Our Vision:
“A world where every child is in school and lives in a loving and caring family”

Our Mission:
To be the leading organisation that ensures the realisation of child education and protection through community empowerment in Ghana.
Letter from the President

My dear friends,

Towards the end of the year my health has provided an obstacle - this has made me consider and begin to clarify the long term suitability of the organisation. Thinking of this, a Strategic report is in the final stages of work that will help clarify direction of organisation for the long term.

This year has seen Challenging Heights build its capacity in terms of Advocacy, through the recruitment of new staff and engagement in global child rights coalitions. This looks to amplify and focus our work on a much greater scale, through a cost effective model.

The year has seen new income stream generated and consolidated. We’ve striven for best practices in rescues, in rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, as well as in our community empowerment. We feel like we are in a better position than ever to provide care to our beneficiaries, and we thank you for your support.

Yours truly,

Dr. James Kofi Annan
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013 Challenging Heights directly supported over 2,410 children and young people. We rescued 58 children who were trapped in slavery in the fishing industry of Ghana and provided 109 children with rehabilitation care at our bespoke shelter for children rescued from slavery. We also provided economic support to 261 women to enable them to provide adequate care for their children.

We engaged directly with over 32,000 stakeholders, actively supporting 14 Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs), establishing 10 new Child Rights Clubs (CRCs), and engaging pupils at 80 schools with the issue of children’s rights.

In 2013, Challenging Heights’ President, James Kofi Annan won the World Children’s Prize for Child Rights. Apart from the cash prize that supported our work, Challenging Heights gained visibility across the world as the award was presented by Princess Victoria of Stockholm, Sweden.

Challenging Heights School provided quality tuition and educational support for over 746 students of whom 40% were trafficked children with the remaining 60% being children at risk of being trafficked.

Challenging Heights led a Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) research in Ghana. This research investigates the links between the LEAP, child wellbeing, children’s care and family cohesion. This was part of a wider study on the linkages between social protection and children’s care in Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa.

The Challenging Heights Ruth Messinger Computer Centre started full operation in 2013. The Remedial School to Restore Hope Programme was modified to include computer training which took place in this centre. A total of 240 young people were trained.
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Challenging Heights

The Passion behind Challenging Heights
At 6 years of age, president and founder, James Kofi Annan, was forced to work along the Volta Lake for seven years. He eventually escaped and worked hard to obtain an education. James rose to become a university graduate and later, he became manager at Barclays Bank of Ghana. He is the last and the only educated out of the twelve children of his illiterate parents. In 2007, James resigned from his employment with Barclays bank to dedicate attention to the mission of Challenging Heights.

At inception, James mobilized children into rights clubs to take action against forced labour, leading to the rescue of 8 children. Later, Challenging Heights built a school for at-risk children to save them from being trafficked. Within 6 months, 181 at risk boys and girls between the ages of 4 and 14 were admitted.

James believes education and the economic empowerment of women are the most important things for eliminating child slavery. Our work suggests that if children are educated, then they will know their rights, and the chances of them being forced into labour will decrease. The organisation has been established to realize James’s vision: to protect and improve the lives of young people and their communities affected by child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour.

The Problem
Ghana is a source, transit, and destination country for children and women trafficked for the purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. It is estimated that over 242,000 young people are engaged in forced labour in Ghana, many below the age of 15. It is also estimated that over 1 million of Ghana’s 6.3 million children below the age of 15 are excluded from school. We have identified poverty, lack of education, irresponsible parenting, ignorance and poor law enforcement as key reasons for child trafficking and forced labour in Ghana.

Our Strategic Position
Challenging Heights works in fishing and farming communities in Ghana. We provide services to women and children in underserved, hard-to-reach, and at-risk populations and are currently present in 10 districts across 3 administrative regions of Ghana.

Our Theory of Change
Challenging Heights’s theory of change focuses on empowerment of the family from the beginning, to facilitate successful reintegration of rescued children following rehabilitation. In this way, cases of re-trafficking are prevented and families are empowered to protect the rights of their children in the future. Our theory of change involves three levels: the individual (the child and the immediate family), the societal (the community where the child and the family lives) and the systemic (the laws, systems, policies, cultural norms and procedures that are destructive to the care and protection of the child and the family).
**Organisational Approach**
At inception, extensive dialogue with key community and Government stakeholders coupled with James’ own childhood experiences exposed the protection gaps for children, enabling Challenging Heights to identify needs and develop targeted community development programmes.

Withdrawing children from forced labour and supporting at-risk children in school, both as a preventive and curative measure is a key organisational strategy. Our second strategy is to reduce child poverty through livelihood empowerment initiatives. This has reduced family poverty and the number of children sold into slavery, and increased the number of children attending school. Our third strategy is to mobilize communities to demand justice for exploited children. The communities have increased awareness of forced labour, prosecution of forced labour offences, and increased school enrolment levels.

**Our Geographic Reach**
A strategic decision was made to focus attention on new child trafficking source communities in the Central Region, rather than expansion into Greater Accra District.

During 2013, Challenging Heights extended its operations into Gomoa West District, in addition to maintaining operations in Peru District, Gomoa East District, Agona West Municipal, Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa District, Effutu Municipal, Kpando Municipal, Senya West District and Atebubu-Amantin District. Our Community Child Protection Committees and rescues are carried out in three regions of Ghana: Central, Brong Ahafo and Volta region.

**Our Human Resource Capacity**
Challenging Heights currently has 71 employees but is actively expanding through recruitment of local staff, overseas staff and volunteers. In recognition of the two-way learning that a cultural exchange can bring, the organisation has decided to develop a volunteer strategy in the coming year.

[World Children’s Prize voting at Challenging Heights School]
Programmes
Programmes

Challenging Heights School
Given our core belief that education is a crucial component in eradicating child slavery, we opened the Challenging Heights School in 2007, with only 12 students; six months later, enrolment grew to 193. Today, we are proud to say that the school accommodates over 750 students (of whom approximately 40% are direct survivors of trafficking) who now have access to quality education at very little cost to their parents.

At our school, each student comes from a low-income family bearing the potential risk of being sold into slavery as their parents reach dangerous levels of poverty.

Notably, students pay only a portion of the full tuition (20%), while many of their parents simultaneously receive business training and micro loans, providing the critical opportunity to escape the cyclical nature of poverty.

Evening School Programme
The Evening School Programme provides students with intensive one-on-one academic tutoring after school hours, while empowering them to protect themselves from exploitation within their respective neighbourhoods. Over the last 5 years, more than 850 boys and girls have been supported through this programme.

Remedial School To Restore Hope Programme
The Remedial School to Restore Hope Programme currently supports 200 young people aged 15 – 25 years old by providing them with free tuition, textbooks, and basic career counselling.

We have measured a significant improvement in the self-esteem of many participants, apparent by the number of students who took on leadership roles in their respective communities following their classroom experience.
We have included a market-oriented, hands-on computer training and business enterprise development component to the programme. Ultimately, every young woman or young man who graduates from the programme has the potential to gain good employment and/or establish their own small business to earn income and finance their own higher education. Since 2010, over 650 young men and women have been supported through this programme.

**Sports Programme**
The Challenging Heights Sports Programme has improved the physical fitness, emotional maturity and team building skills of the participants. This has resulted in strong cohesion and uniformity among the team, creating better performances in sporting matches and in school. The Sports Programme has been a key community mobilization tool for awareness raising and publicity about the dangers of child trafficking and slavery. It has also served as a vehicle to facilitate the social healing and reintegration of rescued children as they rejoin in their home communities. We currently have over 100 young men and women in the Sports Programme.

**Community Child Protection Committee (CCPCs)**
To counteract the growing frequency of reported child trafficking cases, we use a variety of education-based preventative programmes, including thirty-two (32) Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) in two (2) different regions in Ghana.

The CCPCs serve as a liaison between Challenging Heights and community members to build community resistance against child trafficking and slavery. The CCPCs have been instrumental in the liberation of enslaved children who were voluntarily returned by their slave masters to Challenging Heights. Most importantly, CCPCs allow their members to claim a stake in their community’s wellbeing to help ensure the permanent rejection of child slavery.

**Community Awareness Programmes**
Through the community awareness programmes, we sensitize community members, parents, children and local opinion leaders about the social and legal implications of involvement in child labour. Through these efforts, our team has witnessed the successful rejection of child exploitation in schools, religious institutions, markets and communities.
We continue to engage the public through durbars (community gatherings), films and sports programmes, reaching over 100,000 people to-date.

**Anti-Slavery Fishing Programme**
Our most ground-breaking programme yet has proven to be the Anti-Slavery Fishing programme. This programme provides rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration services for previously enslaved children, including rehabilitation offered at our newly opened ‘Challenging Heights Hovde House’—which is currently the largest rehabilitation facility in West Africa. It is named after the donor who funded its construction: the Hovde Foundation.

With a capacity of 65 children, this home is a rehabilitation shelter that provides a safe refuge for children who have experienced the horrific realities of slavery; here they receive nutritious meals, medical attention, psychological care, literacy training, and the sort of love and compassion that they likely have never experienced.

Following this recovery process, the children are reunited with their families, reintegrated into their home communities, and receive ongoing support to ensure their success after leaving the shelter.

**Child Trafficking Survivors Support Network Programme**
This programme provides continued aftercare for child survivors of trafficking through enrolment in traditional schools or vocational training. By monitoring the progress of students who have gone through the traumatic experience of slavery, this programme intervenes in the all-too-common occurrence of child slaves becoming slaveholders themselves.

**Advocacy Programmes**
We use local and international media to create awareness and educate the national and international community about the dangers of child trafficking around the world today. Through this media, we get people to take actions and also government and other policy makers to act to end child trafficking.
We engage the media though publication of articles and feature stories, press conferences, live interviews and broadcasting child trafficking documentaries.

The Founder and President of Challenging Heights, James Kofi Annan, continued to produce national and international publications demanding for the universal rights of children to be upheld in Ghana.

**Livelihoods Programmes**
The Livelihoods Programme has successfully matched over 260 families with microfinance opportunities through rural banks. This programme’s success is evident in the increasing number of families finding economic stability, now providing their children with primary school and/or skills training enrolment.

**Case Study: Daniel**
Daniel is a 16 year old boy who lives with his parents in Winneba. Daniel was first trafficked when he was only 8, but since then, he has been trafficked three times and has worked as a child slave in more than 3 different communities on Lake Volta. Daniel was sold by his own parents for only $25 in 2008 when the family was facing financial crisis after his father had been sick and hospitalized. According to Daniel’s mother, taking care of 4 children, including Daniel, was a burden, so she saw selling him both as a means to income and a relief for the family. As a child slave, Daniel was forced to work tediously without rest and often on an empty stomach for several days. He was beaten severely by his masters.

In 2011, Challenging Heights identified Daniel and rescued him from slavery on Lake Volta. After over 3 months of intensive rehabilitation Daniel was reunited with his family in Winneba and enrolled in school while the family received seed capital of over $200 to support their business. Currently, Daniel is in class 5 and he performs above average. Surprisingly, his family, whose monthly average income was $10 in 2011, is now reporting an average monthly income of $40 over a period of one year after receiving the economic assistance from Challenging Heights. Daniel is living happily with his family in Winneba and pursuing his dream of becoming a military officer.
Case Study: Kojo

Kojo is a 17 year old boy who was trafficked at age 10. Kojo was sold by his mother for only GHC200.00 (about $95 USD). The agreement was that Kojo was to work for the slave-master for two years after which he would be returned to his family. However, when the two years was about to expire, the slave-master strategically promised to build a house for Kojo if he could work for three more years. It was a promise to which Kojo agreed willingly.

As anticipated, Kojo served for three more years but received no house in return. He was returned back to his family without any compensation at all. Out of frustration and difficulties the family had in taking full responsibility of Kojo and his other siblings, his mother re–sold him to another slave-master. The slave-master and the mother agreed that Kojo should serve five years for which the slave-master will pay the family. The slave-master said that after the five years, he would build a canoe and equip it with outboard machines for Kojo to start his own fishing business.

Kojo spent two years out of the five years agreed upon when the case was reported to Challenging Heights during one of the school-based sensitization programmes, by a child who lived in the same community with Kojo’s family and knew of the trafficking. After weeks of engagement with Kojo’s family, Challenging Heights rescued Kojo. Kojo’s rescue was very difficult because he had been convinced by his slave master that if Kojo served him well, he would receive a canoe and outboard motor, with which he could start his own fishing business.

As a result of the abuse Kojo had suffered and the fake promises made by his slave-masters, he was never given the opportunity to think about his education and the opportunities denied to him.

This was an important barrier that Challenging Heights staff had to overcome, as Kojo initially resisted rescue. It was through expert counselling that Challenging Heights staff members were able to help Kojo see the rights that had been taken away from him and expose the manipulation of the slave master. Such mentoring is continuing as Kojo undertakes the rehabilitation programme. As time progresses, Kojo is becoming more aware of his rights and understanding the great abuse he suffered. At the same time, this awakening has seen him increasingly engage with his education and express anger about the manipulation that came from his slave-masters.
Our Impact
OUR IMPACT

In 2013 alone, Challenging Heights provided active support to a total of 2,410 children and youth across its eight programmes.

This included 109 children provided with rehabilitation care at our bespoke shelter for children rescued from slavery, 58 of whom were directly brought from Lake Volta by us. The other boys and girls were either engaged in child labour or at risk of losing care. Of these 1,440 were boys and 970 girls. These numbers reflect the higher risk of males being trafficked in the fishing industry.

We provided economic support to 261 women to help them become financially independent and be able to support their children.

At the school, our new Challenging Heights Ruth Messinger Computer Centre is being used extensively by over 200 high school graduates to develop their computing skills or help establish their own businesses. The ICT Centre is also used to provide training within the community and for rescued children at our shelter. In addition, a library building was completed in 2013 and it is currently being filled with over 7,000 books, ready to open formally in April 2014.

We are very pleased to say that we significantly increased the number of people reached through our children’s rights awareness programmes, communicating directly with over 32,000 individuals. A wider understanding of the need for child protection and education seems to be evidenced by an increase in the number of “voluntary return” child slaves from the lakes. These are children whose families and communities actively seek our support in bringing them home.

Ten new Child Rights Clubs were established this year, providing training to over 120 children and empowering them to assert their rights and participate in decisions affecting their lives. In addition to the 20 established Community Child Protection committees that remain self-sustaining,
we continued to actively engage with 14 more to help more communities develop the structures necessary to safeguard vulnerable children.

Challenging Heights continues to develop participatory research that can support poor and vulnerable people. In collaboration with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), at the University of Sussex, UK we are helping evaluate the Ghanaian Government’s Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme, which provides cash and health insurance to the extremely poor. Results will be available in 2014.

We also undertook Research on Children without Parental Care and Support (funded by EveryChild UK), as part of their project of Reintegration Best Practices Research. This is a programme of child-led research that feeds into an advocacy campaign targeted at the inclusion of child protection in the Post-Millenium Development Goals Agenda (which is funded by IDS and Family for Every Child).

In recognition of the work done through Challenging Heights, James Kofi Annan was awarded the 2013 World’s Children’s Prize. This provided the opportunity for Challenging Heights to engage with 80 local schools and implement a programme of children’s rights activities with them. James addressed the Child Rights Conference in Kasoa, Ghana, telling them: “You can do more than I have ever achieved: that is the challenge that I give to you!”

James hosted Gulnara Shahinian, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, to give her a greater insight into the issue in Ghana. He met with the U.S. Department of State to discuss the situation of child trafficking in Ghana and coordinate efforts to monitor and combat human trafficking. He shared knowledge of the issue through newspaper interviews and speeches in Europe and the United States.
**Case Study: Kofi and Eric**

Kofi and Eric, 6 and 8 years respectively, lived a moderate life with both parents in Winneba despite tough economic situations. Due to financial hardship, the boys’ parents were unable to send them to school; however, they were still hopeful that their fishing business would eventually yield enough income to give these children a taste of quality education. This was very crucial to them, especially when Kofi and Eric’s 4 other siblings never had education opportunities because of the same economic situation.

The story of these children, however, changed when their father died two years ago. Due to pressure from extended family to organize a funeral for her husband, which was outside her financial means, Kofi and Eric’s mother was forced to borrow GHS500 (about $290 USD). Following the funeral, the lender gave this widow one month to pay the money back, but Kofi and Eric's mother couldn’t meet the deadline to repay the loan. The lender therefore suggested that to repay the loan with interest gained, two of her children could work in her husband’s fishing business for 5 years. Kofi and Eric were selected from the family to serve the lender, turned trafficker.

During Challenging Heights’ rescue mission on Ghana’s Volta Lake in August, the team identified Kofi and Eric on a small fishing boat around 12:45pm. The team engaged the boat and begun to investigate. According to the children, their work began at 4am and neither child had been given any food. The children were naked and very weak after working for a long period. Kofi and Eric had served 2 of the 5 years. It is unlikely that the children would have been returned to the mother once the agreed timeframe was reached. Traffickers often renew the contracts with food items, clothes and minute items to keep the children in debt bondage. The joy on the faces of Kofi and Eric is reflected in Kofi’s words, “at long last we can go back to our mother; escaping this slave master and all his cruel treatment. Even if our mother is dead too, we would prefer staying with aliens like Challenging Heights than remaining in bondage.” Kofi and Eric are now happier, beginning their rehabilitation process in the Challenging Heights Hovde House. The boys are receiving education, health care and psychological support, before they will be reintegrated with their family.

*Please note that due to the vulnerability of the individuals in these case studies, all names have been changed and images are not provided.*
Challenging Heights is supported by a number of organisations and financial donors. In 2013, we were grateful for funding from Reach for Change, Free The Slaves, The Hovde Foundation, The United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Freedom for All, The World’s Children’s Prize, plus numerous individuals and Child Sponsors, amongst others. Above all, James and all the staff at Challenging Heights value the continued moral support of patrons around the globe, whose endorsement of our work gives us the strength to continue.
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