



# 2022 WINTER ICA PROGRAM FIELDWORK REPORT



## Location

Tarkwa, Ghana

## Duration

10th – 18th DECEMBER 2022

## Prepared by

**DR. AKPAH SYLVESTER**  
(ICA PROGRAM COORDINATOR)



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The exciting Intensive Course Abroad (ICA) program hosted in Tarkwa, Ghana by Firm Health Ghana Foundation was designed for mental health students from the College of Nursing and Health Professionals (CNHP) in Drexel University, Philadelphia - USA. The program adopted a community-centred learning approach which exposed participants to the entire mental health structure of Ghana, both biomedical and faith-based. The program included seven days of intensive community engagements on mental health (radio and in-person discussion), community service, home visitation of patients with mental health disorders, a visit to a faith-based church for patients with mental health disorders, a visit to a cocoa community to understand the challenges the residents who harvest cocoa face and how that impact their mental health, an exciting interaction with high school students on cyber bullying and how to deal with the menace, a visit to a small-scale gold mine, and the final presentation at a beach in Beyin. The group had the opportunity to visit the Cape Coast castle and Nzulezu, the only community residing on stilts in Ghana.

## 2022 ICA PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- Dr Ebony White
- Idris Robinson
- Rebecca Burke
- Tajma Cameron
- Chelsea Faulkner
- Monique LaMontagne
- Linda Williams
- Neisha Young

# Saturday: 10th December 2022

## Arrival & Welcome Reception

The 2022 ICA program participants were picked up at the Kotoka International Airport (Ghana) at about 15:00 GMT and ushered into their respective rooms to settle down following a long trip. A welcome reception was held to welcome all participants to Ghana and also introduce them to executives and volunteers of Firm Health Ghana Foundation follow. They were then briefed on the weeks activities. Participants were treated to tasty Ghanaian cuisines and beverages courtesy Donsey Catering Services. Participants also enjoyed pulsating Afrobeats tunes which energized the space. The welcome reception ended around 22:00 GMT. After which all members retired to bed since the following was dedicated to travelling from Accra to Tarkwa in the Western region of Ghana.





# Sunday: 11th December 2022

## Days Travel to Tarkwa

Participants had breakfast at 7:30 am GMT which included 'mixed' Ghanaian delights such as grilled redfish, salad, fried plantain, chicken and beverages. After breakfast, the team had its daily debrief before embarking on an 8-hour bus ride to Tarkwa in the Western region of Ghana with a planned stop-over in Cape Coast. Sylvester Akpah (PhD) gave participants an insight into Ghana, the way of life of the populace, the marketplaces, the weather among others to help participants know what to expect while in Ghana. A group photo was taken before departure from Accra. The bus departed Accra at 9:30 am GMT



Whilst enroute Cape Coast, the team stopped over briefly to enjoy some fresh road side coconut in one of the coastal towns. At about 13:45 GMT, the team arrived in the Central Region and moved to the Cape Coast Castle to have an insight into the slave trade in Ghana. A volunteer from the castle briefed participants on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the significant role the castle played in this sad episode of human history.



The team visited the church, and the Palaver hall (A hall used to determine the health status of slaves before they were finally led into the dungeons). The team and the students were led into the male dungeons, located just below the church of the castle. Visits to the shrine, where the slaves used to worship and the Governor's chamber were also made.

The volunteer then took the team to the forecourt of the castle which holds the graves of, Philip Quarcoo (The first black Anglican pastor), C.B Whitehead, a 38 years old British soldier who was killed by a Dutch soldier in the courtyard and the graves of George Maclean, the British Governor of cape coast from 1830 to 1844 and his wife. The final visits were to the female dungeons and the door of no return leading straight to the sea which when crossed by slaves meant there was to be no more contact with the homeland. The team left Cape Coast at 17:15 GMT after lunch and arrived in Tarkwa around 21:00 GMT. Participants were ushered into their respective rooms to rest and prepare for the next day.



# Monday: 12th December 2022

## Orientation and Courtesy Calls

The team had breakfast at 7:30 am. To officially commence the 2022 ICA program, the team paid a courtesy call on the Municipal Chief Executive (i.e., the mayor) of Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality. Led by Dr Joseph Darko (Director of Medical Services, Firm Health Ghana Foundation), the entire team was duly introduced to the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE) and his team and vice-versa and also gave a detailed breakdown of the week's itinerary and what is involved. The MCE expressed his delight about the program and urged the team to count on his support and call on him in the event of any difficulties. The MCE expressed his satisfaction with the program outline and wished the international students a pleasant stay.



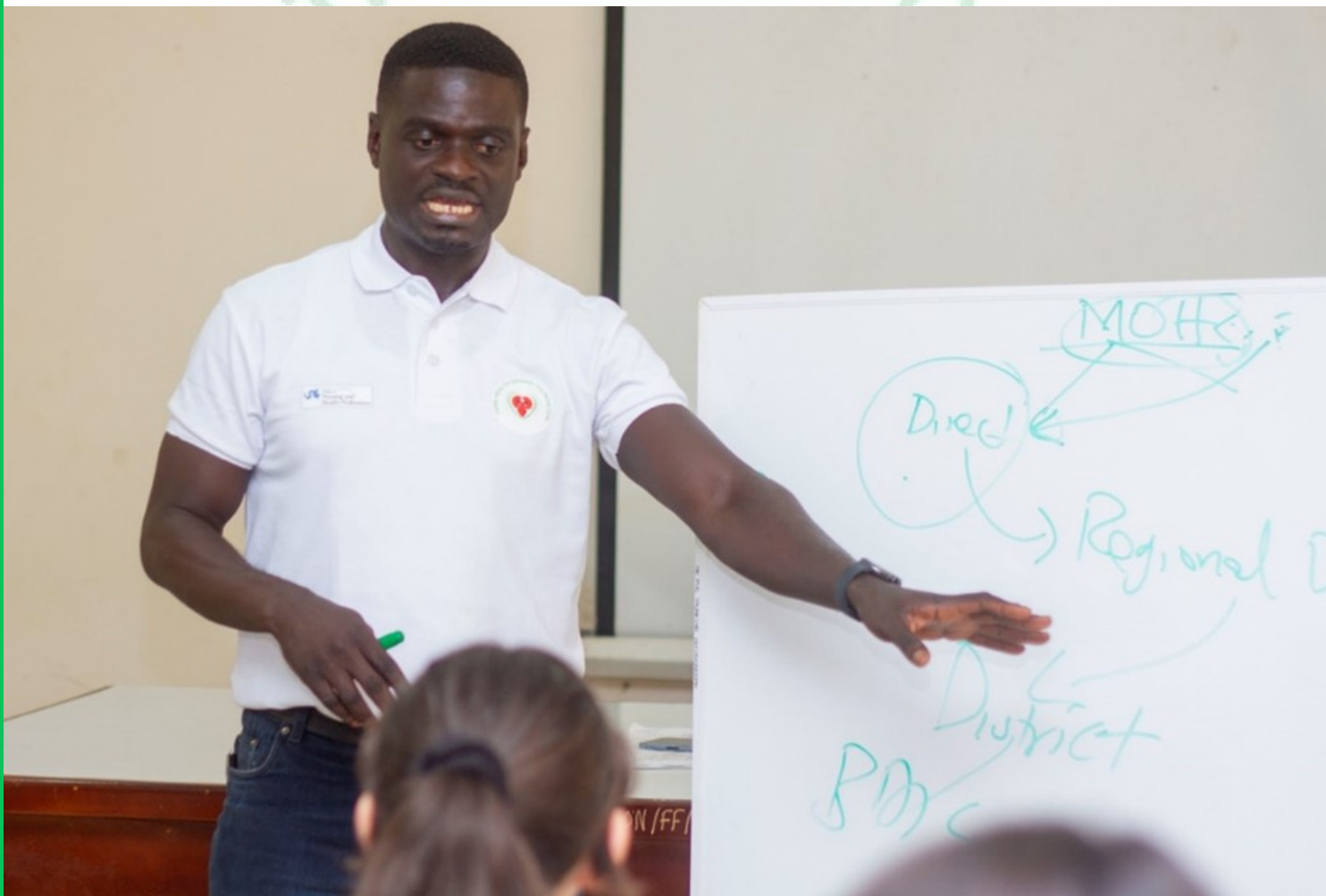


# Courtesy Call on the Municipal Health Directorate

The team also paid a courtesy call on the Municipal Health Directorate (MHD) which coordinates all medical activities in the municipality. The team was joined by mental health nurses from Apinto Government Hospital. Mad. Veronica Toffey (Head of Public Health) and Mad Mercy Nkrumah (Disease Control Officer for the Municipality) briefed the team on the medical activities and centres in the municipality and the various mental health activities including advocacy undertaken by the MHD. The meeting drew to a close with Dr. Darko thanking the MHD for briefing the team on their mandate in the municipality. He then informed the MHD of activities planned by the team.



The group's next visit was to the Municipal Hospital in Tarkwa. Mr Kofi Duku (Head of the Mental Health Unit at the Hospital) one of the organizers of the program introduced the joint team to the hospital's management and vice versa. The team was warmly welcomed by the hospital's management represented by Mr Abbass (The Hospital Administrator) and madam Veronica Mensah (Nurse Manager) and briefly educated the team on the history of the hospital, organogram and services rendered by the hospital. Dr Darko then took the team on the structure of the Ghanaian health system in general and in particular the mental health system and its challenges.



The team of participants and nurses were then split into two groups led by Dr Darko and P.A Aagyemang (a physician assistant and one of the organizers of the program) in one group and Dr White and Mr Kofi Duku in the other, the groups then discussed two interesting



cases of a possible Tourette syndrome and another with acute psychotic symptoms. This was followed by presentations by both groups. Following the presentations, the team had a small dance session led by Ms. Linda Williams and Dr White to ease off some stress. two groups, each group received a case study of two different mental health patients.

The entire session took almost four hours. Around 15:00 GMT, the team was treated to a tasty lunch of waakye (boiled beans and rice) , macaroni, eggs, fish/meat with shito ( a black spicy sauce) and stew.



At about 17:00 GMT, the team visited the psychiatric unit of Apinto Government Hospital, the second biggest and the only other hospital with a mental health unit in the Tarkwa metropole.





At 18:30 GMT, the group visited Instant Pub and Grill for their first home dinner. Participants were treated to the ever-delicious Ghana Jollof, goat soup, boiled yam (with garden egg stew or palaver sauce), fried chicken and fish. As usual, the space was energized by some afrobeat music to which all danced gleefully





# Tuesday: 13th December 2022 - A Visit to Aklica

After having breakfast around 7:30 am, the team travelled to Aklica, a cocoa farming community about an hours drive from Tarkwa. To gain access to the community, the team navigated across the Bonsa river with a canoe before trekking through some cocoa farms to the chief's palace to interact with the chief and his elders



After having The team discussed their mission with the chief through his linguist. After 10 minutes of interaction, the team thanked the chief on behalf of his community, and proceeded to the only school in the community. The group walked for 45 minutes through cocoa farms before arriving at the school.





At the school, the team joined a Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meeting that was being held and as customary, introductions were done on both sides after which engagements were had with the parents and teachers in one of the classrooms. Following the engagements, the best cocoa farmers in the community was tasked to take the students through the primary processes involved in cocoa harvesting and seed preparation before exportation out of the community to be processed into chocolate both locally and internationally. The team had interesting interactions with the farmers, the team inquired what their understanding of mental health was, what they considered to be a mental health disorder among others to which the farmers gave very interesting answers. meant to them. The team was also taken through how to weigh sacks of dried cocoa beans. After the interactions, the team was treated to some fresh coconut water and fruits to quench their thirst after a long walk on a sunny day. The team was then rowed across the Bansa one more time to join their waiting bus and headed straight to Fiaseman Senior High School (FIASEC) around 15:30 GMT to interact with the students on cyber bullying and how to maintain sanity in the era of social media.





## **Interaction with Students of Fiaseman Senior High School**

The team arrived at the school at 16:30 and had lunch on the bus. The team interacted with some school teachers and over 500 students in the school's assembly hall at 16:45 GMT. After a brief introduction by Dr Ebony White, the participating students took turns interacting with the students on mental health. The participating students sensitized the pupils on the importance of maintaining sound mental health in the era of cyber bullying on social media platforms especially, how to do so and numerous avenues for seeking mental health assistance. The students shared their understanding of cyberbullying indicating instances when they had been bullied on social media, the impact it had on them and how they coped with most emphasizing the support of family and friends. Dr. Darko closed the session with a brief talk on the availability of mental health services for high school students in the municipality and urged both teachers and students to make good use of the services. The team left the school to have dinner at the Ghana Manganese Company's restaurant.







# Wednesday: 14th December 2022

## Radio Discussions

After breakfast at 7:30 am, the team including nurses from the mental health unit of the Apinto Government Hospital was divided into two groups to visit two radio stations for an hour's radio discussion on the complex interaction between the biomedical and faith based approaches to mental health in Ghana. The first group went to Dynamite FM, while the second went to Mining City FM, two popular radio stations in Tarkwa and its environs. The discussions were in both Twi (a local language) and English to ensure maximum reach. The teams educated the public on the roles both approaches play in mental health generally and the various mental health units and mental health advocacy programs in the municipality that were available. This very interactive session ended with a phone in session where listeners asked many though provoking questions to all members of the team.







## Home Visitations

After the radio segment, the team headed to the homes of some individuals and families with mental health disorders to interact with them. The session was led by the team of nurses from both mental health units in the municipality to discuss their symptoms, their understanding of their diagnosis, medications and more.

## Small scale mining site

Since Tarkwa is a Gold mining town, the team visited a small scale mining company to understand the processes involved in the mining gold and also see gold in its pure form.

Upon arrival at the mining site, a tour guide led the team around the mining site, he enlightened them on mine exploration, mining types and mine safety procedures and the processes involved in producing gold and took the team to some of the stations. Participants also saw and felt gold in its raw form.







After the tour of the mine site, the team paid a courtesy call on the medical superintendent of Apinto Government Hospital since he wasn't available on the scheduled date.



## Home Dinner and Karaoke

At 8 pm, the team had its second host family meal. The team was offered a variety of native cuisine, including; 3t) with eggs, 'mpot) mpot)', fufu with light soup and banku with fish. Foreign dishes such as Jollof and chicken were also available. There were both local and foreign wines to choose from. The team reveled in some good music, food, conversations and card games to add to the mix. The team thanked our generous host for a warm reception and left for Shooters pub and Grill for karaoke and some socialization involving singing and dancing.





# Thursday: 15th December 2022 - Psychiatric Hospital and Faith-Based Church Visitation

After breakfast, the team departed Tarkwa finally and headed for Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital. After about a five hour journey, the team arrived at the Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital in the Central region of Ghana. This visit was intended to let participant have an insight into how patients with serious mental health disorders are managed in a psychiatric hospital. The visit began with a brief history and orientation of the hospital's internship coordinator who is also a psychiatric nurse. He educated the team on the history of mental health management in Ghana and how the Mental Health Act has helped mental health management and advocacy but re-iterated how slow its full implementation has been leading to serious pressure on the few existing psychiatric hospitals all of which are in the south. He did touch on medications used to manage some of the common disorders at the hospital and challenges with drug supply and how that affects compliance and management in general. The team then took a tour of some of the wards to see a typical psychiatric hospital set up in Ghana. Participants asked questions during the entire session to which appropriate answers were given.





## Faith-Based Church Visitation

The journey from Ankaful to the Mount Horeb prayer camp took a little over an hour. The team was warmly welcomed by the church's founder and his elders. The spokesperson described how mentally ill persons were once chained to trees as a form of restriction among other inhumane acts. He went on to explain how the church became a centre of healing for people with mental health disorders. He further emphasized that in the past; only prayers and fasting were used to heal mentally impaired persons. However, after a directive from the municipality's medical director, patients now attend hospitals for assistance after which prayers are added. He then led the team to see patients at various stages of recovery most of whom had recovered or near recovery. He reiterated the cordial relationship existing between the camp and the health department confirmed by Mr Alex Ackon (Head of the mental health unit at the Abura Dunkwa District Hospital) who led the joint team. He knew all the patients at the camp and he had scheduled visits to the camp to check up on the patients.



The joint team took a tour of the camp which looked more like a growing community and asked the founders and nurses some questions and then it was time to make a more than five hour journey to the beach in Beyin a small town in the Jomoro district of the Western Region of Ghana to settle and prepare for the final presentations by participants.



The team arrived at the beach a little past midnight but the lure of the beach ensured participants stayed awake to work on their final presentations while enjoying the cool ocean breeze with bonfire and music to match the mood. Team members retired to their respective tents to have a well deserved rest on their well inflated air beds.





## **Friday: 16th December 2022 Beach Presentation and Cultural Visit**

After a much relaxing night, the team woke up from their tents to a beautiful sight of the sunrise over the atlantic ocean. Breakfast was served at exactly 8:00 am. Team members took advantage of the relaxing atmosphere to enjoy the beach and prepare for the final presentations scheduled for 4pm in the evening. The entire morning and early afternoon was left open for participants to relax and enjoy the ocean front while preparing themselves for their respective final presentations later in the day. At 2pm, the team paid a cultural visit to Nzulenzu (a floating village) near the beach. The visit required a 20 minute boat ride across the fresh water lake. The ride across this wide natural lake surrounded by bushes and forests was exhilarating.

The team took a quick tour of the town led by the tour guide to visit places of interest in the village including the only junior high school, the tour ended with a dance session in a floating bar.













# Final Presentations and Cultural Dance

At 16:00, the team returned to the beach for the final presentation. The students were divided into groups of two each. This exciting learning session resulted in each pair describing their experiences and how the program had influenced their view of mental health and life in general. Each participant also articulately and clearly shared what they were taking back home with them. Very thoughtful questions were asked with some very personal experiences and tears also being shared. Each group session ended with a fun but meaningful activities to reemphasize the messages of each presentation. Dr Darko gave initial feedbacks to each student on their presentations and pre-travel essays and promised to give them detailed responses on their respective essays in due course. This fantastic but emotional session ended with exchange of gifts and some fried yam and grilled tilapia by Donsey Kitchen and Grill who also treated the entire team to some really fantastic delicacies. The night continued on with grilled beef, pork and fish and assorted dishes with arrival of the cultural dance troupe charged the atmosphere further with the group treating participants to intricate Nzema (the local tribe) dance moves. These very rhythmic songs and dances performed barefoot in the sand made it even more exciting. The cultural dance session ended after about two hours with participants taking turns to also exhibit their dance skills in the sand. Participants and hosts alike danced to some afrobeat songs and performed some karaoke with bonfire and barbecue well into the night before retiring into their tents for their final night in Ghana after a very eventful week of activities and life changing experiences.









# Saturday: 17th December 2022 – Journey to Accra and Departure

The next morning, team members woke up to various activities including beach walks and runs, relaxations and even Yoga against the rising sun. After breakfast, the team prepared and packed up for a seven hour journey back to Accra and departure. Most of the journey was used to catch up on some much needed sleep following a very long and exciting night. After a restful seven hour journey, the team arrived in Accra. Sylvester Akpah (PhD) led an interesting closing session where each member of the team (participants and hosts) described what the experience meant to them and how their perspectives on mental health and life had been influenced by the program. He thanked the members for their various roles in ensuring a successful life altering program. Dr Ebony White (representing all participants) thanked Firm Health Ghana Foundation for putting up a life changing program and being such warm hosts and wished a stronger relationship between both institutions moving forward. Participants were dropped off at the airport and despite a very successful program, there were no happy goodbyes as the goodbyes were said with tearful hugs which signaled the end of the winter ICA 2022 program in Ghana.

## TEAM MEMBERS

- Dr Sylvester Akpah (ICA Program Coordinator)
- Dr Joseph Darko (Head of Medical Services)
- Kwabena Agyemang (Physician Assistant)
- Mr Vondee Selasie (Head, Technical)
- Isaac Darko (Volunteer, Logistics)
- Ms Rhoda Dumfeh (Volunteer, PR)
- Kyere Clement Tabiri (Volunteer, Audio-visual)
- Mr Kofi Duku (Mental Health Professional)





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