

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Leyden, Massachusetts



Challenging Heights Winneba, Ghana

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

Challenging Heights is an anti-slavery and anti-child trafficking NGO located in the Central Region of Ghana. The organization was founded by a survivor of the child trafficking to Lake Volta and forced labor practices that Challenging Heights is working to eradicate. They rescue, rehabilitate, and reintegrate the boys who are taken from source communities along the coast, as well as fight the basic causes of human trafficking in these communities through economic and youth empowerment. I was a school intern at Friends International Academy, Challenging Heights' primary school, located in an at-risk community. There I was a teaching assistant for one of the kindergarten classes, as well as created and implemented a Child Rights Camp (CRC). I helped my teacher with various classroom tasks as well as read to the children, and lead them through their library sessions. Challenging Heights began as a single Child Rights Club, and now they would like to reinstate that model back into the community. My fellow intern and I were tasked with creating the camp as a pilot program to gather feedback and student interest in learning about the rights of a child and leadership skills.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I am quickly learning that sometimes if we can't make a large positive impact, the best way to help others and make small but influential change is by focusing on reducing the negative impacts present in the community. Two months in any community is a short time to make a difference, but I know that through the relationships I formed with educators and students, I helped strengthen the implementation of Friends International's anti-corporal punishment policies. By constantly talking to teachers and children about this policy and its merits, and engaging with them to share their own

opinions, I made teachers responsible for their actions and students more aware of their right to a safe education.

NGOs across the board tend to have many projects, but not the capacity to delegate and utilize their intern personnel, however, this environment taught me how to reach my own goals even if task delegation was lacking. I showed initiative by sticking with the CRC when no community member stepped up to take the lead, which taught me how to create a cohesive program that was flexible and fun for students. By working outside the office, I formed relationships with community members and Challenging Heights Officers alike which improved my knowledge of our work and of the community we serve. This experience has strengthened my ability to communicate effectively with my supervisor and those I'm serving, my leadership skills, program development skills, and my capacity to work with respect and self-assurance in a community that doesn't always share my values.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

Nonprofit and development organizations, especially local ones, struggle with their ability to delegate and utilize interns. A problem my fellow interns and I faced was not having consistent direction from our supervisors and therefore not completing tasks or having much purpose. Sewanee has taught me how to be an independent thinker, and how to speak candidly and constructively with my peers and supervisors alike to reach our collective goals. I came to Ghana and stayed with a purpose, to learn about youth development, human rights work, and NGOs, and when I lost my way, my independence as a student and person gave me the confidence to work with my peers and supervisors to refocus and find tasks that met these goals

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Most of my teamwork experience has been within a large group, but the most crucial teamwork I experienced at Challenging Heights was with my fellow intern at the school. We created the Child Rights Camp, and gathered a consistent group of thirty students from eleven to fifteen years old to attend. We focused on teaching them about children's rights, education, child marriage, and sex education all in English, which is their second language. We both were very invested and had to work around our inability to speak the local language and our short timespan which caused stress and tension. Nevertheless, we worked together as a team that listened and guided one another to reach both the students' and our own goals.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Challenging Heights works specifically with the issue of child trafficking, in which I am now more educated and more passionate about. This and my experiences helping children and youths learn about their rights and my training on how to advocate for Challenging Heights has motivated me to continue pursuing youth development and community and political advocacy. I hope to empower youths to become self-advocates as well as work in the nonprofit sector to help advocate for legislation that supports child development and stops child trafficking. I want to use the connections and knowledge I've gained to serve in the Peace Corps and become a child rights advocate.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

The majority of my internship was spent working closely with the Ghanaian teachers and students at Friends International Academy. Ghana is an anglophone country, but being in a small town and

specifically working with children, not speaking the local language put me behind. However, by getting to know my coworkers I learned some of the language and how to teach and have discussions within the cultural context. Friends International, though created and supported by Challenging Heights, has become independent which causes many of the students and staff to feel removed from the work of the organization. However, these individuals embodied Challenging Heights' mission every day. The teachers strive to provide for their own families as well as create an enjoyable learning experience for their students, and the students are free to be children which is truly what Challenging Heights wants for all children in Ghana, the chance to learn and have a childhood. The most important lessons I learned from these relationships were how to stay positive when I had to change my approach to a situation more than once and how to express my different beliefs clearly and help everyone enjoy the ensuing discourse. Challenging Heights is a local NGO that requires both local and outside perspectives to reach its goals, and I was fortunate to experience this dynamic first hand.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

This spring I attended the University of Ghana to study political science, NGOs and development from a Sewanee professor and multiple Ghanaian professors, scholars and experts. To end this experience by gaining first-hand experience within the cultural, economic, political and social context I had already dedicated a semester to was extremely beneficial to me as a student and aspiring child rights advocate. Though I acquired a lot from my semester I did not feel that my time in Ghana was over. Your generosity has allowed me to stay in Ghana for an extra two months to work at Challenging Heights, an exceptional organization with nationally praised achievements and an inspiring staff. Thanks to you and Challenging Heights, I am leaving fulfilled.