



The GATEWAY

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PAHO Tours a Slum.

Old Fadama, Accra.

Projects Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHO) toured the slums of Old Fadama in Accra to ascertain the extreme living conditions of the people. The tour revealed poor sanitary conditions, unplanned wooden settlements and the poor food hygiene.

Mr. Frederick Opoku, President of Women in Slums Economic Development and Empowerment Ghana gave volunteers an insight into the living conditions of the slum dwellers. He mentioned that the city authorities have consistently threatened to clear the slum but his organization has fought for the rights of the slum dwellers to be respected.

Projects Abroad has a legal desk in the same office and offers legal advice to the people.



Regional Updates

Cape Coast

We have 22 volunteers at the Cape Coast who are participating in various projects – Medical, Journalism (Print media and television), Care and Teaching.

We had two major activities that the volunteers were happy to be part of. The first was a *Dirty Day* activity at the St. Monica's Basic School. The volunteers painted and drew on the walls of the school. It has been a long time since the school was painted and the volunteers were excited to bring some change in the school and to make the learning environment child-friendly.



The second activity was a *Bag Flash* programme. Projects Abroad is concerned about the environment and therefore introduced this programme to encourage the re-use of plastics in Ghana. Volunteers collected water sachets in town that will be used to make creative bags for people to use. We raised a lot of awareness on the re-use of plastic bags as a firm step to saving our environment from excessive plastic waste.

Regional Updates

The Hills

The month of February is the month of love and on Saint Valentine's Day, we showed love to the pupils and staff of Otuatire Primary School. Many of our volunteers including medical volunteers participated in the activity. It was a *Dirty Day* activity. We worked on putting in new floors in the classroom block. Our Country Director, Emmanuel Abaaja showed up at the site during his regional tour and could not help but raise a few shovels of sand.

Volunteer Corner

Willemijn de Bruin writes...

Hi all,

I would firstly like to introduce myself, my name is Milla, and I am 21 years old. I live in Amsterdam, Holland, where I completed my bachelor in Health Science last summer. From the end of December till just before Christmas time, I have been working at the Projects Abroad public health project in Kumasi, Ghana. My time in Ghana was an unbelievable experience, and I loved working with the other volunteers at markets and at schools, as this way I got to know the local people and culture very well. Furthermore, every day was special, with new people and new places.

Before I departed for my trip to Ghana, Projects Abroad – Netherlands, organized a preparation day to get me ready and tell me what to expect. One of the things we discussed during this day was the possibility of fund raising. Many people, who go to developing countries for voluntary work, will inevitably run into someone, or something that requires a bit of help. After hearing an inspiring story of a former volunteer, who used her money to build a new classroom for a school in Cambodia, I got inspired! So I started some simple fundraising by sending a donation letter to as many people I could think of. Thanks to all my family and friends, I eventually raised well over 2000 euro, which is around 5000 Ghana Cedi.

The first month in Ghana was tough. I purely needed to adapt to the new climate and culture. After this, I needed time to think on what, where, and how I wanted to spend the money on. After several discussions with the Projects Abroad staff, and my colleague volunteers, I decided to spend the money on hepatitis B vaccinations for the children of the Kumasi Children's Home.

Hepatitis B is a viral infection, which spreads via blood contact, or via contact with other body fluids. The disease causes a liver infection and will eventually lead to lethal liver complications like cirrhosis and cancer. During the standard medical outreaches, the public health team checks the Hepatitis B status of adults. In Kumasi on average 10% of the people checked are positive, but on some days this rate is around 25%. More often than not, this is disastrous for these people and terrible when you realize that this infection might have been prevented by vaccination.

The week prior to the vaccination day was filled with organizational issues. This is Ghana after all, so everything will be settled eventually, but it might take some time. We got the permission of the Kumasi Children's Home relatively easily, under the condition that the mothers (caretakers of the kids) would also receive an injection. After spending some time at Boamen Memorial Enterprise, we arranged that they would provide us with the necessary equipment for the big day. This included the following:

- 48 Euvax B Hepatitis B vaccines flacons of 5 ml
- 4 boxes of Hepatitis B tests
- 2 boxes of lancets for the Hepatitis B test
- 4 boxes of syringes and needles for the injection
- 1 box of alcoholic pads to clean the arm prior to the vaccination

Wednesday, the 5th of December was the big day, an exciting day for almost everyone! And I have to admit; I got pretty nervous the night before, lying in my bed. It's quite exciting to finance, organize and execute a whole vaccination day!

In the morning I woke up early to collect the vaccines and to pay the bill at Boamens. Upon my arrival

at the orphanage I already noticed the other volunteers were busy to prepare everything. All Projects Abroad volunteers were present, as well as the people who work on the Care project, to organize and comfort the kids. The medical and public health volunteers tested and vaccinated the kids and they were supported by the Projects Abroad staff.

In total we vaccinated 136 people of which around 100 of them were kids. Not an easy job at all, and not for the faint of heart! There were a lot of babies, and young kids who were not very fond of needles, especially not when they get pricked twice within five minutes! Every kid had to be checked on hepatitis B first, followed by a vaccine only if the test turned out to be negative.

Apart from the young kids, there are a few severely disabled children in the Kumasi Children's Home. Four volunteers were needed to comfort and hold these kids, which enabled the fifth volunteer to approach with the injection. Luckily, the kids were willing to forgive, and most of the time a kiss, hug, Disney sticker, or a colourful Band-Aid did the job.

It is difficult to tell a story like this on paper, but they say that a picture speaks a thousand words. So I hope that will do the job, and do my story justice. Overall it was a day full of tears, screaming, stress, tension, and concentration, but most of all a day filled with smiles, thankfulness and big pride. I am very glad I eventually decided to spend the money like this. It was a huge honour and success!!!

I would like to thank the people and kids of the Kumasi's Children's Home, as well as my fellow Projects Abroad volunteers and support staff for all their help, time, and effort. I want to especially thank those people who made the second vaccination day in January a massive success as well. Furthermore I want to wish all the current and future volunteers in Ghana good luck, especially on the third and last vaccination day in May. Thank you for completing what I started!

I hope this story will inspire many future volunteers to save a little extra money, and use it to make a difference!

With love,

Milla

Volunteer Corner

Our American Volunteer Victoria Westra writes...

I had no idea what to expect as I emerged from the plane into the intense Ghanaian heat one month ago, but what I experienced was incredible. You don't realize something has changed your life until you look back and fully understand what you just did.



As a veterinary intern in Kumasi, Ghana, I learned from the very people I would like to become someday. These people were willing to share their skills and knowledge with me wholeheartedly, and at every opportunity to try something new I walked away feeling proud of what I accomplished. I had never before been so involved with veterinary medicine, even though I have worked in vet hospitals at home and strive to become a veterinarian myself. I administered injections and vaccinations to dogs, goats, sheep, pigs, and even turkeys. I witnessed astonishing cases of diseases and problems rarely seen back home. I observed and aided in surgeries, including tail dockings, removal of tumours and a sheep born with no anus. I performed my own castrations on a dog and pigs, and I learned how to suture like a surgeon with styrofoam and a needle and thread.



within and around Kumasi I discovered a culture teeming with vibrancy and determination. Living as they do was difficult yet humbling, especially knowing that I still had it better than a lot of people in Ghana and my host family was an overwhelming blessing.

It is difficult to describe the feeling of walking along a dust-covered road surrounded by simple vendors with handsomely dressed people, a sewer drain, taxis and “trotros”, and the occasional banana tree or two, permeated with the scents of cooking food, burning garbage, exhaust, and perhaps urine. Contrast this with the dense forest of Kakum National Park or the stunning beach of Cape Coast! The country itself is beautiful and filled with such a variety of places to explore that my time there was not enough to see all that I could have seen. You never really know what to expect every day!

As I move on to the next chapter in my life I will not forget the impact this project has had on me and will continue to have as I go back to life as an American college student. I would definitely consider going back someday, and to anyone wondering if this is for them, do not hesitate to give this adventure some thought. For people with so little, Ghanaians have so much to offer!



Volunteer Stories

Joshua Franz

German volunteer Joshua Franz gains tremendous experience in Human Rights Project in Ghana.

Joshua Franz, a 20 year old graduate from Schiller Gymnasium in Germany volunteered in the Human Rights Project in Ghana as a lead volunteer.

The project, run by Projects Abroad Human Rights Office in Accra, deals with issues of domestic violence, children's rights, juvenile correction and other human rights issues. Joshua has led his team of volunteers to facilitate progressive discussions in a human rights club in a high school in Accra; taught mathematics and made presentations at a boy's correctional facility of the Social Welfare Centre; introduced alternative methods of teaching to teachers in selected schools in Accra and has done extensively researched on disabilities in Ghana.



Joshua has traveled internally in Ghana to preach the human rights message to communities in Tema, Dodowa, Teshie, Nungua and a few others. On a daily basis, he made lesson plans for the human rights “focal” (teachers) and the human rights club in school. He did human rights and law education in different schools for younger children whose ages ranged from seven to fourteen years. “I research on certain topics and go into the communities to set up projects in the coming month,” he explained.

Joshua is confident that he has gained an appreciable knowledge on Human Rights and Law in Ghana. He believes that he has tremendously improved his teaching and presentation skills and above all can communicate effectively in the human rights language. "I have gained knowledge on a different culture and lifestyle and a different living standard," he added.

Projects Abroad activities include dirty days – a day where volunteers clean and paint schools and orphanages to brighten the learning and living environments for the pupils and orphans respectively. Joshua is inspired by activities like these and believes that they make a huge difference.

He recalls a boy of 14 at the correctional facility who couldn't write a single letter of the alphabet but after a few weeks, he could write the entire alphabet. He continued: "Other boys who were rowdy have developed in a good way and have become interested in learning and they are having fun in what they are doing."

Joshua emphasized that everything he and the other volunteers did at the boys remand is extremely important and that more volunteers are needed to go and help. The project, he said, has made a big difference in his life: "I have learnt to be independent and to be a leader and defend what I believe in."

Ghana has received commendations worldwide for being a hospitable and friendly country. This reality is not far from how Joshua experienced the people, sights and sounds of bustling Accra and historic Cape Coast. However, he admitted that he experienced a culture shock and felt like leaving within the first three days of his stay in Ghana. "After the three days, I acclimatized and that increased my opinion about Ghana. I got used to it and I loved it." he stated happily.

Prior to his coming to Ghana, he has always wanted to travel to Africa and to do something that would not only benefit himself but something that would benefit the people he will work for.

Joshua recalled his most memorable moments in Ghana: "The first time I went on an outreach in a slum area, many of the children ran to us making us feel so special. One New Year's Eve in James Town, the streets were filled with thousands of people and everyone went crazy. But most of all, I felt so happy to see the children I worked with improve."



Joshua was quick to mention that the whole Projects Abroad programme opens one to have access to a large number of friends since volunteers come and go. He tells future volunteers to be open-minded. “Don’t be afraid to meet the locals. Be careful and be open for good people,” he added.

Projects Abroad hopes great stories like these inspire others to help Projects Abroad continue to make a difference, and by doing so, learn something themselves along the way.

Worthwhile Experience!

Lesse Moller from Denmark writes...

My 10 year old Ghanaian friend once told me “Ghana is the best country in the world!!!” and in so many ways I agree with him. I’m halfway through my two-month stay in Ghana, more specifically in the city of Kumasi in the Ashanti region. I am in Ghana to do a public health programme with projects abroad as preparation for medical school.

So far my stay in this beautiful country has brought many experiences with it, and many more experiences are yet to come - hopefully. Whenever you do anything in Ghana you are reminded of the big differences between here and home. A simple thing like eating soup and rice with your fingers seems strange to many, but down here it is a custom and in order to live down here you have to embrace it and go with the flow. Often following this traditional way of eating earns you respect from the locals.

The people of Ghana are joyous when foreigners adapt to their traditions and their customs especially learning the language will provide you with a solid amount of respect combined with laughter and smiles. If you take time to learn the local dialect, in my case Twi, you will find that many things become easier for you. Simple things like taking a cab, ordering food, buying whatever you need become much easier if you spill out some phrases in the local dialect, just to let people know that you are sure of what you are doing, and that you are not to be hassled with.

A big part of the public health programme is a matter of communication. On a normal day we do outreaches to markets, stations and schools and so on. We test, advice and treat people with the means at hand. At the markets we do different kinds of testing like hepatitis B screenings and BP measuring and when you do things like this it is very important that people trust you and that they understand what you are doing. To do a hepatitis B screening, blood is needed, meaning that you have to poke someone’s finger to get it. In order to get it you have to be able to tell the person what to do, where to sit, where to go, what is going to happen and so forth, and this becomes so much easier when using the local dialect, you can truly feel how the locals open up to you when you start talking in their tongue, you suddenly become more than just a random white guy in Africa.

You are all of a sudden the centre of laughter and joy, hence everybody now seeks to converse with you. It is in these situations that you experience the real Africa; you get to know the real people, not the lazy, impolite people of the tourist attractions, but the hardworking people of the street fighting to make a living - people who often do not have the means for the most basic things, like housing and food. But it is within these people that you find the most joy, laughter and happiness, it is with these people you feel at home, you feel welcome, sometimes almost a part of the community. These people are the general public of Ghana, honest and hardworking, and you find them wherever you go. Everywhere you go you will be greeted with a smile or perhaps the local word for the white man “Obruni!!!”, which is not an expression of racism, but rather a statement of your presence. Since they rarely see white people you quickly become an attraction, especially the kids love you.

We go to the schools to do the public health programmes and we go there to treat whatever diseases and injuries we can treat. Many of the children suffer from ringworm, fungal infections and infected wounds as well as fresh wounds. Some even suffer from boils, broken bones and head injuries. Despite all this, you can’t find happier and more trusting children in the world. The children back home in the western world are raised with a natural fear of strangers, and an instinctive distance to all unknown. These traits do certainly not apply to the children of Ghana. As soon as you enter a schoolyard, you

become the centre of attention. The small kids will run to you, hold your hand, give you high-fives or whatever they feel like doing, some even just want your attention and might even cry if you don't pick them up (often experienced at the orphanages). And again, if you speak Twi to these kids they will go wild and joyous.

They never cry, they never scream, if they feel pain they will just let you know discretely using hand-gestures. They will not utter a sound. I stood for around 30 minutes treating a girl, around 6 years of age, who had fallen off a table. Her head and upper body was covered in blood from a head injury. The wound was very deep and wide and bleeding profusely. The pain must have been excruciating especially because of my numerous attempts to clean the wound - which wasn't easy due to the amount of blood. The girl didn't utter a sound, didn't cry, didn't yell, and didn't react to the treatment. I was deeply impressed to say the least, and the girl today stands for me as a symbol of bravery and endurance.

To utter a few words about my accommodation, I love it! Living with a Ghanaian family has to be experienced. The charm and the warmth of these wonderful people towards strangers are overwhelming. It is almost like getting a second family. You become part of the family so quickly, and as you adapt to their way of life you embrace it fully. The facilities are good even though the lack of running water isn't the most wonderful thing in the world, but it is part of the charm. My dear host mom Augustina is a very sweet woman; she cooks, cleans and takes care of me. She fits the perfect image of an African housewife, she is big-boned, smiling and hardworking, always laughing and chatting, and she cooks delicious food! To sum up: I lived like a prince!

Travelling is, of course, a part of being in a foreign country and in that direction Ghana has a lot to offer. From the parties and castles in Cape Coast to the postcard beaches of Busua to the national parks in Mole and Kankum, you will be able to travel safely and easily. The varieties of things you can do are numerous and the experiences you gain likewise. You can do things down here which would be difficult back home like sitting at the beautiful beaches in Busua enjoying large amounts of freshly caught, grilled lobster for the mere price of 60 Ghana Cedi (about 20-30 Dollars) or maybe spending the night at a Tarzan-like tree hut in the Kankum Rainforest where night safari in the jungle is part of the experience. But travelling isn't restricted to other parts of the country. The city of Kumasi has a lot to offer as well. A great club-life combined with western standard hotels and swimming pools lays the foundation. And the markets, churches and other attractions complete the experience. You are never bored in Kumasi if you just have the courage to try new things all the time!

A visit to Ghana can be highly recommended if you seek experiences that are unlike any other you'll find on the normal charter-tours. If you come for luxury, comfort and relaxing, stay away, but if you seek to get the experience of a lifetime, visit Ghana, work with the locals, embrace everything around you and I will guarantee you the trip of a lifetime!

Dirty Day!

PAHO paints boys & girls remand centres



Farewell Football

Dutch Volunteer Robert Gijbels organized a farewell match

Robert Gijbels called out via our social media platform for the participation of other volunteers:

Hi guys!!!

This Friday I, Robert the Awesome am leaving Ghana after 4.5 months being here. I have spend most of my time working at the Boys Remand Center. The Boys Remand Center is a government institution ment for boys in the age of 12 to 17 who are in conflict with the law. To thank the social workers for their support and the boys for giving me enjoy my stay, Ruben and I arrange.....

Boys Remand Center



ProjectsAbroad

When: Tuesday 19 February
Location: We meet at the Projects Abroad human right office at Osu
Time: Meet at 4 PM
Bring: Mosquito nets, Water!!! Your Projects Abroad T-shirt
Don't!: Take pictures / movies of the boys! Privacy!
Do: Take pictures of volunteers!



If you don't want to play, feel welcome to watch and support!

Afterwards we all go together to Pizza night!



The last weeks we helped out on the Boys Remand and the Girls Correctional. We had the dirty day where we did some painting, we organised fans in the classrooms and for the Boys we arranged fans in their speeling room. The next things on the list are: Fire alarms in the boys and girls sleeping rooms, mosquito nets on the doors and windows, new tables in the office from the social workers, a new white board for the classroom and fixing the computers for ICT lessons.

And we also need your help!

You can help by donating your or left over MOSQUITO NETS!
Bring them with you on Tuesday!





Robert Gijbels in white jersey, second from right (Squatting)

Group shot with the photographer for the match, our German volunteer Jasmine Paul.



Robert Gijbels our volunteer from Holland gives his farewell speech to part away with friends.



His volunteer friends appreciate his work done with our Human Rights Office in Accra.

Social Media

Our social media platforms remains a powerful tool that connects volunteers, friends and family of Projects Abroad through status updates, tweets, pictures, blogs and videos. Our Facebook groups were as active as always in providing information on volunteer experiences and that informs the expectations of volunteers who are coming to Ghana and prospective volunteers as well. Our different Facebook groups – [The Hills](#), [Koforidua](#), [Accra](#), [Cape Coast](#), [Kumasi](#) and the [Projects Abroad Human Rights Office](#) were active throughout the month of December.

For many of our volunteers, our social media platforms are where they can continuously relive the valuable moments they once had in Ghana and it becomes their space for expressing the heart warming satisfaction they gained from volunteering to affect the lives of people in need.

Check out our other social media platforms by clicking on the images below:



Help!

Learn!

Explore!

Volunteer with  Projects Abroad

Please feel free to contact the Information Manager if you have any questions, concerns or comments: infomanager-ghana@projects-abroad.org

Thanks for reading!