

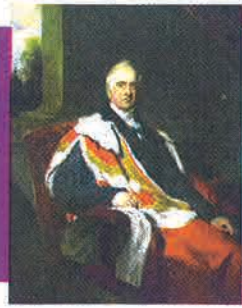


U.S. wins World Cup title

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A team from Oklahoma United Methodist Church of the Servant, of Oklahoma City, visited My Heart's Appeal in Liberia in March 2013. (PHOTO PROVIDED)

Oklahoma City group strives to help Liberians with disabilities

BY TESS THOMSON
For The Oklahoman

My Heart's Appeal Inc. works to give those with special needs in Liberia a better life.

In Liberia, organizers said, people with intellectual disabilities and Down syndrome are not always understood and aren't put into a special education program.

"Most of the time they're pushed aside," said Lovetie Major, founder and CEO of My Heart's Appeal, which started in Maryland and is now based in Oklahoma City.

The goal of the nonprofit is to set up a special education program in Liberia. The nonprofit's supporters hope to raise awareness and develop a safe campus

where those with learning disabilities can go.

One of the biggest needs of the organization right now is financial donations to buy land to set up such a campus. The campus will have trained teachers and assistants to help those with intellectual disabilities address their vocational, residential and occupational needs.

"A lot of parents are bringing their children to our program because it's where they can be productive," Major said.

My Heart's Appeal was founded by Major, a native of Liberia, after watching her sister with Down syndrome be made fun of and marginalized her entire life in Liberia.

NEEDS & DEEDS

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"I decided that even though I was one person and it was a whole country, I was going to try and right that wrong any way I could," Major said.

Major began the nonprofit in 1996 in Baltimore.

She relocated to Oklahoma City in 2011, and the nonprofit is now incorporated in Maryland and Oklahoma as well as Liberia, according to its website.

Many partnerships

The nonprofit has established partnerships with several organizations and services in Liberia and elsewhere.

The current partners of the nonprofit are Alliance Inc. Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Moveable Feast, both in Baltimore; Center of Family Love in Okarche; Dale Rogers



Lovetie Major, founder and CEO of My Heart's Appeal, third from left, briefs Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf about the goals and objectives of My Heart's Appeal. (PHOTO PROVIDED)

Training Center and Hannah's Promise-Respite Care, both in Oklahoma City; Down Syndrome International, based in the United Kingdom; Ministry of Education and St. Andrew Lutheran Church, both in Liberia; National Down Syndrome Society based in New York; Southern Nazarene University in Bethany; The Future

Leaders Group in Ghana; and Towson University Reading Clinic in Towson, Md.

"I know what my sister has gone through. She is still laughed at and called stupid, but what we have done has raised her self-esteem," Major said. "I hope that once it's done we can look back and see the change."



A team from Oklahoma United Methodist Church of the Servant, of Oklahoma City, visited My Heart's Appeal in Liberia in March 2013. (PHOTO PROVIDED)