

**Autumn/November 2023**

## **FRIENDS OF WEH NEWSLETTER**



### **Ruth's report from WEH**

Our autumn volunteer meeting was a success. We were happy to see each other and meet new folks.

- Eric, a teacher and single father, is a new volunteer in Kotto-Up. He works with Richard Mulema.
- Mrs. Zenatou, a mother of three and a grade school teacher, lives in Souza.

**We have 450 children and plan to keep that number.** However, Eric reported 38 new displaced children. We cannot accept all of them and also keep the 450 ceiling. One suggestion: give priority to new Anglophone children. WEH has had internally displaced children since the strife started. We cannot abandon them. What to do?

### **Continuing challenges**

- A boy, age 14, was picking "safou" (fruit that grows on trees) to eat. The farm's owner took him to the police. He was in jail for 10 days. He died a few days after being freed. We will never know how and why he died; police give no answers.
- **Mary and Delight** are orphans whom WEH has cared for since their parents were killed. In school, Mary passed to form 6. Her brother Delight is in form 3. Volunteer Judy said Mary worries that WEH may not be able to continue paying for her schooling. Mary is doing well in school but Delight is weak; Judy found a tutor for him.

An aunt came from their home village to care for them when their parents were killed. The aunt became pregnant and returned home to deliver her baby. She stayed there, leaving the two orphans with **Judy**. Judy is that area's volunteer. She is in her early 30s, a single mother living in a tiny room with her three children: twin boys age 1 and her niece age 7. I'm sure they all sleep in Judy's bed, because there's no room for another mattress. WEH cannot set a precedent by renting a bigger room for Judy. I gave them my grandchildren's used clothes and \$40 for food.

- Some young girls and boys among displaced children work more like little slaves than servants. Their "employers" pay them very little.

**David (WEH's treasurer), thank you so much** for forwarding donations. As you see, this money is coming at the right time.

## Richard Mulema

Kotto Report Sept. 15 2023

Internally displaced children and orphans

Mbaku Joclan was born in a village in the southwest region of Cameroon. He is 12 years old and in class six in Success Primary and Nursery School Kotto. This child came to Kotto from a village called MUNYENGUE in the SW region because of continuous gun shootings and killings during the Anglophone crises of Cameroon (NW/SW).

Mbaku told me that he slept near the river Moungo for three days because his family's house was set on fire by the military. Lucky for him that he went to fetch water from a spring. More luck — a hill hid him from the military. His sister was burned. Other family members and their house were destroyed to ash by fire.

I, Richard Mulema, saw this child's situation and I think of what I saw happen in Soweto – South Africa in the 1980s.

### **Why do displaced children travel through dangerous bush country to find WEH?**



Friends of WEH honors the courage and resilience of children who experienced true horrors seeing their parents killed and their homes burned. Some walked four months or more, hiding and eating off the land until they stumbled into villages where WEH has a welcoming safe presence.

WEH takes in orphans and vulnerable children (OVE). WEH pays their school fees and checks on them and the people whom they live with regularly.

These children are determined to go to school and thrive.

Many WEH children were born in WEH's area; others walked from places where the civil war is killing people and displacing children.

When WEH began, most orphans had lost their parents to AIDS. Now increasing numbers of children are orphaned by civil war violence.

Some children need continuing health care; many need help with their living situations. Volunteers problem solve to find food, required school uniforms, or an extra bed in crowded homes where multiple children may sleep in one bed or overflow to a dirt floor.



Soleine Fevor ALANFACK

Form 4 11 yrs old

We ran away from the war because they were killing people. We ran away so that we could go to the village [in Littoral province].

This is from Fevor. Thank you.



Louise DIBONGO SELLE

Form 4 13 yrs old

I have no father and my mother lives in Douala with my sisters. I live with my aunt. I spent 3 years without going to school. After my father's burial she decided to take me. Now thanks to her I'm going back to school.



Amandine, age 12, 6th form

She's frequently absent from school because of sickle cell anemia. In October she was hospitalized for chest pain and difficulty breathing. She is following the prescribed treatment.



**Our Mission**  
The Friends of WEH supports the work of Women, Environment, and Health (WEH), a non-government organization (NGO) in Cameroon, West Africa.

We raise funds to pay for school fees, books, required uniforms, and other expenses for orphans and other vulnerable children so they can stay in school. When funds are available, we help provide medical and preventative health care for children.

We support WEH's work to raise the status of women in Cameroon by promoting girls' education and job training.

**Please consider a tax-deductible donation. Mail a check payable to Friends of WEH to: Friends of WEH, 4205 SE Ramona St, Portland, Oregon 97206 or visit [Friends of weh.org/donate](http://Friendsofweh.org/donate) online.**

We **appreciate** the support of our generous donors.

- 2023: \$10,679 as of Nov. 22
- 2022: \$ 9,100
- 2021: \$14,000
- 2020: \$132,233\* includes \$120,000 from Lee Edwards for technical school
- 2019: \$16,050
- 2018: \$11,820
- 2017: \$11,170

## Cameroon Political Update November 2023

The situation in Cameroon remains very challenging. Problems are particularly severe for the two Anglophone regions, Southwest and Northwest, where a separatist insurgency continues to wreak havoc. Fighting between government forces and the insurgents, referred to by international agencies as “non-state armed groups (NSAGs)” but locally known as the “Ambas,” has shut down schools and healthcare facilities and displaced more than 600,000 people – 3,655 persons in last July alone. Kidnappings and extortion continue to be carried out by the Ambas adding to the insecurity of the two regions and sometimes spilling over into Littoral Region where WEH operates. The Southwest has also been affected by floods and landslides that closed 12 schools in the town of Limbé, and cholera has broken out in the Southwest district of Tiko.

Over the past two years there have been several peace-making efforts by Canada and other countries as well as by Cameroonian civil society groups. But so far they have not borne fruit.

Refugees from the two Anglophone regions continue to stream into the adjacent Littoral region. WEH volunteers have responded by helping refugee children access the education they have been denied in their home regions. The influx of these children has stretched WEH resources to the maximum.

Meanwhile the Nigerian Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram, continues to carry out attacks in the far north in the Lake Chad area. This conflict has killed more than 3,000 Cameroonians over the past five years and displaced another 250,000.

Since a series of coups in the Sahel region and Gabon, social media and streets are becoming louder. Some journalists have been arrested and newspapers suspended or shut down for comparing the situation in Cameroon with events elsewhere on the continent.

President Paul Biya is at least 90 years old; some say he is older. Succession remains cloudy. The government has responded by jailing some journalists and suspending some newspapers but these measures have only served to fuel the rising discontent.

Despite the violence and insecurity wrought by the insurgency, the government has vaccinated 526,153 children in the Southwest and Northwest regions. The Indomitable Lions, the national soccer team, brought joy to many Cameroonians when it beat a formidable Brazilian team in the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the 2023 Confederations Cup by identical scores of 1-0.



## Grace Epoto Seamstress and clothing design

Children in developing nations have dreams of better futures as vivid as our own children's. Support from donors in WEH's work and the lives of the women and children WEH advocates for will pay dividends in Cameroon and the world beyond our understanding.

Friends of WEH, here is a tangible result of your generosity. With support from WEH volunteers, **Grace Epoto** overcame a starkly deprived childhood to heal what could have left her with lifelong emotional scars.

The photo on page 6 shows Grace wearing her graduation practical skills project. She designed and sewed it herself.

Grace has been a WEH-sponsored student from age 3. She graduated from high school on July 7, 2023, with the help of WEH and a Friends of WEH benefactor. Her anonymous sponsor covered the rental for a safe one-room apartment in Douala. She has monthly food money and sleeps under a mosquito net. Grace now attends a school to learn advanced sewing skills that are preparing her to support herself and live a secure life, using skills that give her pride and enjoyment.

Through her hard work in school and a positive outlook that includes helping others, Grace developed a vision for a self-sufficient future.

In Cameroon, women and men can earn a living by making clothes. Ready-to-wear clothing and household items such as curtains are not available as in more developed countries. This is one of the few career choices, especially for women, that can lead to independence, safety, and an honored needed role in the community.

This is truly Grace's ticket to a life of choice and options. Our gratitude is beyond words.

THANK YOU SO MUCH, FWEH.  
Ruth Titi-Manyaka



# Grace Epoto



## Could your faith group or family sponsor a WEH orphan?

As the holidays approach, your faith group or family may be considering how to share with a poor child who has very little in what we consider basic requirements to survive and thrive. Many WEH children have been orphaned by AIDS and/or military violence. Some watched their homes burn as they fled into bush country.

For several years ending in 2009, WEH participated in a temporary Cameroon government program to help keep children in school. Ruth sent information about children with the highest needs, their stories, and photos to Friends of WEH. Common needs were required public school fees and uniforms, school supplies such as paper and pencils, blackboard chalk, and nets to reduce the risk of malaria from infected mosquitos while children slept.

Friends of WEH spoke to groups and individuals about WEH's children and their strong desire to attend school and build safe secure lives for themselves and their families. Kol Shalom, a Humanistic Jewish Congregation in Portland, Oregon, was an early sponsor. The response was heart-warming as people signed up to give.

For more information or to learn about specific children in need, please e-mail [archersh84@gmail.com](mailto:archersh84@gmail.com).

