



6 April 2023

## AIM volunteers rock!

Volunteers are vital to the success of all endurance events such as the AIM, and we value and appreciate ours for bringing us this far from where we started. Over sixteen years ago, we set out to produce a beach-to-beach marathon running event that would traverse our beautiful coastline from Ningo Beach in Prampram to La Beach in Accra.

There were (and still are) many physical obstacles on the course we tried to plot, including a lagoon with an enormous pipeline that served as the only bridge to cross to the other side and proceed towards Accra. We stared, amazed, as we watched a bicyclist dismount from his bike and carry it across the pipeline to the other side of the lagoon. We scouted long and diligently to find a way along the coastline to move towards La. There was none to be had.

We revisited the area several times over the ensuing years expecting that infrastructure development, which seemed like a major ambition for whichever administration was in power, would provide a path. It didn't, and we ended up hoping for future improvement but settling for alternate routes that did indeed get us from the Dawhenya area to La but without the scenic views we sought and knew our visiting athletes, especially, would appreciate.

Almost imperceptibly at first, the route we plotted got increasingly congested with vehicular traffic as well as with numerous hawkers who usurped the pedestrian lanes that athletes could hope to use in relative safety. As the risks to athletes increased, any beauty in the unspoiled greenery of the country-side greatly decreased thanks to man-made structures sprouting up along the route with little apparent regard for the scenery.

Without dedicated volunteers to help with transporting water and related event paraphernalia from our base in Accra to the start line 42 kilometers away, and supporting AIMers with water and other refreshments and first aid, we would not have survived to this point, where the proliferation of clean beaches along the Accra-Tema beach road have enabled us to *sankofa*<sup>1</sup> our dream of producing a beach-to-beach event that will highlight our scenic coastline and the friendly people who inhabit our beautiful country.

Volunteers are vital to an event's success, but equally true, volunteering at such events as the AIM presents community service-minded individuals with opportunities to achieve personal goals, develop essential employment skills, and, studies show, invest in their emotional health and longevity. Voluntary service is a nexus of community development and leadership development and is an essential ingredient in the resolution of community challenges and the acquisition of leadership skills.

Fully understanding the connection between community involvement and the early development of leadership skills, top tertiary institutions and employers scrutinize applicants' records for voluntary community service to identify individuals with great potential to bring acclaim to their organizations. In addition to leadership skills, involvement in the solution of societal problems by way of voluntary service provides invaluable work experience for the youth.

AIM volunteers do not get paid; instead, they are rewarded by the pride of helping to produce an event that draws

participants from over thirty different counties all over the world and the satisfaction of "giving back" to their community and country. Volunteers have been the proponents of the most satisfying and successful fundraisers we have held.

During our pandemic-induced break from producing the AIM, we donated funds towards the rehabilitation and expansion of a school in a community in Oguaa (aka Cape Coast). The inspirational cohesiveness of the community in supporting the project was instrumental in the extraordinary success of that charity partnership. We will bring you the story behind that project, which was nominated by one of our long-time volunteers, in a future edition of the *Race Director's Message (RDM)*. Indeed, that volunteer and his two brothers have been with us from the beginnings of the AIM and are the most senior of all our volunteers.

This year, we are pleased to announce the launch of a prize to be awarded in recognition of our first two vol-



Dr. Momodou Cham: Public Health Physician Specialist; Catholic Health Service Trust Ghana

unteer medical professionals, Dr. Momodou Cham and Dr. Kwame Darko. They started flexing their community service muscles while they were still in medical school at the University of Ghana, Legon.

They helped to provide public health outreach to low-income areas in Accra with health screening and presentations that enabled community members to receive important information on and ask questions about hypertension, diabetes, nutrition, and other health topics.

As if these activities were not challenging enough for students undergoing the rigors of medical school, Momodou and Kwame started *Outreach*, a public health newsletter funded by the Ghana office of the World Health Organization and designed to promote interest in public health amongst medical students and doctors. *Outreach* helped to raise public awareness about, among other issues, disease outbreaks, neglected tropical diseases, and non-communicable diseases.

The Cham-Darko Prize will be awarded to young medical doctors or medical school students who exemplify the voluntary community service that Drs. Cham and Darko provided years ago at the threshold of promising professional careers in healthcare. Many more Ghanaian doctors and nurses have participated in the event in some capacity, and we look forward to introducing more of them to you as time goes on.

Though we have met the goal we long ago set for funding the Cham-Darko Prize, the value of our local currency is now such that we must increase the goal in order to make the award more meaningful. Towards that end, we will initiate the fund with GHS60,000 this year and commit to a 3 to 5-year fundraising period to raise the endowment to GHS250,000. The logistics remain to be navigated, and we will work with the relevant stakeholders to devise and implement them.

Please check out our next *RDM*, in which we will spotlight some of our stand-out veteran volunteers. In the meantime, you can [use this link to access our volunteer application](#).



Dr. Kwame Darko: Consultant Plastic Surgeon National Reconstructive Plastic Surgery and Burns Centre Korle Bu Teaching Hospital

<sup>1</sup> an Akan word meaning to go back and get something that has been left behind