Kreuzwertheim. How did you go about doing that? What was your greatest success?

I have always wanted to foster understanding of other realities and ways of life. A lot of people are fearful, at least initially, of anything that is new or strange, includ-

ing different cultures – and I always wanted to be a bridge between people. I wanted to show people in Kreuzwertheim that, in Ghana, the people are very likeable/lovable, even though a lot of things there are altogether unfamiliar to us.

If you want to reduce prejudice, you need a great deal of sensitivity, patience, and perseverance. So we started small - by playing some African music during a church service, for example. And we provided African food at the Ghana Days. This couldn't be too exotic at first; otherwise no one would want to try it. As time went on, we discovered three dishes which have become real favourites here and are greeted with enthusiasm: African chicken curry, a peanut hotpot with pork, and “red red”, a vegetarian bean stew with African spices. In this way, people grow increasingly curious and become more open and eventually develop understanding for other people and places. At our 2019 Ghana Day, we were able to make a live video call to Ghana for the first time, thanks to Internet technology. My daughter, Almuth, interpreted for us. Richard Alandu from FISTRAD was able to speak directly to our visitors in Kreuzwertheim and tell them that, according to the latest count, several thousand young people have been able to successfully complete vocational training with the support of Paul e.V.

Incidentally, I was especially moved by Richard Alandu that day. When he recognised me on the screen, he spontaneously called me „Mum“. I was a bit irritated at first, but then I was very pleased, because it shows how close we have become through working together on our project. And that makes me very happy.

The association is inseparable from you and your family and evidently means a lot to you. What do you think the future holds for Paul e.V.?

I gave up being the president recently. We have found a very good new and younger team to continue our work. I am very happy about that.

And our partner organisations are on a stable footing too. In some cases, successors of the founders have now assumed responsibility there as well. We are extremely lucky to have a second generation of good and reliable partners in Ghana. This is so important, and it makes me feel confident that the projects are sustainable and will continue to operate successfully in the future.



In 2017, Gertrud Schauber (left) was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for her voluntary work. Her daughter Almuth (centre) and sister Magda (right) are also in the picture.

Almuth Schauber
political scientist
2000 - 2002:
Ghana, DED
2004 - 2006:
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Almuth Schauber
now works at
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Further information on the partner organisations WOM-Ghana, FISTRAD, and CAS can be found at: www.paul-ev.com

