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My Heart's Appeal working to create community in Liberia



Lovetie Major, the founder and CEO of My Heart's Appeal, talks about her mission to help the people of Liberia, West Africa.

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What do Liberia, West Africa and Oklahoma have in common?

Here is a hint: "The love of liberty brought us here."

Love of liberty is a common thread of history between Liberia and the United States. The love of liberty gives meaning to our lives. And given the chance, liberty creates opportunity. After 14 years of Civil War, Liberia has had a decade of restoration and growth. But for many, opportunity lies just beyond their reach.

In Liberia, West Africa, there is a notable absence of programs and services for children and youth with Down syndrome or other intellectual disabilities. The children and youth are the object of abuse ranging from bullying and abandonment to taunting and labeling them as results of witchcraft. Often families abandon their infants to hospitals that are equally unprepared to provide any services, such as respite care for the families or literacy and vocational training to their children.

Begun in 1996, My Heart's Appeal (MHA), a 501.c.3 charitable non-profit corporation has located its corporate headquarters at 5909 NW Expressway in Oklahoma City and been a member of Northwest OKC Chamber since 2011. The founder and CEO, Lovetie Major, has committed her time and resources to create a campus community in the capital city of Liberia, Monrovia (named for U.S. President James Monroe) that is creating the elusive opportunity of education.

Her husband, Burke is her mainstay. Her younger sister, Titema, who has Down syndrome, is her inspiration. Imagine the heartbreak she and hundreds like her experienced from being barred from any opportunity for schooling because of her disability.

But out of heartbreak and commitment, opportunity is being created for teenage children and young adults to enroll in classes in the form of literacy, life and vocational skills; and for younger children, a special needs day program, Major said. Their calendars are parallel that of the public school system in Liberia.

Providing such parameters of normalcy will assist the community in liberating the worth of every citizen to be productive when given the opportunity. Bigma's Care Place, a community service program, provides a monthly respite care program on the last Saturday of the month for these children and their siblings to provide the parents a brief respite from the intensive care and attention their children require.

The Connie Thrash McGoodwin Vocational Training Hub is still waiting to open its doors to needed applicants in Liberia. Major said in September 2016, MHA held an open house in Monrovia to welcome applications for 40 vocational students. It was also an occasion to inform the public of its mission and to invite pre-enrollment for 30 new special needs day program students. Imagine the look on the faces of the staff when 100 families attended the event to do just that.

The enterprise is renovating and building 10 rooms in the vocational structure to accommodate classes. To reopen the vocational training hub, MHA is seeking support to give the rooms a fresh coat of paint, purchase and install doors finishing, and provide classroom and cafeteria furnishings. Donated computers for the new literacy lab require a generator to support the necessary load and air conditioning, Major said.

Also needed are teacher salaries and tuition sponsorship categories for students which are reasonable, but well beyond the ability of most of the families to afford.

"These opportunities are truly liberating," Major said.

MHA is not alone in its efforts. Recently, a sister agency Dale Rogers Training Center-Oklahoma donated two 11-14 seater wheelchair passenger buses, a pickup and box truck to MHA for sustainable needs. The most pressing need is to ship these vehicles to Liberia.

Foundations, corporations, service clubs and churches understand the economic impact of a nonprofit like My Heart's Appeal on the local community in Liberia, Major said. Every American recognizes that opportunity comes from liberty.

That is why the motto of Liberia is so meaningful to us -- "It is the love of liberty that has brought us here."

Liberia and the United States share the red, white and blue stars and stripes in their flags, as well as the desire to be a better people, Major said. For MHA, it starts with serving the needs of the most vulnerable and under-served. It's the spirit that creates a meaningful future.

Gifts to missions transform the giver and the recipient. Join and help, because they "Give Light. Give Love. Give Life," Major said. MHA is combining Advent and Christmas seasonal giving with the United Methodists global mission and outreach opportunities for #GivingTuesday 2016 which continues through Nov. 29. Visit www.myheartsappeal.org for more information or can contribute online though The Advance www.umcmmission.org/give link, project name My Heart's Appeal for the Intellectual Disabled or project #3022086, where 100 percent of your contributions goes to MHA's project.