

## Forming Friendships One Bracelet at a Time

The language of “friendship bracelets” must be universal. After years of talking with our church about my desire to form a Connected Community with ICCM in Togo, the real connection was made by 6th grade girls and hand-braided bracelets.



When missionary Vickie Reynen and I met in grad school, I began to share my hope of cultivating real-life relationships between the families in my small congregation and the families connected with International Childcare Ministries in West Africa. After Vickie moved to Togo we began to dream about the possibilities. But, limited funds and a small congregation (and the good timing of the Holy Spirit) seemed to keep us in standby.

The concept of world missions sounds wonderful for most of our parishioners, but the idea remained rather vague and far-away, more magical than realistic. Hoping to spark an eagerness to connect with the global church, I invited our church kids and their parents to ask a crazy question: *What if you could personally connect to a community on the other side of the world?*

This question led to a mini-missions-event in May 2019. After our first Togo Talk complete with Timbits (doughnuts) for a tasty incentive and a personalized video message from Vickie, our small gathering of children and adults began to consider the possibility of our real-lives intersecting with people overseas. Our imaginations were expand-

ing to include international friendships. We began thinking of ways to develop real relationships with kids across the ocean.

We passed around sponsor packets for 10 different Togolese kids. I invited everyone to close their eyes and imagine themselves playing with their new African friends. After a few minutes of picturing ourselves kicking a soccer ball in the heat, I prayed for Jesus to help us choose two children from Togo to sponsor. Making space for our children to choose which kids to sponsor was empowering for them and surprising for me. (I thought I knew who they’d pick, but they made a Jesus-led decision otherwise!)



Beyond providing sponsorship for a handful of Togolese children, Monroe’s kids ministry has committed to faithfully praying and sending pictures, letters, and videos back and forth. (Technology is amazing!)

Just one month after our first Togo Talk, our kids and parents met Vickie and Mike Reynen in person. We gathered in my backyard to play some Togo trivia games, eat some treats, and ask lots of questions. The best part of the night were the videos our Togo

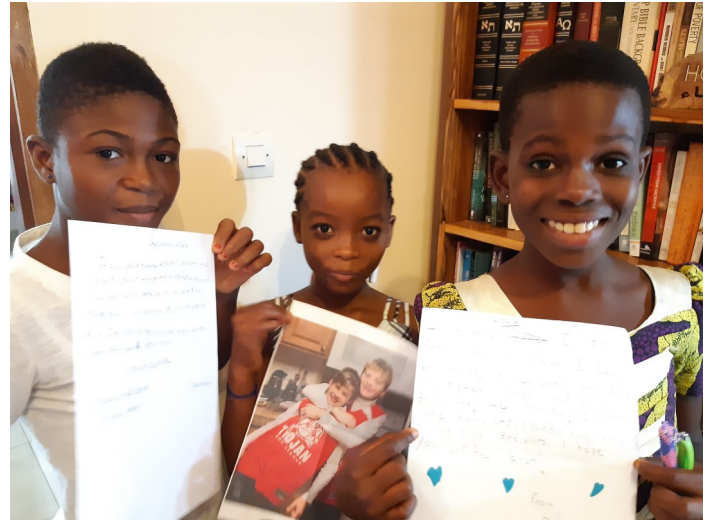


friends made for us with Vickie's help. Getting to see their faces and hear their voices added another layer to the foundation of budding relationships.

At the end of our summer evening gathering, two 6th grade girls (twin sisters) approached Vickie with a baggie full of friendship bracelets. "Could you take these to some of the girls in Togo for us?" they asked earnestly.

Thanks to Vickie's willingness, the bracelets made it all the way to *l'Eglise Methodiste du Togo*. A few weeks later, I pulled Bailey, Bela and their mom eagerly into my office to read them my rough translation of the French thank-you note the Togolese girls had sent back to them for the bracelets. This was really happening: personal relationships and meaningful connections forming with friends on the other side of the world.

One small connection followed another as our communal excitement began to grow, building momentum in our dream of flying a small group from Monroe to Togo in 2020. We're eager to meet the children we sponsor, their families and to build deeper connections as friends, while partnering with the mission of Jesus and ICCM in Togo.



Several months ago, I watched with excitement as Bailey and Bela opened an envelope from Togo, West Africa. Inside was a sweet note from Vickie and two sets of fun shoelaces she'd bought at the market in Lomé. These shoelaces, silly and simple, are tying together two communities as we continue to connect.



A Togo Team trip is being planned for August 2020. We'd love to have sponsors of Togo children join this team! If you're interested, contact Vickie Reynen at: [mvreynen@yahoo.com](mailto:mvreynen@yahoo.com).



**When you sponsor a child, you change a world.**