

WESLEY SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF



Deaf children learning in Surulere, Nigeria

On a break from MJoTA film production in Berachah Audio and Video Studios in Surulere, Nigeria, I walked down the road to see what I could find out about the Wesley School For Deaf Children.



Mrs MI Ogunjobi, Principal of Wesley School 1; Mr Solomon Addey, Vice Principal of Wesley School 2.

During my walks around the studios I had seen children in school uniforms happily interacting with each other as they went to school, but their interactions were silent and included a lot of hand movements.

I arrived at the front gate and a swarm of little boys came out and saw me take a photograph of the Wesley School sign. They all wanted their photographs taken and they squealed when I showed them the instant digital images on the back of the camera. After a few minutes I was welcomed by a teacher who told me to come inside and I could take as many pictures of the chil-



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Above, Wesley School grounds; below, student teachers, of whom some are deaf.



dren as I liked. I was escorted by a tall young man Mr Anietie Udoh who walked me silently to the office of the Principal of School 1, who welcomed me and handed me over to her Assistant Principal and to the Principal of School 2, Mr Solomon Addey.

Mr Addey told me that a group of philanthropists first started the Wesley School, and it was both a



Above, sign on school door; below, the alphabet in sign on a wall in the school grounds.

boarding and day school, in 1962, and it was the first school for the deaf in Nigeria.

Eventually it was taken over by Methodists, and after the 1967 war, when Lagos State was created, it was taken over by Lagos State and named the Wesley School in honor of

the Methodist patrons. Once it became a state school, students ceased being able to board, and other similar schools were set up around Lagos so



Mr Anietie Udoh in front of his cobbler shop.

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that students would not have so far to travel.

Mr Addey was an audiologist before he started teaching; I asked him if the prevalence of deaf in Nigeria is particularly high. He said he did not know, but that most children became deaf after viral infections, particularly meningitis. Meningitis is endemic in Nigeria, and it is not in the United States, so I conclude that likely the prevalence of deafness is greater.

I asked Mr Addey if calling a child deaf was insulting, and did they prefer being called hearing impaired. He said no, many of the deaf feel they are not disabled, but belong to a special community. He knows deaf adults who have married other deaf

adults and have deaf children; once 3 children of such a union were in the schools.

My escort Mr Udoh was a graduate of the schools and staff gave him assistance to start his shoe-making business, which he operates across the gates from the school. He happily escorted me out of the school and showed me his small shop.

I returned the next day to make sure I had spelled his name correctly. He was ready to abandon the magnificent

pair of shoes he was working on the escort me anywhere in the school I liked.

Having any kind of handicap limits opportunities for a child. The staff at Wesley Mission School aim to give as many opportunities as possible to all children. Mr Addey told me they have many success stories of children going on to university, even to law school.

By SJ Dodgson BSc(Hons), PhD

Dr Dodgson has worked in the United States, Europe, Africa and Australia in the pharmaceutical industry and academic research since completing her PhD in physiology and pharmacology in 1978. E-mail: ustawi@kdnc.org.