

AUTISM AWARENESS, CARE & TRAINING. AACT



ANNUAL REFLECTIONS REPORT

2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Autism Awareness Care and Training (AACT), is a local support and education centre for children with autism that was founded in 1998 by Mrs. Quaynor, a mother of a child with autism. AACT is committed to supporting individuals and families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

This report epitomizes activities undertaken by AACT over the period of 2016. AACT built strategic alliances with Autism Speaks (Advocacy Leadership Network), North American Women Association (NAWA), Haven International, Dromo Foundation and Martin Hayford Ministries. Also, AACT continued her structured behaviour modules, academic training, social and life skills training that helps the children to develop their academic skills, behavior skills and other skills like sensory, social and communication skills

Over the year, a few parents made enquires about having their children assessed by personal contact. They made appointments but only a few showed up to have their children assessed for autism. Many parents who have children with other communication disabilities sort our support. Unfortunately, we only support children with autism

Ceramics was added to the activities of the centre this quarter to aid the children with fine motor skills and eye and hand coordination. Working with clay is very good their sensory needs. The music therapy program at the centre has taken a different turn over this period as our music therapist relentlessly and patiently taught the children different styles in music and dance depicting our Ghanaian culture. The music therapy program has also aided in reducing many challenging behaviors in the children. Several trainings went on over this quarter but the most important were training for volunteers and caregivers who were new to autism. Also a P. T. A meeting was held towards the end of this quarter, this was to discuss progress of the children and the plans for the future. AACT increased the use of social media, particularly on Facebook, twitter, and Whatsapp. Media was not left behind as we did a lot of awareness on television and radio and in prints media to educate the general public.

AACT over the period has answered many questions associated with autism and reduced the stigmatization about autism, thus a lot of people have come to know about children living with autism and are volunteering their time to support the children at the centre. We continued to support and champion the inclusion of persons living with autism by sending few children with autism to mainstream schools. By this strategy, AACT has helped many children with autism to effectively and efficiently socialize and interact with their counterparts. AACT had 5 volunteers joining her team over this quarter.

Private individuals, and a few corporate bodies from around the community and abroad supported AACT this quarter through in-kind and cash donations. In-kind donation ranged from teaching aids, art supplies, toiletries, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication) materials and plenty of water which is very much needed since the children drink a lot. Despite the progress and advancements made over this quarter, AACT still encounters challenges. These includes but not limited to inadequate space, lack of adequate financial support to run the centre as it should be run. We have a waiting list of children whose parents cannot afford to even take transportation to come to the centre not to mention even pay the contribution that we require to help us run the centre.

This report covers all the twelve months of 2016. Over this period, AACT focused mostly on its core activities, in particular:

- Teaching and training of children with autism (to improve on their behaviour, academics, social and life skills for social inclusion in both the family and the community)
- Inclusion of children with autism in the mainstream schools for social integration and support.
- General public and social media awareness on autism.
- Training of mainstream teachers, resource teachers, and students on autism and the need for children with autism to be treated right and accepted.
- Inclusion of children with autism in the mainstream schools for quality education.
- Training of siblings of children with autism
- Training of health professional on autism and how to handle children with autism when accessing healthcare.

This year also saw AACT entering Eastern region, Central region and expanding community networks on autism in Volta, Ashanti and Northern regions.



Program Management

The AACT program team welcomed Mr. David Kwesi Debrah, Ms. Yesutorko Maanya Gbewonyo, and Hafiz Mohammed.

Strategic Alliances

AACT has made strategic alliances with Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) and Sharecare Ghana all in the interest of promoting the awareness on autism and reducing the stigma and discrimination associated with autism.



Communications

AACT was very vibrant on Facebook and Whatsapp raising awareness and sharing inspiring stories to help and supporting parents and siblings to understand autism more and to be able to give proper care to the family members with autism.

Teaching and training for children with Autism.

During the year, AACT continued her structured behaviour modules, academic training, social and life skills training that helps the child to develop the intellectual capacities and other skills like sensory, social and communication skills. Leading to an improvement in behaviour and communication for social inclusion.

Assessment



AACT assessed a total number of thirty four (34) children who had difficulties in conforming to the norm and with communication challenges. Seventeen (17) of the children were found to be on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at various levels and 7 were immediately enrolled for support, care and training. Children who go through the AACT assessments were mostly referred by doctors, health professionals and informed individuals in the community.

Ceramics

During this year, the children were allowed and supported to explore by way of making them do most of the work by themselves as they watch and imitate the potter. Caregivers mostly guide the children on what to and how to by prompting them when they lose focus. The children become very happy when their mouldings turn out when it is similar to that of the potter. This art helped the children to improve on their attention, imagination, eye stimulation and hand coordination.



Music and Drama Therapy



The music therapy program took an interesting turn as the therapist took the children through the various dances of the various regions in Ghana. The children adapted very well to the dance moves and steps as they had a lot of fun. They enjoy playing the music instruments, the xylophone, rattles, tambourine, flutes and guitar. The children love the various sounds that emanates from playing the instruments and dance to various rhythms.



Inclusion of Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools

Inclusion of people living with autism into the mainstream schools has been a very successful and interesting for both AACT and the participating schools as teachers, students and other administrative staff got opportunities to learn about autism and also interacted more openly with children with autism. As part of program and activities, AACT increased the number of students in the inclusion program by 3 children. More children with autism had the opportunity to socialize, interact and play with their peers in regular schools and also took active part in classroom work and followed all instructions from the class teacher. At the school they joined their regular peers to play and socialise. They participated in the class activities with support from their caregivers and their peers who were in the buddy system.



Training



The Centre has trained over 70 special needs teachers, resource teachers, caregivers and parents in the Eastern and Greater Accra regions of Ghana to improve the care given to children and learners with autism. It is the Centre's vision to see a society where children and learners with autism can easily be integrated into normal community activities.

Accra Training.

AACT sensitized and trained over 30 teachers, parents and caregivers on autism and proper way to care for children with autism for maximum impact. Participants agreed that children with autism human beings, they are different but not less.



Akosombo Training

This training gave participants an understanding of autism and various strategies to use when caring for and working with children autism since they are all unique and different in character and behaviour.



Participants were introduced to communication using pictures. Be it to give a command, ask how one feels, teach a task, change a behaviour or engage in an activity, pictures and visuals enabled children with autism to make sense of what you are trying to communicate to them and they learn to respond to you better.

Children with autism can learn and if one strategy does not work go back to your ABC and see what the barriers are.



External facilitation for AACT caregivers

AACT contracted some renowned consultants to train caregivers in the changing trends in caring for children with autism. The sessions offered caregivers the opportunity to ask questions about their job and roles towards the child autism.



Communication/Awareness Creation

AACT has posted many write-ups about autism and activities involving vocational and independent skills development by children with autism on Facebook and twitter platforms. Also, radio talk shows and television appearances were made in some few selected radio and TV stations within the community.



AACT had a total number eight (8) volunteers during this quarter. Four international volunteers and four from the University of Ghana.



Day in and day out, the number of people who volunteer their precious time supporting children with autism at AACT increases in number and this can be attributed to the incessant use of social media platforms to promote our image. AACT is also confident that God leads our mission.



Water Play Therapy

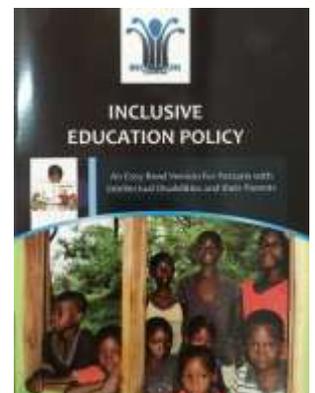
This is a therapy that uses water to stimulate the fine motor skills of children with autism. As they play with and in the water it enhances their coordination because it's a calming and soothing approach in providing sensory stimulation.

AACT collaborated with Inclusion Ghana (a network organisation advocating for the rights of children with intellectual disabilities in Ghana) to develop a national document



"FACILITATING THE INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH AUTISM IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS" that demonstrates how children with autism can be included in the mainstream schools with support or care as we await the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy by government.

The same collaboration has led to conversion of the national Inclusive Education Policy into Easy Read versions for easy understanding for parents and students. The centre has used these books to sensitize over 100 of students and teachers to appreciate the new wind in Ghana's education.



GENERAL PUBLIC AWARENESS ON AUTISM.

AACT took her awareness campaigns to the principal streets of Accra and the Mallam Atta Market. AACT went to the market to interact with the market women. They were pleased to



interact and shared stories about their friends, relatives and neighbours who have children showing signs of autism. What was worrying about their narration, these children were beaten and molested and they are glad that we came. They will go back home and talk to their friends and relatives and advise them on where to go to for the right support.

AACT educated them on what autism is and what it is not, also spoke to some expectant mothers who were so anxious to know what to look out for in the early years of their child's

development. The focus was on accepting and supporting children with autism in their communities and society at large and to come clear on the misconceptions about children with autism and their families. This was a good social interaction exercise for the children as they enjoyed being in the market and also had the opportunity to purchase items from the market women. Market women added extra of each of the items purchased, they were happy that we were giving the children this needed exposure and also thanked all caregivers for the good job they are doing.



TRAINING OF SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

AACT organized a siblings training workshop for the children with autism. The workshop started with the brothers, sisters and cousins who were invited



joining in the good morning/welcome session and later joining for worship before workshop started. The workshop focused on educating them on autism, how to understand their siblings with autism and also how to deal with the stigmatization that extends to them. It was interesting to know the various definitions they had on autism and also how their friends



relate to them. They learned how to live and support their sibling with autism at home and in their various communities.

TRAINING OF HEALTH PROFESSIONAL ON AUTISM



AACT has trained over 30 health professionals to understand autism and how to care for children and children with autism when accessing healthcare. After the trained parents are now more comfortable to send their children with autism to the various health centres because there is less discrimination and stigmatization.

TRAINING OF MAINSTREAM TEACHERS & RESOURCE TEACHERS ON AUTISM



The centre has trained over 30 special needs teachers and resource teachers in the Volta region and Ashanti regions of Ghana to



improve the care given to children and learners with autism. It is the Centre's vision to see a society where children and learners with autism

can easily be integrated into normal community activities.

HO Training.

AACT sensitized the students in the mainstream section of the Anglican Primary School about their colleagues in the special education unit. Parents also had the opportunity to share their stories with AACT. Both teachers and students agreed after the training that children with autism have the right to be treated right. They are first human beings, they are different but not less.



Autism Society of Ghana (ASOG)



AACT is part of ASOG of which Serwah Quaynor, our Founder is the Chairman. During this quarter, AACT helped ASOG organize a forum for Parents of children living with autism. The main aim was to bring parents of children living with autism together in order to discuss strategies on how to lobby government to help children with autism in Ghana. Since stigmatization is huge in Ghana, we planned on how to educate the general public to be aware and accept children with autism in our society.

ABC Lessons in Christmas & Fundraising

This quarter, we did ABC Lessons in Christmas & Fundraising which is an annual end of year performance that engages the children with autism in drama, dance and movement plus a mainstream school, Edifort International in Kaneshie. The performed together to showcase how inclusion works beautifully when we are all given a chance. Children with autism were taken through rehearsals together with their mainstream counterparts, caregivers to be able to perform to the admiration of all. Also, some regular schools and church bodies joined the programme. It was a channel through which awareness about autism was again created to the general public.



Independent Living Skills



We put a major focus on our older children this quarter because we realized that even at the ages of between fourteen and eighteen, many and just taking care of their daily grooming. We therefore decided to put a major focus on independent living skills (ILS) and to have some kind of competition amongst them (Everybody was a winner). The ILS was to equip persons with autism the necessary skills to boost their independence. They were taken through various activities of daily living to teach them skills like bathing, tooth brushing, combing of hair among others.

It was important that the parents worked with us at home to continue helping their children otherwise, our efforts would have been in vain. Thankfully, day of competition finally arrived and we invited the parents and general public to see that with training the possibilities of our children with autism are unlimited. All the children were winners because they all gave off their best according to their abilities.

Bottle Garden Project

The bottle garden project was aimed at giving skills in gardening to children with autism. They consist of a plastic bottle with a neck and small opening in which plants are grown. The bottle garden project engaged children with autism in garden related activities, facilitated by a trained therapist. It helped the children with autism to show a different side of their personality and increased positive behaviors.



New Centres



As part of our mandate to create impact in Ghana, we are helping Kumasi Centre for Autism and Research Education (KCARE) and Tamaha also Centre for Autism and Research Education (TCare) set up properly to cater for the needs of children with autism. We are doing this by helping them to start awareness raising and some training of a  small scale has already begun. The situation in Kumasi is quite difficult because there's only government school that takes just a few children with autism.



Tamale where Tamaha Care is, is much worse off – actually the situation is rather dire. In Kumasi and Tamale, Centres must be started immediately because many children with autism are left on their own, abandoned, uncared for and where parents don't abandon them, they the parents end up taking them to prayer camps to have demons beaten out of them or worse given concoctions to basically send them to their maker. Teachers need to be trained immediately and we need to find support for these children!

Field Trip/Excursion to Mmofra Foundation

Children with autism have sensory issues and have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. While some are overly sensitive in some areas, others are under sensitive or both, at times. These sensory differences can affect behaviour and have profound effect on a person's life. Providing sensory diet is therefore needed. It is in this regard that AACT organized a trip to the Mmofra Foundation where the children living with autism benefited from sensory input that aided them to build and adjust to their environment.



DONATION



During the year, we got cash and in-kind donations ranging from food items, art supplies, picture exchange communication system (PECS) and educational materials, toiletries and water, which the children really need a lot. The support has helped us increase our activities for the children as well as promoted more awareness in Ghana.