

# Two weeks in Ghana village makes lasting difference

October 1, 2008

BELTON—When Shirley Walker, a social work professor at the [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) , participated in a mission trip to a small village outside of Kotoku, Ghana, she hoped to contribute any way she could.

“I didn’t really know just how much social work they would have me do there,” she said. “I wanted to just peel potatoes in the kitchen—whatever God wanted me to do.”

Walker’s two weeks with the orphans at the [Rafiki Foundation’s](#) group home turned out to be much more than just peeling potatoes.

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor  
Social Work Professor Shirley Walker  
works with children at the Rafiki  
Foundation group home in Kotoku,  
Ghana. (UMHB Photos)

During the first week she taught learning skills to four different age groups and was reintroduced to kickball.

“That is not something I would have chosen for myself at all, but it was good and helped me see the children in a different environment,” she said.

Some of the most memorable work she did was one-on-one with a girl named Mary, who is a slow reader. Mary seemed to get picked on a lot. Walker said after reading to Mary the book *The Kissing Hand*, she altered its message for her, telling Mary that when she felt lonely or sad she could kiss her palm, hold it to her cheek and say to herself “God loves me.”

“She had this glow, a smile on her face,” Walker said as she recounted the experience.

During her second week at the village, Walker began forming a bond with Cathy Carney, the village director. Carney was in the process of hiring for the first time a social worker for the village and sought advice from Walker, who has years of experience in the field.

“I was in hog heaven,” Walker said. “I loved it. At the end of eight hours, Cathy looked at me and said, ‘I have just had a graduate course.’”

Walker was surprised when she was later asked to lead interviews with five candidates for the job. In addition, she drafted a job description for the position, developed interview questions and the interview process. Walker also developed the village’s referral process and referral forms.

“That was easy for me, because it’s what I do,” she said.

Before Walker left the village, Carney asked if she would serve as her unofficial U.S. consultant for social work. The consultations have continued via e-mail, Walker said.



Shirley Walker and friend.

Walker felt satisfaction using her professional knowledge to potentially benefit the children for long after her two-week stint.

Another significant event didn't exactly come as a surprise to Walker, since she sensed a clear direction from God about it during a prayer meeting a week before she left.

Through two full-time missionaries from her church, Central Baptist in Round Rock, she learned about a family near Kotoku who had lost a seven-year-old son to a tragic accident. The boy's sister, Magdalene, is a student at the village school.

"The Lord told me (in that prayer meeting), 'You are going over there to minister to this family,'" she said.

Walker said she missed out on two early opportunities to visit Magdalene and her family, but on a Sunday afternoon she was able to go with Carney to visit them in their home.

"Because of the timing, I got to pray individually with Magdalene, her mother, father, two brothers and an aunt. That was such a wonderful prayer. They were so responsive."

It was only two weeks but Walker talks glowingly about her experiences, how she fell in love with the people and left part of her heart on the African continent.

"I see it as God ministering to those kids, and he allowed me to be the vessel," she said.