

A Story of Hope from Ghana

One thousand days: From conception to a child's second birthday, every day is vital for their development. But in rural Ghana, poverty prevents access to essential health and nutrition services, causing children to miss critical milestones. This can lead to serious health issues, academic struggles and limited job opportunities in adulthood.

To address this, **Catholic Relief Services teamed up with the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne on a project in Walewale, Ghana, to help children up to 3 years old live happy and healthy lives by improving early childhood development.**

The project began more than four years ago when the sisters met with the chiefs and elders of the community about establishing a space at the Our Lady of Rocio Clinic to provide mothers and children with health education services and early childhood development activities. Today, the space teaches caregivers new ways to support their families, offers mental health services for moms, empowers communities through savings groups and strengthens families to build a brighter future together.

As part of the project, community volunteers were trained in skills like making early learning toys and starting savings and lending groups. Some of the toys the mothers learned to make include sensory shakers crafted from plastic bottles and stones or buttons, and fabric balls from scraps around the home.

Sister Yvonne says that a sensory shaker is like music for a child.



Sister Yvonne Koudjonou, community leader and account officer, poses for a picture at Our Lady of Rocio Clinic in Walewale, Ghana. Sister Yvonne was instrumental in meeting with the local chiefs and elders to enhance the clinic space.

“It helps the child develop mentally and build muscle strength,” she adds.

Georgina was one of the first volunteers and is now a lead mother in her community who trains female neighbors in what she has learned. A mother of three, Georgina brings two of her children to the space to learn how to make simple, inexpensive toys that engage children’s senses and stimulate learning and development. She says that her children are seeing the benefits.

“They teach them how to count: one, two, three. ABCs,” Georgina says. “Compared to those in the house that I live with [who don’t attend the space], they are very smart indeed.”

Sister Yvonne emphasizes, however, that early childhood development cannot stop at the walls of the center. Mothers must make play spaces at home for their children and volunteers must teach new mothers what they’ve learned so that this knowledge will spread and other children can thrive.

“This program has helped us change our lives and our children,” Georgina says.



Georgina sits with her 6-month-old son Ephraim at Our Lady of Rocio Clinic in Walewale, Ghana.

How to journey this Lent with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Rice Bowl:

1. Pick up your rice bowl from your local parish or school.
2. Pray about how God is leading you with regard to your Lenten practices and make a plan.
3. Read stories about women and men who've been able to engage in activities that break the cycle of hunger and build health and resilience - <https://www.crsricebowl.org/stories-of-hope/intro>
4. Join the global family in prayer by sharing your prayer intention on the CRS Rice Bowl prayer intention map (scroll down the webpage) - <https://www.crsricebowl.org/>
5. Consider incorporating into your Lenten practice recipes for meatless meals from around the world - <https://www.crsricebowl.org/recipe>
6. Share your Lenten alms to make a lifesaving difference for our neighbors in need - <https://www.crsricebowl.org/donate-to-crs-rice-bowl>

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