

Around the World or Down the Street

KC Sorensen



CORNERS

OUTREACH

My Story

Before becoming a Program Director at Corners Outreach, I volunteered with Peace Corps in Cameroon, West Africa. Living with a host family for three months, I received cultural and technical training to prepare myself for my teaching assignment, as well as other academic-based projects. I then moved to the town of Bafang, and taught at St Paul's Bilingual School of Bafang-Banka. Even though my school was relatively well off, the classrooms were comprised of basic wooden benches (four students to a bench), a painted wall for a blackboard, and no electricity. I taught 70 students in sixth grade, 90 in seventh grade, and 30 in eleventh grade in a biology lab for which we had no real resources. **The large class sizes, combined with the lack of resources, made it very difficult to convey any information in a student-friendly way.** Most teachers would simply write on the blackboard and expect students to copy. At the end of the year there would be an exam, and that would be it.

The curriculum was left over from French/English colonial times, and rarely received modifications. As a teacher, I had a specific amount of time to cover certain subjects and had to finish the material, even if the students misunderstood it. This meant that *many* students were severely behind on basic, foundational concepts. To make things even more challenging, many students were learning these concepts in their third language! I would teach some amount of the lesson in French, in hopes that they could stay with me, but I couldn't overdo it since their exams would be in English.

Student-teacher relationships were very stressed. Often based on fear, many teachers observed the old adage, "Spare the rod, spoil the child." As a Peace Corps volunteer, one of my main purposes was to model a more student-friendly approach to education. Things like rewards, activities, and critical thinking games were not viewed as appropriate ways to teach. I received a lot of pushback on this from my school administration and most of the other teachers. Even my own students supported classroom management with corporal punishment. One final obstacle to my students' education in Cameroon was the varied degree of support from parents. While some valued their children's education, most were worried about the demands of the present, often electing to keep their kids from school in order to work in the fields.

Abdul & Zafrin's Story

Siblings, Abdul and Zafrin are two students at our Meadowcreek Cluster location. They have the incredible family heritage of a mother from Ethiopia and a father from India. At home, there are at least **four** languages spoken! No matter the language, they clearly support their children's education.

Unfortunately, many parents who arrive in our corner of the world face a difficult time. Imagine the hurdles a young mother from Congo faces when her son is learning in his fourth language (which she does not speak at all). I was honored to translate parent teacher conferences for her, but many more are in the same, uphill battle.

Now let's look at how education is approached at Corners Outreach

When I found my way to Corners Outreach in October 2018, I was happy to know that I could continue to work with a community of different cultures. Just like my students in Cameroon, many students at Corners speak English as a second or third language. Instead of relying on outdated, rote memorization curriculum, Corners Outreach has connected with Georgia teachers to create a **student-friendly** program. This program is carried out at homework club, with the aims of engaging the students and helping them meet the Georgia standards. As the students gain confidence, they become accountable for their own goals and progress, **which puts the power in their own hands.**

In order to reap the full rewards of the program, we rely on volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to come sit with the students at the table, to help them with homework, and especially to read with them. Soon after launching the Meadowcreek Cluster club, I found myself once again, alone at the front of the classroom with 25 students waiting on me, and 25 more with Cinthia. While I did what I could to lift the students on those days, I went home feeling discouraged at the untapped potential. Compare that to the scene a month later when we had 15+ volunteers show up, and **each student was able to have one-on-one reading time, homework help, and another positive role model.** These students can't make it on their own, and I can't make it without you volunteers!

In addition to the volunteers, the students need their parents to be involved in their education. Much like in Cameroon, many of the parents of our students here in Georgia have immediate needs dictating their every move. While education hopes to create a bright future, issues like food insecurity, language barrier, safety, immigration, among others, make it difficult to invest fully in the promise of education. Children are often required to help the family business or find jobs of their own, instead of spending time reading or doing homework. It also means that one or both parents are often absent, and it's up to the children to champion their own academic career. **At Corners we reach out to parents** to offer encouragement, tools, and opportunity to become more invested in education.

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It's a beautiful world out there, with so many different cultures and people, but we don't have to travel far to see it. The greater Atlanta area is home to people from all over the world (just visit Buford Farmers Market if you need a reminder). Everyone here has something to add to the community, but we will never know until they're given the chance. Education is a global struggle, but we don't have to travel far to see it.

What can you do?

There are 3 paths of investment:

1. **Volunteer** - We need tutors, mentors and parent workshop volunteers. [Sign up today.](#)
2. **Become a client** – We offer a variety of goods on our [store page](#) including leather goods made by teens in our program, masks made by mothers of our students, and landscaping through [Lawn Care with a Purpose](#). [Request a quote here.](#)
3. **Become an investor** - Join our [931 Club of recurring donors](#). Commit to donating one penny for each student we tutored last year (or more if you're willing). Can't donate monthly? [Make a one-time donation.](#)

Through education and improved job options, together we can break the cycle of poverty and improve lives in our community today and for generations to come. Please join us!

Shocking Statistics

- Worldwide, there are still more than **150 million children ages 3 to 5** who do not have access to pre-primary education, including more than 80% of children in low-income countries.

Source: [GEM Report: Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all \(2016\), p.428](#)

- The cost of 250 million children not learning the basics is equivalent to a **loss of US \$129 billion per year.**

Source: [GEM Report 2013/2014, p.19](#)

- A dollar invested in an additional year of schooling, particularly for girls, generates earnings and health benefits of **US \$10 in low-income countries** and nearly US \$4 in lower-middle income countries.

Source: [The Learning Generation, executive summary, p. 4](#)

- In poor countries with available data, on average primary-school age children from the wealthiest 20% of households are **four times more likely to be learning at the desired levels** than children from the poorest 20% of households.

Source: [The Learning Generation, p. 41](#)

These stats, and the messages behind them, are just as valid in Gwinnett and Dekalb Counties as they are across the world. Only 39% of English language learners will graduate in Gwinnett county if we don't help.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/data-and-results/education-data>