

Ship Report

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Photos: Debra Bell, Mercy Ships International

Mercy Ships-trained facilitators take basic education into Monrovia prison

In the middle of March, Taiwo Oladipo was released from the Monrovia Central Prison. Having spent seven months in jail after being framed by people who robbed him of \$1,600 US, Taiwo certainly deserved to leave.

But then he came back.



Taiwo is being trained to teach Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes, so he can help prisoners and others in Liberia—where the illiteracy rate tops 80%—gain the skills they urgently need in order to enter the workforce and to do their part in rebuilding their war-ravaged nation.

Taiwo and David Brown, a staff member with Prison Fellowship in Monrovia, are learning by watching Karfee Pantan and Thomas Toe, two Mercy Ships-trained ABE facilitators, run a class of 20 Monrovia Central inmates. The class began at the end of February and is offered completely free-of-charge to the inmates. They meet in a small building on the prison grounds three afternoons a week to learn the basics of math, reading, and writing.

This project started with a group of Mercy Ships crewmembers who discovered several prisoners wanted to have a literacy class. A few inmates were willing to help begin a program, but they needed help. Veronique Biville, the leader of ABE asked Karfee and Thomas, two of the best literacy facilitators she'd trained, to consider running a course inside the prison and training others as facilitators.

The two men, Biville said, have risen to the challenge, despite their initial fears. *“They have their hearts in it; they’re not just teaching and leaving,”* she stated. They have gotten personally involved in the prisoners’ lives, and they have been changed by this.

Taiwo is excited about the progress the students are making. Karfee and Thomas will continue to lead the classes, stepping back little by little over the next two months. By the time the Mercy Ship leaves, Taiwo and David will run the course on their own.

