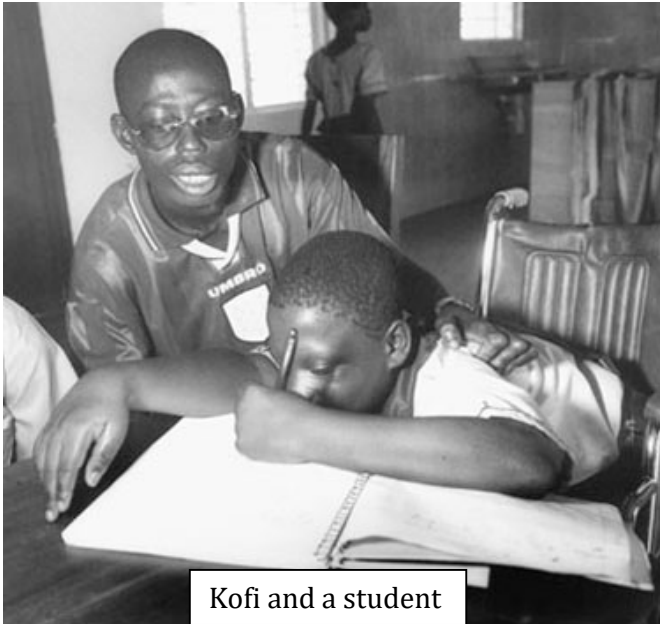


**By Kofi Nyarko, Ahotokurom, Ghana, West Africa**



Kofi and a student

Kofi Nyarko, a leprosy survivor, comes from a family of 4 children, who have lost both parents. At the age of just 7 Kofi began to fall ill and display symptoms of leprosy. However, he was not diagnosed until the age of 10 and due to his situation, he was left unable to avail of treatment for his disease for years. Due to his leprosy being left untreated his condition severely worsened and he developed deformities in his hands and feet. The people in Kofi's village began to lose hope for his family, as the last remaining male was on the brink of death. Fortunately, in 1984 at the age of 13, Kofi was introduced to a man

called Br. Vincent, who brought him to Ahotokurom with the promise of a better life. Kofi stayed in the childcare facility at Padre Pio Rehabilitation centre in Ahotokurom, where he met Sr. Kate, Sr. Monica, Sr. Peg, Sr. Ínez and Sr. Pat – who took extremely good care of him. Though throughout this time he was very sick and weak, and was orphaned, Kofi recalls feeling right at home with the Sisters who were like parents to him. The Sisters in Ahotokurom paid particular attention to the importance of Kofi's education and did everything they could to make sure he completed his schooling and he completed forms 1-3 while staying there with their help. In 1986, Sr. Monica introduced Kofi to a specialist doctor from the Netherlands who would operate on his feet to improve the condition of his deformities caused by leprosy. He was sent to Ankaful leprosy hospital to receive the surgery and spent the following 6 months confined to a wheelchair under the care of the Sisters in Ahotokurom. During this time the Sisters created many opportunities for Kofi. A novice came to Ahotokurom to tutor him, and when he was accepted to secondary school in Elmina in 1987, he was given housing in Anakful and a bicycle in order to kick-start an independent life outside of the centre and success in his studies. In 2001, Kofi was given the life changing opportunity of travelling to England to be trained as a special needs teacher by Fr. Douglas Bull.



He was the first person in his community to ever travel abroad, and the experience opened many doors for him. Kofi made many friends and contacts while in the UK, and on returning to Ghana he received an invite to attend a conference in South Africa regarding leprosy in 2005. At the conference Kofi was introduced to representatives from NGO's all over the world. The World Health Organisation took

particular interest in Kofi's story and invited him to join a Tropical Neglected Diseases campaign as a panel member. To this day, Kofi has had a successful career working for the WHO, and has travelled all over the world to attend conferences discussing tropical neglected diseases, including countries such as The Netherlands, Switzerland, India, America, Korea, China, Ireland, Ethiopia, Congo and Kenya, to name a few. Today, Kofi has been married to his wife for 21 years and has 4 children, and is still at the peak of his career. He is hailed as nothing short of a hero in his hometown due to his incredible transformation and success despite the extraordinary struggles he has endured. Kofi may not have been able to survive, let alone reach such success without the help he received from Daughters of Mary and Joseph. He is forever grateful to everyone involved.