

New York Wrestling News



Ghana Make a Difference: Former Wrestler Changing Lives for Children in Africa

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By NYWN

An article for the holiday season ...



15 years ago **Cornelius (Cory) Hofman**, his wife **Stacey** and their five children lived together in a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in Chicago for months at a time while one of his daughters received medical care.

He said those times of "materialistic simplicity" were some of the happiest of his life. However when he witnessed another version of materialistic simplicity on a trip to Ghana a few years ago, it gave him a very different feeling.

Hofman saw children sleeping "on the concrete floor in equatorial Africa in an overcrowded room with extremely poor ventilation." Among other things, he saw a lack of food, beds, showers and toilets.

Those conditions are things that the Hofmans have worked hard to change through the organization they founded three years ago with some others in Idaho, **Ghana Make A Difference**.

How did Hofman, a former wrestler at Cornell University with a Masters in Japanese Studies, an MBA and a more than 20-year career as the President of The GEC Group find himself in this charitable endeavor?

He's certainly never been afraid of a challenge.

"Cory has always been an incredibly independent person who is willing to take things on," said Cornell head wrestling coach **Rob Koll**. "As an eighteen year old, Cory went to Japan for a mission without speaking a word of the language. And when he returned, he left Utah and a life he was familiar with and drove 2,000 miles across the country to Ithaca, NY to start a totally new life."

Traveling across the United States is something Hofman did again, years later, in one of his first big charitable projects.

In 2004, the Hofman family wanted to give thanks to the medical staff at Chicago's Shriners Hospital for the treatment they provided to now-15-year old Halle Hofman, who was born with a craniofacial disorder called Pfeiffer Syndrome. The Hofmans found a unique way to show their appreciation.

"Her doctors were top notch," Cory Hofman said. "We thought we'd ride our bikes from our home in Idaho to Chicago, about 1600 miles, to raise money for the hospital. I think we raised about \$25,000. It was a great family thing and we saw how great it was to travel while doing charitable work."

"Traveling with a humanitarian twist" became a recurring theme for the clan from that point forward.

The Hofmans journeyed to China, where they spent time at a home for disabled children. Inspired by that trip and others, three of the Hofman children graduated from high school a semester early and spent the next few months volunteering. One of them, Arianne, left her heart in Kenya after the Hofmans traveled there to work with impoverished schools located deep in the bush.

"Arianne fell in love with Africa," Hofman said. "She wanted to go back, but Kenya didn't work out, so she went to Ghana instead in early 2012. She had a great experience."

That experience had a significant influence. Around that time, Cory and Stacey Hofman were pondering adoption and when Ghana was suggested to them by an adoption agency, they decided to make a trip to the African country to investigate.

"When we went, we visited several orphanages," Hofman said. "It was amazing - when you get there, you fall in love with the kids in about 10 seconds. It's an amazing bonding experience. On the flight home, we made some big decisions. We decided we wanted to adopt twins from Ghana, if possible. We felt like on top of adoption, we needed to do something more to help these kids."

And Ghana Make a Difference was born.

The Hofmans returned to Ghana in the summer of 2013 and spent ten months there, volunteering while getting to know the twins that would be joining their family. At the same time, they laid the groundwork for the development of their significant home-building project - an orphanage to provide not only food, clean water, sanitation and adequate living space to children, but also to provide them with a family environment.

"We aren't for institutionalizing kids - our goal is to always have kids be part of a family," Cory Hofman said. "But at the same time, you can't deny that these kids don't have a place to live or sleep. They don't have food. We felt the need to create a healthy environment where these kids can have food, shelter and love with the hope that as many as possible will eventually be adopted into homes."

Step 1 was acquiring the land. The Chief of the village of Dabanyin donated 5.5 acres and the plans were drawn for the building. After intense efforts, those plans steadily became reality. Today the children's home in Dabanyin, Ghana, houses close to 50 children, 11 full-time Ghanaian caregivers, and as many as 14 volunteers.

The organization has made contributions in a number of ways. Highlights for 2015 include unifying 21 children with permanent families, building a new house for children with intellectual disabilities and starting a poultry farm that helped achieve greater self-reliance by eating and selling the eggs.

That wasn't all. The organization also formed several alliances - with Ghana's Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to shelter children rescued from child labor, with 'Acacia Shade' to care for children with disabilities and with 'Look at Us' to provide children with hearing aids and surgical procedures.

Ghana Make a Difference is seeking additional donations to ensure that these projects continue to thrive. And Hofman emphasizes that all that is given goes directly to the cause.

"We've been running full speed for three years, and I'm blown away by what we've accomplished, but our quick successes have put us in a tight spot financially. We desperately need additional support to continue the good we've worked so hard to establish. We treat donations to Ghana Make a Difference as sacred," Hofman said. "My wife and I cover all the administrative costs so that 100% of the money goes to the kids. That's really important to us."

Hofman said that even the smallest gestures make an impact on a daily basis.

"It's amazing how good it makes you feel when you impact their lives," Hofman said. "You want to do it for them, but at the same time what you get back is so fulfilling. There's so much pleasure and delight when they have anything of their own - their own washcloth or underwear or socks. Their smiles knock your socks off."

In that Chicago apartment years ago, Cory Hofman found happiness in simplicity. Many children in Ghana will find a home and a path to a better future because he and his family do not fear a complicated challenge. Instead, they see an opportunity to do the work of a lifetime, with the smiles of children their true reward.

For more information on Ghana Make A Difference, see the organization's website [here](#).

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