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Orphanages of Accra: A Comparative Case Study on Orphan Care and Social Work Practices

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Abstract
Title: Orphanages of Accra: A Comparative Case Study on Orphan Care and Social Work Practices

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Objectives:

i. To gain an overview on Ghanaian views on orphan care
ii. To visit four orphanages around Accra and conduct a comparative case study
iii. To understand social work in Ghana and its interaction with the orphan care system
iv. To judge the effectiveness of the Care Reform Initiative based on my field work and provide my own recommendations for the future of orphan care in Ghana

Methodology:
During the month long project I was based in Accra. I began my conducting literary research about orphanages and social work in Ghana. My fieldwork consisted of choosing and visiting four different orphanages around Accra. During my interviews I learned about the history, services, operations, philosophy and general upkeep of each orphanage. I also focused on the prevalence (or lack there of) of social work theory and practice at each orphanage. Finally, I discussed the impact of the Care Reform Initiative at each orphanage. After collecting my data I compared the orphanages to each other and made conclusions as to which orphanage provided the best care and why.

Findings:
My research yielded me a thorough understanding of the four orphanages that I visited. I found that the orphan care system has yet to be fully developed in Ghana because of the reliance on traditional forms of caring for orphans, i.e. kinship fostering. The four orphanages that I visited illuminated the lack of social work theory, and more specifically counseling services, available to the children. The corruption and problems with bureaucracy within the government in general and Department of Social Welfare, specifically, were also clarified during my research time.

Conclusion:
The orphan care system in Ghana is still far from adequately caring for the children in need. The Department of Social Welfare needs to invest in counseling and therapy services for the orphaned children. While the Care Reform is a good initiative in theory it has yet to show any actual improvements within the system and until the Department is itself improved, the reform will never be effective. The government needs to create coordination between itself and orphanages (both public and private) in order to build a relationship of trust. My comparison of the four orphanages led me to conclude that private orphanages are better because they allow children to live in a home like environment. Also the private orphanages are able to work without the constraints of the corrupt and difficult Department of Social Welfare.

Table of Contents
Acknowledgements

To Professor Badasu, thank you for being a great advisor and for advising my project under such short notice.
To Isabel, thank you for being my spiritual leader and helping me to understand that love comes from everywhere.

To Papa Attah, lets eat Fufu later.

Introduction:

In Ghana, today, there are 1,100,000 orphans. Out of that number, 160,000 are children that have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Although Ghana has a relatively low
number of people with AIDS, in comparison to other Sub-Saharan African countries, the percentage is still rising (UNICEF, 2010). This entails that the number of orphans in Ghana is also increasing each year. The Department of Social Welfare reports that there are 148 Children’s Homes (orphanages) operating in Ghana, however only 5 are registered (CRI, 2006). Compared to the high number of orphans in Ghana, the low number of orphanages clearly cannot and does not accommodate all of the orphaned children.

This low number of orphanages in Ghana is mostly due to the reliance on traditional forms of childcare. When children loose either one or both of their parents, they are taken in and raised by extended family members. Kinship fostering is much more common than sending a child away to an orphanage, however it is also filled with many problems that can place fostered children in dangerous situations.

The little information I had about orphans before beginning this project was enough to spark my interest into the many problems neglected children face in Ghana. I was eager to uncover where the root of the problem for proper orphan care lay and what changes need to be made in order to improve the system.

A monumental change came in the development of orphan care in Ghana when the Department of Social Welfare released the Care Reform Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to move the orphans of Ghana away from institutionalized care and towards permanent foster care.

The general objectives of this research paper were to understand orphan care in Ghana and how it has developed. Specifically I wanted to first study traditional views on orphan care. The majority of my fieldwork was spent on my main objective of conducting a comparative case study of four different orphanages around Accra. Through
this I wanted to gage the effectiveness of the Care Reform and then make my own recommendations as to what the future of orphan care in Ghana should be. During each step, my final objective was to understand the role that social work theory plays in orphan care and general social welfare. This led my project to a brief examination of the corruption and bureaucracy inherent in the Department of Social Welfare and how this has stunted the ability of the government to adequately care for orphans.

Methodology:

Background

My initial topic for this project was to research human trafficking in Ghana, and more specifically to understand the role that social work plays in the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. My first few days of the project were spent researching this topic and meeting with my given advisor. However, this project was short lived because my
advisor’s busy schedule required him to leave the country during the ISP time. At this point I needed to find a new topic and a new advisor. I still wanted to focus on social work in Ghana because I plan on pursuing a graduate degree in social work after completing my undergraduate education. For my new topic I chose to study orphanages around Accra and conduct a comparison between four different orphanages. The purpose of the study was to understand how each of the orphanages operated and through this make conclusions about which orphanage provided the best home for children and why. At each orphanage I also researched the relationship between the orphanage and social work—from this research I also wanted to make conclusions about the presence (or lack there of) of social work within the field of social welfare for children.

The four orphanages I visited and conducted interviews at are: Osu Children’s Home, Christo-Centric Orphanage Home, Hope for You and Assurance of Hope for the Needy Children. These four were chosen for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, these four homes were responsive to my requests to visit and interview employees. I contacted many other orphanages in the Accra area and they either could not accommodate an interview and visit, or my phone calls were never returned. Secondly, I chose these orphanages because they include both private and public orphanages. Osu Children’s Home is a government run orphanage and is the only public orphanage in Accra. The other three are all privately run and funded orphanages. I wanted to study both types because I knew that there would be a vast difference in how the orphanages operated. I considered focusing on one orphanage and conducting a more in depth research project, however at the time I felt that a comparative case study of more than one would allow me to gain a better understanding of the orphanage system in Accra.
Literary Research and Fieldwork

Before visiting any of the orphanages, I conducted library and online research of orphanages, social work and social welfare in Ghana. I wanted to have enough background knowledge before conducting interviews at my research sites. During the interview process, I continued my literary research and focused on finding journal articles and books that addressed social work and orphanages in Accra.

After this I began contacting different orphanages, and set up interviews at each of the four sites. I decided to hold interviews with the heads of each orphanage, because it is clear that those individuals could provide me with the most information about their respective places of work. When possible I also interviewed young adults living in the orphanage homes, however this was only applicable at one of the locations. At each orphanage I conducted thirty minutes to one hour interviews and took short hand notes.

Apart from the four orphanages, I also interviewed a professor of Social Work at the University of Ghana. During the project period I attempted to interview two different individuals in the Department of Social Welfare, however due to time constraints neither were able to meet with me before the paper was due.

Field Experiences and Challenges

The main difficulties I had for this project revolved around gaining access to orphanages and contacting individuals. I also had problems with my interviewees understanding some of my questions, in particular my questions about social work. I had the most trouble at Osu Children’s Home. In order for me to visit the orphanage and interview just one individual for 30 minutes I had to go through an elaborate process. First I had to visit the home with my Letter of Introduction. Then, I had to bring that
letter to the Department of Social Welfare to receive permission to officially visit the home. It took two more visits to the home (again, after my letter of introduction was already signed by the Department of Social Welfare) before Osu Children’s Home allowed me to interview a case worker. While all of the other orphanages were very open to my research project and my questions, Osu’s Home was not. They were very hostile towards me and unwilling to share information.

My visit to Osu Children’s home opened by eyes to the corruption in the government as whole as well as specifically within the Department of Social Welfare. The problem of bureaucracy in Ghana is visible in every aspect of governmental activity. My personal experience at Osu illuminates how even the smallest task within the government requires an arduous process that is truly unnecessary and inefficient.

The three private orphanages did not have any social workers on staff and therefore it was difficult to gather any information on the role that social work played in the functioning of the orphanages. However this helped me understand the lack of social work in the orphan care system in Ghana, and this became a large part of my research project.

Another rather heart breaking difficulty that I encountered was the desire from the three private orphanages for me to donate money. To them, my project was less about research and more of an opportunity for them to inform me of all of the amenities they need at the homes, and whether or not I could donate any money to them. This bias, on the part of the orphanage owners, tainted our interviews to some extent. However, I was still able to get good answers for all of my questions.

A final challenge in my project was my ability to take pictures at each location. While I wanted to fully document each experience, I was not able to. At Christo-Centric
Orphanage, the children were living in the home with the family and it would not have been appropriate for me to document their home and put the pictures in a public document. At Osu Children’s Home, I was unable to take any pictures because the staff did not want me to take any for fear that I would capture and share a picture that somehow displayed the Home in a negative light.

If I were to conduct this project over again, I think there are a few aspects I would have changed. I would have liked to spend more time at each orphanage, because I clearly could not gain a full picture from just one or two hours spent at each one. If given more time, I would have spent a week at each place and then be able to provide a better comparative case study. Another important aspect of my project that I would have liked to explore would have been to contact people who previously worked at the orphanages. From this I could have gained a more realistic picture of how the orphanages function and the problems they face that a current employee would be unwilling to share.

Although I was able to examine the role of social work in Ghana through literary research, my field research did not provide me with many answers. In retrospect, it may have been better to focus less on the role of social work within the orphanages, and perhaps more on other aspects that would have yielded more answers.

Analysis of Data and Information

After collecting my data, I analyzed my research through a comparative lens. I took all of my information about the different orphanages and compared and contrasted what I learned. Through this comparison I began to see which orphanages were providing the best atmosphere for children and why. Also, I looked at all of my research through a
social work lens and analyzed whether or not the services provided by the orphanages were on par with accepted social work theory about orphanages.

In general I was able to make conclusions about what the orphanages were excelling in, and which aspects needed vast improvements. During my research time, the blatant corruption that exists in the social welfare and orphanage systems were brought to my attention. At the end of my project I also analyzed all of my research through this lens and tried to spot the corruption where I could and attempted to figure out the damage it was causing to the children, and how it could possibly be resolved.

Due to the brevity of this project, I realize that I have just skimmed the surface on orphanages in Accra, let alone orphanages in Ghana. Additionally my knowledge of social work in Ghana would also require many more months if not years of studying before I could claim to be thoroughly versed on it. Despite all this, I still feel that I had a unique look into orphanages of Accra and understand much more than I did before beginning this project. I am very glad that I chose this topic because it had piqued my interest and motivated me to spend more time researching and helping the orphans of Ghana. I truly hope this project also helps others to see how much work needs to be done in order to transform the orphanage system in Ghana so that the thousands of orphans in Ghana can grow up in safe and nurturing environments.
Findings:

I. Traditional Ghanaian Views and Practice on Caring for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children

Long before the first orphanage was ever opened in Ghana in 1945, Ghanaians have been providing a type of orphanage system for their needy children. Kinship fostering is the most common type of fostering in Ghana. During stressful times for a family, the family will often foster their children with relatives or community members until the situation improves and then the child will return. Sometimes kinship fostering is also used as a tool for raising children with behavioral problems. In small communities orphaned children will generally be taken in and cared for. In the majority of cases they will not be officially adopted, however, they are fully taken care of by their fostered family. Children are seen as the responsibility of the community, and therefore even if
they do not have biological families to raise them the community is still indebted to their care.

If the children’s parents are still alive, fostering becomes a positive influence in the child’s life because they have the support of their foster family as well as their biological family throughout their lives (Ansah-Koi, 2006). Fostering may also be positive when it is used to teach a young child a certain skill. A number of young people in Ghana have gained their education and life skills through fosterage. Some communities in northern Ghana believe that extended family members are more equipped to raise children, because the biological parents have too strong of an emotional attachment. Extended families may also take in orphaned children when they do not have any children of their own (UNPF, 2008).

A prominent example of traditional care for orphans in Ghana today is the practice of the Queen Mothers of the Manya Krobo District. Each Queen Mother takes in orphaned children and raises them as a part of her own family. The mothers feed and clothe the children as well as pay for all of their expenses. There is a great effort on the part of the mothers to integrate the children into the general society and avoid any stigmas attached to being an orphan—especially those related to HIV/AIDS. The orphan problem in Ghana is growing specifically because of the spread of AIDS has left many children parentless. This specific type of care for orphans by Queen Mothers is important because it strengthens the traditional African system of caring for children through extended family. In this sense the children have a family their whole lives as opposed to being cared for in an orphanage with many other children (Mensah & Lund, 2008).

Major issues can result from fostering of orphaned and vulnerable children that the traditional care system cannot accommodate for. As mentioned above, many times
these children are cared for by foster families, however they are not fully adopted by them. This entails that the children do not receive any inheritance benefits and sometimes their financial security is compromised (Ansah-Koi, 2006).

Additionally there are no rules, regulations or procedures attached to fostering in Ghana. Instead, the traditional system is based mostly on trust between families. This can create a problem when children are being exploited or abused by their foster parents/family. Also there is no way to check up on the children, because the fostering does not take place through social service agencies. Especially if the child is an orphan with neither parent alive, there is no source of support for the child outside of the foster family (Ansah-Koi, 2006). Therefore cases of abuse and exploitation can occur for many years before any intervention is made in the child’s life (UNFP, 2008).

With the rise of HIV/AIDS in Ghana, many more children are becoming orphaned which has led to the opening of more orphanages around the country. Children from urban communities have a greater need for orphanages because they do not come from small communities where there is a deeper sense of responsibility to care for them. State sponsored and controlled orphanages are required in these instances to provide homes for children when there is no community to care for them until a suitable family can be found. Although there are only a few state recognized orphanages around the country, there are countless smaller private orphanages. The rise of orphanages around the country has been accompanied by corruption and scandal. Through my interviews I discovered that many people have opened orphanages in Ghana as a money making business. They seek donations and keep the money for themselves as opposed to for the orphanage. Corruption like this has deterred people from giving donations to orphanages because they are unsure of where the money is going. A couple of orphanages just around
Accra have been shut down due to sexual abuse, and monetary problems. The negative stigma surrounding orphanages is part of the motivation behind the Care Reform Initiative (Solomon Omari 17 APR 10).

II. The Care Reform Initiative

Before providing descriptions of the four orphanages I visited it is essential to address the Care Reform Initiative (CRI) that was implemented by the Department of Social Welfare in 2006. The information I gathered about the CRI comes from the website created by the Department of Social Welfare (ovcghana.org). This initiative is meant for the improvement of integrated care for vulnerable children and families in Ghana. The purpose of the initiative is to move Ghana away from a reliance on institutionalized care systems, i.e. orphanages, and towards integrated family and community based care. The goal is for children to be placed in permanent family homes, as opposed to orphanages, so that they can receive consistent care their whole lives.

The Care Initiative is comprised of four main parts. The first part is the prevention of the disintegration of families through different programs that will help families stay together and provide them with resources. Secondly, the initiative aims at reintegrating children with extended family (kinship care), so that if the biological parents of a child cannot care for them, the child will first be placed with other extended family members. Thirdly, when kinship care is not available children will be placed in foster care with foster families for either a temporary or permanent status. Finally, the fourth option for a child who cannot return to their family is for the child to be adopted by a family, preferably a Ghanaian family.
Further goals of the Care Reform are to create a database of all 3,800 children in orphanages and to also strengthen the Department of Social Welfare. Both of these items are very essential to the success of the care reform. As of now there is no database that tracks children, and this will be even more essential once the children are spread out and not concentrated in one orphanage home. The reform’s effectiveness depends on how well social workers through the Department of Social Welfare are paid and motivated to make sure that each child is placed in adequate care. Other goals are to ensure that the three government operated (including Osu Children’s Home) and the seven approved private orphanages around Ghana are improved on all levels and house only 25 children at the most. Also, the plan emphasizes creating a home for children with special needs, creating regulatory standards for fostering, kinship, residential and adoption care and finally sensitizing individuals involved in the child welfare system to goals of the initiative.

The Care Reform is a very impressive list of goals, however already four years into the initiative there seems to be little action. The end result of the reform is complete transformation of the orphanage system, and it will take time before any real change occurs.

III. Christo-Centric Orphanage

Christo-Centric Orphanage began 5 years ago in the city of Dome. On April 17th, 2010, I interviewed Rebecca and Solomon Omari, the Christo-Centric Orphanage owners at the orphanage location. Rebecca and Solomon are Dome residents who could not help but notice the number of children in their neighborhood who were orphaned and not attending school. Inspired by the children in need, Rebecca and Solomon opened their
home and began to take in orphaned children. From the onset, Rebecca and Solomon paid for everything for these children—food, education, medical bills, etc. They first started with three children and as time went on they took in more, however they soon started to realize that they needed another source of funding in order to support the children. To compensate, Rebecca and Solomon built a private school on the same property as their house. Local children from the neighborhood pay to attend the school and the Omaris use the money from the tuition to cover the costs for ten orphan children to also attend the school.

Overtime, their household also became a place for children as well as teenagers to go to for their food, clothing, and overall parental care even if they physically lived with family members. Currently fifteen or so teenagers stop by the house every day, while only two or three actually live with the Omaris. In my interview with Rebecca she told me that the philosophy of Christo-Centric is to make children economically independent in order to ensure that they do not get involved in social vices. It is clear from my conversation with Rebecca how much her heart breaks every time she sees a young person become involved in prostitution or street hustling.

The Omaris would have continued to open their home up to more orphans, however in 2006, the Care Reform imposed new restrictions on the orphanage community. Christo-Centric does not qualify as an orphanage according to the standards supplied by the government because the children who they are providing care for are not officially considered orphans in the eyes of the government. While these children are on the streets and not living with a family, most of them do have family members (maybe even their actual parents) who are alive. While I was visiting the orphanage they told me that they were in the process of changing their name to the Christo-Centric Foundation
because they are providing care to children, but not necessarily just orphans. After the Care Reform was enacted, Rebecca and Solomon had to go around Dome looking for the parents or family members of the children they had been caring for. Solomon told me they find the family members and beg them to take the child in just to provide them a place to sleep at night, while Christo-Centric still provides all of the education, food, medical bills, clothing, etc that the child needs.

Apart from providing education, clothing, medical services and other basic necessities, Christo-Centric focuses on providing a religious education. Every Sunday all of the children go to church, whether it be with the Omaris or with the children’s families. When I interviewed Justice, a teenager living with the Omaris, he said that his favorite part of Christo-Centric was the strong emphasis on Christianity. Aside from that, Christo-Centric does not provide any therapy to the children. They do provide resources to young persons who have left the home to go to school or work in other parts of the country. Rebecca described that the services are not formal, however if an individual leaves and needs help of any sort, Rebecca and Solomon provide what they can. Their main goal is to ensure that when the individuals are old enough to go to college or find a job that they are moved from the orphanage (or from their family’s home in Dome) to a stable environment.

Christo-Centric is a registered NGO with the Ghanaian government yet when I asked whether or not the government provides them with any support both of the Omaris laughed: they have never, nor do they ever expect to receive any help from the government. The only contact they have had with the Department of Social Welfare was when Rebecca went to the department to ask for help from social workers, yet none have ever visited the orphanage. Christo-Centric also has no relationship with any of the other
orphanages around Accra. Rebecca and Solomon both spoke extensively about how little trust they have in the government and its ability to provide for them and the children that they are caring for. The Omaris both seemed very hesitant about adoption—so far no children have been adopted from the orphanage despite the fact that they have had requests. They are too unsure of where the children are going and prefer to look after them as opposed to give them away to families that they do not know. Rebecca is in the process of beginning a sponsorship program so that people can sponsor a child from Christo-Centric and help pay for the student’s school fees, clothing, food, and other necessities.

IV. Assurance of Hope for the Needy Children

Assurance of Hope for the Needy Children is a brand new orphanage that was started just one year ago. Assurance stems from a previous Teshie based orphanage, called Hands of Mercy. Hands of Mercy was a Canadian financed orphanage that was closed down over a year ago due to financial and possible corruption issues (I was unable to receive a clear answer as to what truly led to the shutdown of the orphanage). Assurance is run by Pastor Enoch Y. Mensah, who used to work for Hands of Mercy before opening this orphanage of his own. I interviewed Pastor Mensah at the orphanage site on April 21st, 2010. While interviewing Pastor Mensah, he repeatedly made the point that Assurance has no affiliation with Hands of Mercy and they no longer receive any sort of assistance from the Canadian based organization. Assurance is a private NGO completely funded by Pastor Mensah himself, with the help of donations from outside sources.
The orphanage houses 38 children from all over Ghana. The majority of the children stay at a two bedroom home in Teshie, however eight of the teenagers stay with Pastor Mensah in his apartment close to the Teshie home. These young adults stay with the Pastor so that they can be closer to the school that they attend. The children are referred to Assurance from different sources: Pastor Mensah explained that some children are referred by the Department of Social Welfare while other children are brought in from villages all around Ghana. Apart from referring children, the Department of Social Welfare has no relationship with Assurance except for one instance, when a social worker visited the orphanage to report on its activities. Assurance also does not have any relationship or coordination with any other orphanages, despite Pastor Mensah’s claim that Assurance belongs to the Ghana Orphanages Association. This Association is a union of about 25 orphanages around Ghana. No other orphanage I visited is a part of this organization. The goal of the association is to provide coordination, resources, classes, skills training, etc to orphanages. While this association seems like a positive force in the orphanage system of Ghana, I only heard of it in this one interview and when I checked the website, Assurance was not even listed as a member.

The philosophy of Assurance is to function as a home. The two parents of the orphanage are Pastor Mensah and his wife, and they attempt to be parental figures to all thirty eight children. There are also a few other volunteers/employees that work at the orphanage. Aside from providing an education to the children, Assurance has many activities for the children to do when they are not in school. They have music and art classes, attend Sunday school and have frequent outings to places like the beach or recreational centers. Sowah Patterson (Informal Interview, 22 APR 10), a volunteer at
Assurance, teaches the traditional art of Batik to the children at the orphanage. Assurance does not provide any therapy or counseling to the children.

Since the orphanage is still very young and the oldest child in the orphanage is finishing secondary school now, it is not possible to determine the resources Assurance will provide to their children once they leave the orphanage. The orphanage is very open to adoption, and currently some of the children are in the process of becoming adopted. The strict rules of the Department of Social Welfare regarding adoption make it very difficult for any family to adopt from an orphanage, and Pastor Mensah regarded this in a negative light.

When I visited Assurance I was welcomed by about twenty children who were very bubbly and excited for visitors. They sang me songs and were very happy. I take the time to mention this because it was clear that the employees of the orphanage have a good relationship with the children and that they are able to make the children happy. While seeing this made me very excited, I also soon realized that thirty children live in this two bedroom house. Pastor Mensah mentioned how some children have to share mattresses and that the orphanage is in great need of more space. This problem needs to be addressed immediately, and it seems that in due time the orphanage will be closed down by the Department of Social Welfare unless more accommodation is created for the children. At the end of my interview I asked Pastor Mensah about his knowledge of the Care Reform Initiative, yet he did not know much about it and the reform has not affected his orphanage yet.

V. Hope for You
Hope for You was founded in 2005 by Felicia Mensah, a Ghanaian woman who was living in London and working at a school when she was struck with the inspiration to return to Ghana and begin a charity. I interviewed Felicia in the city of Dome on April 23, 2010 about the history and current status of her orphanage, Hope for You. While working at the school she noticed all of the school supplies that the school was throwing away at the end of each semester. She realized these hardly used supplies should be brought to Africa to be given to the children there. That is when she returned to Ghana and started a charity where she visited villages and would give school supplies and other necessities to the children. After that, she started an orphanage in Dome and rented a big home for all the children. Many volunteers have helped Felicia at the orphanage and often times the volunteers will pay the school fees for the children.

A short time after opening the orphanage, Felicia began taking in neglected mentally and physically disabled children into her home. While she was able to take care of them for a while, soon the financial burden became too strong and Felicia had to close down that part of the orphanage. She does regret this, although she realizes the need to focus on one project at a time. During the same time the rent for the house in Dome became too costly and she had to move the children to a new location. I could not visit the orphanage because they are now in this transition period. Felicia’s main goal, currently, is finding new accommodation for her children. She has rented a small apartment for five of the children, and the other ones she had to disperse among the community.

Hope for You is a registered NGO with the Department of Social Welfare but she receives no support from them. A social worker has not even come to Hope for You for an inspection. Felicia is very close with a person who works in the Department and in the
beginning, this woman used to come visit the orphanage and lend advice to Felicia. Felicia also used to reach out to Osu Children’s Home for support, yet that relationship has ended.

Felicia was aware of the Care Reform, however it has not affected her orphanage. My interview with Felicia was very interesting because unlike all of the other orphanages, she was hesitant to talk about her monetary issues. She did not want to seem like she was asking me, or anyone, for money. She also placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the community, Dome, where her original orphanage was. She said that during the time she was there the community would constantly support her and the children with food and other supplies that the orphanage needed. Felicia is looking for a similar type of community, possibly even a village, to purchase a new permanent home for the children in her care. Like the employees of Christo-Centric and Assurance of Hope, Felicia takes care of the orphanage, while also having a separate job in order to make money for the orphanage.

VI. Osu Children’s Home

The Osu Children’s Home began as a Government operated institution, under the Department of Social Welfare, in 1962. For my interview at the Home I spoke to Agnes Abolimpoh, the case worker on staff, on April 22, 2010.

In the home there are 250 children from the ages of birth through eighteen years. The housing for the children is all located on the Home’s campus. Also located on the campus is a primary school, as well as several other buildings such as social halls, eating halls, etc. The children are brought into the Children’s Home by the police, social workers, the courts, and hospitals.
Aside from the primary school, the Children’s Home provides food, all medical needs and clothing for the children. Despite being the Government operated and most well known and established orphanage in Accra, the Home does not have any therapy or counseling services. At times, if a child is in great needs, one of the four social workers employed at the home will help the child out however no formal counseling services have been created. The Home also has some children with disabilities; however there are no specific services or specialists for those children. Most of the children at the orphanage do not have parents and the ones that do were brought to the orphanage because their parents could not care for them. Once the children are 18, the Home does not let them go until they have secured a job or further education. When they leave, the Home keeps in contact with the individual and provides support until the young person is able to stand on their own financially.

On a day to day basis Agnes handles the files of all 250 children. She deals with receiving cases, discharging cases, and ensuring effective coordination between the Home and the referral institutions. She also cross checks the performance of each aspect of the orphanage and reports back to the manageress.

The Home is funded by the government as well as through private donations. When the Home is in need of a specific item they will appeal to the public through the media in hope of receiving private donations. Aside from the four social workers there are a total of 93 staff members, including all security staff, school teachers, cleaning staff, and others.

Adoption from the Home is very common, both internationally and locally. Agnes was very aware of the Care Reform and she informed me that some of the children have already been put into foster care since the initiative began. A study on the correlation
between the children’s home and adoption found that the home was a strong factor in the
rate of adoption of children in Accra because the adoption process cannot occur without
their recommendation. Since the home is the only government run orphanage in Accra,
they are the main source that children are adopted from (Akpalu, 2006).

Also, social workers from the Department of Social Welfare are frequent visitors
at the Home in order to perform inspections. The only coordination the Home has with
other orphanages is when NGO’s will sometimes bring the orphanages together for
events.

An important part of my time at Osu Children’s Home was my experience
attempting to even have a chance to interview anyone at the home. I had to visit the home
four times before I was given permission to speak to anyone. When Agnes finally sat
down with me she did not give more than 30 minutes, and during the interview she was
constantly speaking with other individuals. When I asked about any sort of statistical data
she would simply say she did not know. Then, when I asked her if the Home produces
any annual reports, she said that they do however they are private. I was not allowed to
take any photos, unless they were approved by Agnes, however she did not have any time
to give me approval to take any pictures. While I was interviewing Agnes, a group of
students from America were visiting the orphanage and donating toys to the children. The
students must have taken a walk around the campus, because at one point Agnes jumped
up and started yelling at the students for walking around without permission.
Additionally while I was there a camera crew arrived and all the staff members became
immediately on edge and began questioning the camera crew. The fear that the staff
members have about exposure of the Home that they do not approve is unbelievable.
Cleary, the corruption and problems associated with orphanages in Ghana has negatively
affected the Home because they spend much of their time monitoring their image as an orphanage as opposed to working on creating counseling services or other much needed services for the children.

VII. Social Work in Ghana

Effective care of orphaned and vulnerable children relies on the efficiency of the state social workers. As of now, the Department of Social Welfare and the social workers employed by the department are not equipped to adequately monitor and care for the orphaned children of Accra. Every person I interviewed (aside from the care worker at Osu Children’s Home) explained to me the blatant corruption that exists within the Department and the lack of effort on the part of the Department to reach out and help private organizations, like the three other orphanages I visited. Felicia Mensah, the owner of Hope for You explained that the Care Reform will be ineffective until the Department itself changes, and is able to employ social workers who can carry out the terms of the reform.

My most enlightening interview about the reality of social work in Ghana was from Professor P.K. Abrefah, a professor of social work at the University of Ghana (P.K. Abrefah 20 APR 10). The first school of social work began in Ghana in 1946. Previously, students of social work had to travel to Britain in order to be trained, and then return to Ghana. Thus, the school in Ghana began from the need to train social workers in the country. From 1946 on, social work schooling expanded to include higher degrees; in 2004 the University of Ghana started the first Masters of Philosophy in Social Work. In general, whether in Universities or in the government, social work is generally ignored. Professor Abrefah had to petition to make social work its own department in the
University in 2001. Additionally, currently the Social Welfare Department in the government is a sub section of the Department of Employment and Social Welfare, when in reality it should have a department of its own. Aside from a degree in social work attainable at the University or a certificate of social work from the Osu School of Social Work there is no institute that can certify individuals to perform specific social work related jobs.

A possible positive force in social work in Ghana is the Ghana Association of Social Workers, however this organization is faced with problems as well. The association is filled mostly with public servants, including the president who does not even hold any certificate or degree in social work. The majority of the members are bound to the Department of Social Welfare and do not speak out against the Department for fear of losing their jobs. This halts the effectiveness of an outside organization of social workers to change the Department, and improve social work. Because of the inefficiency of the Department and the extreme difficulty of being a social worker in Ghana, most of the students that are trained from the University either go abroad for jobs or work at NGOs. For the government, this means that the highest trained individuals are not contributing to the work of the Department of Social Welfare, where the most help is needed (P.K. Abrefah 20 APR 10).

Specifically for orphanages, very few students of the University of Ghana join this field of work. Students in the past have found that the state orphanages refuse to be transparent and the students have much difficulty researching and working there. This entails that the employees of the orphanages have very low, if any, qualifications for working with children in an orphanage setting. My own research clearly reflected this: The three private orphanages I visited did not have any employees with degrees in social
Only at Osu Children’s Home did I find individuals with degrees, however even in this case many of the employees at Osu still do not have the appropriate degrees. The job description of a social worker in Ghana is not appealing or desirable, and until this changes students of social work will continue to look for jobs abroad or with private organizations within Ghana (P.K. Abrefah 20 APR 10).

A recent 2008 report from the Journal of Social Work, found many of the same problems inherent in the Department of Social Welfare that inhibits the social workers ability to do their job. All social workers interviewed for this article cited that the chronic under-funding makes even simple administrative tasks, like data recording, impossible. Other simple necessities such as transportation are lacking in the department’s offices all over Ghana, which does not allow social workers to make field visits. The result is a deterioration of the relationship between the social worker and the client. The social worker’s inability to help the client breeds distrust and a lack of desire to interact with the social worker in any setting. Usually, the only relationship that the social worker and private organizations have is when the private organizations initially register with the Department of Social Welfare. After that initial meeting usually a social worker never visits the agency, and the agency in return does not reach out to the social worker. Again, this is consistent with the field research I performed: the private orphanages had only met with the Department one time, and since that time they have had no contact. Furthermore the private orphanages made it clear to me that they expect nothing from the government and they do not see state social workers as a possible source for help or support. (Laird, 2008)

VIII. Comparison of Four Orphanages
The four orphanages that I visited during my fieldwork opened my eyes to the harsh reality of social welfare in Ghana. An inadequate social welfare system has led to many orphans being left behind, and the need for individuals to step in and create orphanages of their own. The three private orphanages I visited all consisted of people with separate jobs of their own who felt compelled to help children, because there were so many in need. The issue of orphan care in Ghana grew very serious when scandals erupted from orphanages. For example, at the Peace and Love orphanage sexual abuse by young children to other even younger children was discovered. Issues like this prompted the creation of the Care Reform Act, however the positive effects of the initiative have yet to be felt by the orphan care community (Salia, 2009).

Out of the four orphanages that I visited there was no clear “winner” as to the place that seemed best for orphaned children. Each orphanage had problems that needed to be addressed. Christo-Centric seemed to have the most promising future ahead of them. The owners of the orphanage are very well educated and each has relatively well paying jobs. Their idea of creating a school in order to fund the schooling and other expenses of the orphans has allowed them to become a self sufficient organization and additionally allows the orphaned children to become fully integrated with the community of school children. The ultimate goal of Christo-Centric is to move to a big plot of land that they already own and open a bigger orphanage to house more children. They were the most knowledgeable about the Care Reform and about the general rules and regulations set up by the Department of Social Welfare. Also, Christo-Centric only housed about ten orphans which allows the few children that they do have to feel a part of a family. Even though some of the children will have to return to an extended family member (again because of the Care Reform) Christo-Centric will still provide all of the
children in need with full care. Their main setback is that they do not provide any sort of therapeutic services to the children, just like the other orphanages. A home for an orphan is an extremely important factor, however psychological counseling is equally essential. Because neither Rebecca nor her husband have social work degrees they cannot provide the full care an orphaned child may need.

Assurance of Hope for Needy Children faces similar problems as Christo-Centric. They too do not have any social workers on staff, or any ability to provide such services. They are also under-funded which has led to many children sleeping in a small home. On a positive note they provide many activities outside of school for the children to engage in, and more importantly they ensure that each one of their 38 children goes to school every day. Because of the large number of children, and lack of adequate funding it is questionable how much support Assurance can provide to each child aside from the basic necessities of life.

Hope for You Orphanage Home was in a time of transition when I visited them, so it is difficult to truly understand what state they are in. The owner, Felicia Mensah, has many goals in mind for the orphanage and once she is able to purchase a new home, she will be able to start beginning her work again with the children. She currently only housed five orphans and to them she provided the basic necessities: schooling, medical care, clothing, etc. Again, her lack of social work training inhibits the full potential of the orphanage to provide all encompassing care for the child. Hopefully Felicia will be able to restart her foster home for mentally challenged young adults. This is a subgroup of the Ghanaian society that is largely ignored and it is important for more care to become available for them.
Osu Children’s Home, the one public orphanage I visited, is in my opinion the least effective way of caring for orphans. Firstly, even though Osu has four employed social workers and is sponsored by the Department of Social Welfare they do not even have any therapy or counseling for the children. If the most funded and staffed orphanage has not even developed counseling services yet, the rest of the orphanages in Accra are that much further behind. There are 250 children, yet just one case worker who is responsible for keeping track of all of the children and their progress. There are far too many children for each one to be receiving full care. None of these children are growing up in a family structured environment, as some of the children are doing in the smaller orphanages. The high rate of adoption in the Home is very important because it is giving many children a chance at a family based upbringing. In the past, orphanages in Accra have faced criticism for corruption and a lack of transparency. When I visited Osu it was very clear to me that the staff spends much of their time defending the image of the Home and avoiding scandals at any cost. The Care Reform should initially focus on dispersing the children from this orphanage into homes around Ghana, rather than asking smaller orphanages like Christo-Centric to send the few children they do have back to families that are not equipped to take care of them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through both my field work and my literary research, I have concluded that the private orphanages seem to be a better place for orphans to grow up in than a public one. I did not initially think I would feel this way because the public orphanages have access to many resources and they are forced to be transparent organizations that must conform to national guidelines. However, I found that the history of corruption in orphanages has left public orphanages struggling to defend their image. Additionally the public
orphanages are too large, and the focus on orphan care needs to be shifted towards smaller orphanages caring more intimately for fewer children. The Department of Social Welfare should rely on these smaller private orphanages, as opposed to reject their existence, because they can provide better care than publicly run institutions.

The Care Reform truly is an outstanding plan to reorganize the orphan care system, yet the Department of Social Welfare is far from ready to handle the task of this reform. Until the Reform is properly implemented, the Department of Social Welfare should focus on placing children in these smaller, private orphanages. They need to create open relationships between the orphanages and social workers so that the orphanages can have access to resources, and the social workers can ensure the proper care of the children. The Care Reform stresses kinship care as the initial form of care for orphaned children. I do agree with this because not only does it allow children to be reintegrated into a family structure, but it also reinforces traditional Ghanaian child raising practices. However, with the rise of HIV/AIDS and orphaned children it is not realistic to imagine a society without orphanages. Thus, the Department should look to these smaller private orphanages as good places for children to go because they provide a more family like environment.

Any change in orphan care will also rely on the Department’s ability to rebuild trust with the orphanages. All of the orphanages I spent time with had no expectations from the government and felt that they would never receive any support. The Department needs to spend time building relationships with the orphanages through consistency and reliability. From this efficient coordination between the private and public spheres of orphan care will begin to bridge and true change can occur.
For any orphan child, whether in foster care or institutionalized care, the Department of Social Welfare needs to begin providing counseling and therapy services. This task should be given to the social workers employed by the government or through private organizations. In order for this to occur the Ghanaian government needs to funnel resources into employing more social workers and generally providing more support to the Department of Social Welfare.

It is clear from my research that no change in orphan care will occur until the Department of Social Welfare is drastically transformed and provided with enough money. The general attitude towards social work also needs to change: the Department of Social Welfare should inform the Ghanaian public about the purpose and importance of social work. This will bring support from the people towards the increase in the prevalence of social work into their lives. Hopefully these changes will be implemented in a timely manner so that the Care Reform can truly begin to change the orphan care system and the orphans of Ghana will grow up in safe and nurturing environments.

Informants:


Mensah, Felicia. Orphanage Manager. Formal Interview about Hope for You Orphanage, Dome. 23 APR 10.


References:


**Appendix A: The Care Reform Initiative**

The following is taken from the official Department of Social Welfare website for the Care Reform Initiative: <http://ovcghana.org/what_is_cri.html>

**THE CARE REFORM INITIATIVE (CRI) – 2006/2010**

TOWARDS INTEGRATED CARE SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN GHANA.

**DEFINITION**

The CRI 2006/10 seeks to de-emphasize over reliance on care systems for vulnerable children based on institutions and move towards a range of integrated family and community based care services for those children without appropriate parental care.
**BROAD GOAL**
The goal of the CARE REFORM INITIATIVE is the establishment of a more consistent and stable approach to caring for vulnerable children in Ghana so that each child will be assured of a permanent home in a supportive and loving family.

**MAIN COMPONENTS**
This approach will be based on four main components:

- **Prevention**: To prevent the disintegration of families through linkages with strategies that strengthen families such as the social grant programme (LEAP), scholarships, food packages, access to National Health Insurance and other support programmes.
- **Reintegration with the extended family (Kinship Care)**: In cases where children are separated from their parents, to find loving relatives who are able to create a caring and stable environment for the child.
- **Fostering**: When kinship care cannot be provided, temporary or permanent care with foster families can still provide a good home for children.
- **Adoption**: When the possibility of a family reunion is exhausted, to find the child a loving adoptive home, preferably with a Ghanaian family.

**EXPECTED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN**

1. Institutionalization as a last resort for OVC, and not for more than three consecutive months, and social support systems such as cash transfers used to promote in-family care.
2. 3,800 children in institutions identified and a database to track their cases created.
3. The care system that relies on orphanages transformed into one based on kinship and short and long term fostering.
4. 3,800 children in orphanages resettled in a family care context, or transitioned into independent living.
5. Fostering and adoption rates increased by at least 50%.
6. The general public in all districts sensitized on the benefits of family care and the risks associated with institutionalized care.
7. State employed social workers adequately paid and motivated to sustain the management of the OVC database, individual care plans and monitoring systems.
8. The three government-operated, and seven approved private residential Children’s Homes transformed into model child care institutions.*
9. A shelter, a Home for children with special needs and a mother and baby home for transitional care available in each region.*
10. Regulatory standards for Fostering and Kinship Care, Residential Care and Adoption produced.
11. Fund for care and support packages that enable children to remain with their families established
12. Members of the Judiciary, Child Panel members, law enforcement agents, traditional and political leaders at a district and community level, and other stakeholders sensitized in 170 districts.

* Not more than 25 children

**ACTIONS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE UNDER THE CRI**

Activities that have taken place under or additional to the OVC Care Reform Initiative (CRI)-GHANA
“Every child deserves a family” July/Aug 2006- August 2007

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<th>Subject</th>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Training Seminar for 256 Social Workers</td>
<td>Bunso, 17th to 21st July 06</td>
<td>DEP’T SOCIAL WELFARE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training for Care Givers</td>
<td>March 07</td>
<td>OICI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop for stakeholders UN Draft Guidelines for the Protection and Alternative care of Children without parental care</td>
<td>13th to 14th March 07</td>
<td>MOWCA</td>
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<td>Half day familiarization workshop for 15 OA staff</td>
<td>12th March 07</td>
<td>OrphanAid Africa</td>
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<td>One day workshop for 30 key Home owners and managers</td>
<td>April 25th 26th 27 2007</td>
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<td>Two day workshop for 20 Central and Western Region Home owners and managers</td>
<td>Takoradi, 24th -27th June 2007</td>
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<td>Two day workshop for 14 Northern Region Home owners and managers</td>
<td>Bolga 16th, 17th August 2007</td>
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<td>Two day workshop for 32 Ashanti Region Home owners and managers</td>
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<td>Two day workshop for 53 Central, GR Accra and Volta Region Home owners and managers</td>
<td>Bunso, 10th and 11th Sept 2007</td>
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<td>July 06</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare /Orphnahid Africa</td>
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<td>Carrying out of the Nationwide Census</td>
<td>July to December 06</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare Orphanaid Africa</td>
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<td>Production of a Database and final changes to the Census</td>
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<td>Dep’t Social Welfare Orphan Aid Africa</td>
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<td>Event Description</td>
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<td>Drafting of the Standards</td>
<td>March 07</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare Orphanaid Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drafting of the Legislative Instrument</td>
<td>March 07</td>
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<td>OVC Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td>23 June 07</td>
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<td>OVC stakeholder Group 2 day workshop on the Standards</td>
<td>August 07</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare</td>
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<td>OVC Steering Committee Meeting</td>
<td>26 October 07</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject Date Implementation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Talk Show (1 hour) “Adoption”</td>
<td>25 Feb and 4 March 07</td>
<td>Radio Gold/ Dep’t Social Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article (3/4 page) “Family Care- the movement form residential “orphanages” to family reunification</td>
<td>March 3rd 07</td>
<td>The Statesman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creation and Dissemination of A Jingle “Family Care” in 5 local languages</td>
<td>March to December 2007</td>
<td>Radio Stations</td>
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<td>3/4 Page Editorial in Daily Graphic on OVC Care Reform</td>
<td>30th May 07</td>
<td>Daily Graphic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Launch of OVC Care Reform Initiative</td>
<td>Aug 23rd August 2007</td>
<td>Dep’t Social Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisement on training programmes</td>
<td>Thurs 16th and Fri 17th Aug 2007, Thurs 5th Sept 2007</td>
<td>Daily Graphic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why Ghana should adopt the Hague Convention on Adoption (Two hours discussion on Orphanages Standards and International Adoption)</td>
<td>19th Aug 07</td>
<td>Radio Gold</td>
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<td>Article “Social Welfare Dep’t to close down badly run orphanages”</td>
<td>10th Aug 07</td>
<td>Daily Graphic</td>
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<td>TV3 News</td>
<td>9th and 10th Aug</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTV News</td>
<td>11th Aug</td>
<td>GTV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orphan Care Reform Initiative launched</td>
<td>11th Aug 07</td>
<td>Ghanaian Times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Govt should support orphanage care givers</td>
<td>14th Aug 07</td>
<td>The Chronicle</td>
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**Appendix B: Statistics**

The following statistics are taken from the UNICEF website:

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ghana_statistics.html>

<table>
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<th>HIV AIDS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated adult HIV prevalence rate (aged 15–49), 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated number of people (all ages) living with HIV, 2007 (thousands), estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated number of people (all ages) living with HIV, 2007 (thousands), low estimate</td>
<td>230</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated number of people (all ages) living with HIV, 2007 (thousands), high estimate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother–to–child transmission, Estimated number of women (aged 15+) living with HIV, 2007 (thousands)</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paediatric infections, Estimated number of children (aged 0–14) living with HIV, 2007 (thousands)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention among young people, HIV prevalence among young people (aged 15–24), 2007, male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention among young people, HIV prevalence among young people (aged 15–24), 2007, female</td>
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<td>Prevention among young people, % who have comprehensive knowledge of HIV, 2003–2008*, male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention among young people, % who have comprehensive knowledge of HIV, 2003–2008*, female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention among young people, % who used condom at last higher–risk sex, 2003–2008*, male</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention among young people, % who used condom at last higher–risk sex, 2003–2008*, female</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orphans, Children (aged 0–17) orphaned by AIDS, 2007, estimate (thousands)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orphans, Children (aged 0–17) orphaned due to all causes, 2007, estimate (thousands)</td>
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<td>Orphans, Orphan school attendance ratio, 2003–2008*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child labour (5–14 years) 1999–2008*, total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child labour (5–14 years) 1999–2008*, male</td>
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<td>Child labour (5–14 years) 1999–2008*, female</td>
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<td>Child marriage 2000–2008*, total</td>
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<td>Child marriage 2000–2008*, urban</td>
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<td>Birth registration 2000–2008*, total</td>
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<td>Birth registration 2000–2008*, urban</td>
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<td>Birth registration 2000–2008*, rural</td>
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<td>Female genital mutilation/cutting 1997–2007*, women a (15–49 years), total</td>
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<td>Female genital mutilation/cutting 1997–2007*, daughtersb, total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude towards domestic violence, 2001–2008*, total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child disability 1999–2008*, total</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child discipline, 2005–2007*, total</td>
<td>89</td>
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Appendix C: Interview Questions

These questions were used during my fieldwork interviews at the four different orphanages:

1. Brief history of the orphanage? Inspiration for starting orphanage? When/Where?
2. Population served by orphanage?
3. Services provided to children? More than just education, food, clothes?
4. How long do the children normally stay?
5. Who brings the children to the orphanage?
6. Do children ever get adopted? If so, how? How frequent? Are there any services provided to the adoptive family or child?
7. Reasons that children are orphaned?
8. Describe living arrangements and general living atmosphere of orphanage?
9. Does the orphanage coordinate with other orphanages or agencies?
10. What is the relationship between the orphanage and the government, more specifically the Department of Social Welfare?
11. What is the relationship between the orphanage and social workers?
12. Is there any social work theory employed by the orphanage?
13. What is their personal conception of orphanages around Accra and Ghana? Good or bad? What needs to be changed?
14. Have they ever heard of the Care Reform Initiative and if so how does the reform affect their orphanage?
15. What is the future of their orphanage? What aspects need change? What funding do they need and why?
16. Where does the general funding come from? Private donations? If so, from who?

17. Once the children are old enough to leave the orphanage what services are provided to them? Do they keep in contact with the orphanage?

18. Does the orphanage perform any type of advocacy work?

19. What do they feel needs to change in the government or general Ghanaian society that will better serve Ghana’s orphans?

Appendix D: Orphanage Information

1. Christo-Centric Orphanage

   Website: [http://www.christocentricorphanage.org/](http://www.christocentricorphanage.org/)

   Address: House No.3 Dome, off Old Taifa and about 300 metres away from Dome Excel Fuel Service Station

2. Assurance of Hope for Needy Children

   This orphanage does not have a website, but the email of the manager of the orphanage, Pastor Enoch Y. Mensah, is: enochmensah_2002@yahoo.com

3. Hope for You


4. Osu Children’s Home

   Website: [http://osuchildrenshome.com/](http://osuchildrenshome.com/)

   Address: OSU Children's Home
   P. O. Box 640
   Accra