



Challenging Heights *Annual Report* *2015*



Our Mission

**To promote youth and family empowerment
and children's rights to education and freedom
from forced labour in Ghana**



Our Vision

**A world where the rights of every child to
education and a family life are realized**

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We have had another wonderful year at Challenging Heights. I feel immensely proud of what the staff, volunteers and supporters of Challenging Heights have achieved in 2015.

Fewer children have been left to suffer, working in hazardous conditions on Lake Volta and more children have remained at home with their family rather than be trafficked to the Lake. Knowledge and understanding about child rights has increased in Winneba and surrounding areas, more families can support their children because they have sustainable businesses and we have educated hundreds at our school. I feel very proud indeed.

2015 was the 10th Anniversary of Challenging Heights which makes this past year even more special. As you will be able to see from this annual report, we achieved so much across all of our activities. For me, a few things stand out in particular. Firstly, our livelihoods site became firmly established as an important Challenging Heights hub in Winneba. Watching so many women smoke fish in the community ovens has given me great joy. And knowing that we have laid the foundations for expanding opportunities for many more when we open our cold store in 2016 is also hugely satisfying.

This was also the year when our rehabilitation work for children truly came of age. I believe our shelter at Hovde House has set the standard for all other shelters for vulnerable and trafficked children to aim for. The standard of psychological support and the quality of the social work we provide the children there, many of whom have been deeply traumatised by years of slavery on Lake Volta, is second to none.

It gave me great pleasure to hear the news, for the second year running that the children in Challenging Heights School achieved a magnificent 100% pass rate in their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). These students are the second full graduating year of the school so their success is a testament to the hard work of all our teaching staff.

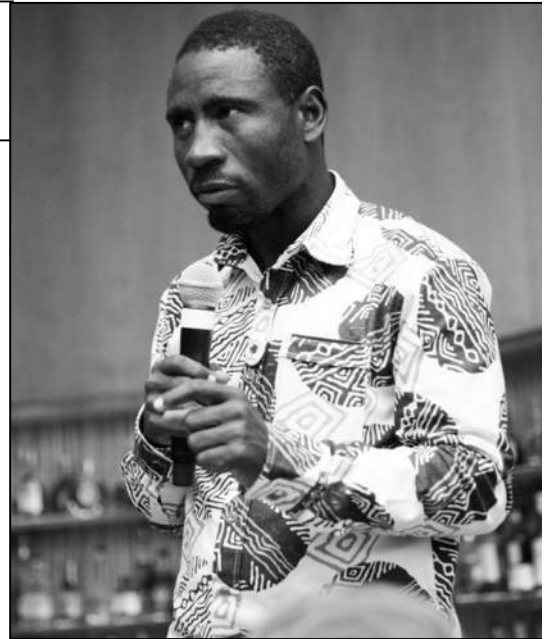
Of course, no year can be perfect and I was saddened to see Ghana slip down the international league table of slavery and trafficking. Being downgraded to Tier 2 Watch list status is an indication of how much more our government and policy makers could and should be doing to reduce child trafficking. My door is always open for them to work in partnership with us!

Finally, I would like to thank all of our donors and partners for their support, advice, funding and generosity. Without them, we would not have been able to achieve so much in our tenth year

Yours truly,



Dr. James Kofi Annan



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child trafficking and forced labour remains a significant problem in Ghana; both the total number and the proportion of children in Ghana in child labour have increased in recent years. Ghana was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch list status in the 2015

Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report, with Government efforts deemed insufficient to tackle the problem of hundreds of thousands of people trapped in modern slavery; including an estimated 21,000 children trapped in hazardous labour on Lake Volta.

We remain conscious that, more than ever, children in Ghana rely on NGOs such as Challenging Heights to ensure their rights are realised. Despite these challenges we have reached thousands of vulnerable and underserved people in 2015, not only directly saving children but empowering their families and wider communities to bring about long-term systemic change.

As an organisation, we continue to grow our capacity through the recruitment and retention of skilled and passionate staff and the development and implementation of clear policies and procedures. Programmes continue to be strengthened through infrastructure investment, most notably a new bus for the children and the construction of a permanent livelihoods site for their carers.

2015 saw significant restructuring of our protection programme to bring our care and support of children in line with current international best practice. Achievements this year included:

41 children removed from slavery on the Lake through our operations in March (17), October (23) and November (1), with an additional 10 rescued through community work. Another 5 children were taken into protective custody following checkpoint operation, and the Mercy Project also brought 12 children to us for recovery.

118 were cared for at our rehabilitation shelter this year, including 70 new admissions. All were provided with comprehensive medical, physical, social and educational rehabilitation. We also expanded our psychosocial care with staff now trained to provide psychological interventions including NET therapy.

74 children were reintegrated with their families and continuous monitoring was provided to 82 children, with staff following up at home, in school and providing educational support and materials.

We supported our Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) with training in child protection and worked together to run sensitization events that resulted in new victims in need of rescue being identified.



Challenging Heights school supported over 720 children in 2015, with classes oversubscribed. We remain the joint-top performing school in the district for the second year running. The school is also a beacon for non-violent discipline, with our positive behaviour management programme being a flagship for ending violence against children.



Our Community Library celebrated its one year anniversary with more than 1500 registered members, loaning out over 1000 books, with many more children and adults coming in to use the books in the library. We have also engaged other schools in the area with an outreach programme that included a recitation competition and inter-school quiz.

Our Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP) trained 124 young men and 114 young women in ICT, leadership and business, with 108 entering apprenticeships, finding employment or accessing further education as a result.

Our Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (WEEP) supported 254 carers of vulnerable children.

In addition to core business management, food security and market access training, 105 were trained in liquid and solid soap making and 50 given horticultural training and mentoring. In addition to seed capital provided to technical and vocation training beneficiaries, another 39 carers received finance training and microloans to start other business.

We inaugurated a smoke house with 56 smoke ovens to be used by local women's cooperatives, with an additional 30 women provided oven racks for use at home. Construction of the cold store that will underpin the whole WEEP site was started and is due for completion early in 2016.

Our Stop the Bus campaign reached a successful conclusion in June when the Inspector General of Police issued a directive to all checkpoint officers to properly screen vehicles for trafficked children. The occasion saw the launch of our Turn Back Child trafficking campaign which combines a personal pledge to fight trafficking with a widespread stickering campaign targeting public transport and training key stakeholders.

We campaigned on key national issues including reform and expansion of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection publically accepting our research findings. James

Kofi Annan also addressed the Minister of Labour on the failure of the National Plan of Action Against the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which expired in 2015.



Our Partners in Development Programme continues to welcome visitors from all over the world, providing tailored service-learning opportunities so that the number of voices advocating against slavery in Ghana continues to grow.

CHALLENGING HEIGHTS

10 YEARS OF CHALLENGING HEIGHTS

In 2015 Challenging Heights was proud to celebrate its 10th anniversary as an NGO, although in fact James Kofi Annan founded the organisation two years earlier, in 2003. During that time the organisation has grown enormously, continuing to be driven by the passion of its president. Trafficked himself when he was six years old, and forced to work in various fishing communities along Ghana's Lake Volta for seven years, James Kofi

Annan has dedicated himself to serving as a voice and advocate for children who are trapped in similar situations. Today our holistic care of those rescued from slavery is complemented by education and livelihoods support that ensure their long term future, and wide ranging campaigning that seeks to bring about systemic change in Ghana and the world.

WHY WE EXIST

Child trafficking and forced labour remain significant problems in Ghana. A traditional culture of moving children amongst extended family and an existence that requires children to contribute their share of chores is exploited by slave-masters, traffickers and, sadly, a few uncaring parents, for profit. We acknowledge the need for children to work in many families, but by law this should not interfere with the child's development – especially education – or impact negatively on their physical health and wellbeing.

As the National Plan of Action Against the Worst Forms of Child Labour expires, the situation remains worse now than when the plan was launched five years ago. The total number of children in Ghana in child labour has increased (the change from 1.27m to 1.9m represents a 49% rise). And the proportion of Ghanaian children in child labour has increased from 20.0% to 21.8%. The Human Trafficking Fund is unfunded for the fourth consecutive year, and government shelters remain unfunded and in an inadequate condition.



It was therefore not surprising that Ghana was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch list status in the 2015 US State Department's Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report. Nor is there any reason to doubt the Global Slavery Index estimate of over 193,000 people trapped in modern slavery in Ghana today (including trafficked children and those in child marriage), or to assume the International Labour Organization/International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) 2013 estimate that 21,000 children are trapped in hazardous labour on Lake Volta has changed significantly.

The TIP downgrading of Ghana indicates that the US State Department deems the Government of Ghana as not working to comply with the minimum standards of preventing human trafficking. Ghana is known as a source and destination for trafficking, but prevention and protection methods have not been upgraded in years. Ghana has

several laws that criminalise child trafficking and forced labour, including the Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 594) and Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), these practices continue in Ghana. According to TIP, however, there has been a decrease in government efforts to prosecute offenders. Our own experience is that prosecutions have only been achieved by NGOs pursuing cases and funding law enforcement agencies themselves.

In the Central Region of Ghana, where we work, there is no functioning Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) office despite being a source of victims: we rely on the Domestic Violence & Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) who are not mandated or trained for day-to-day work, connecting with the national AHTU centre in Accra for major operations.



Our recent research on Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme shows that economic support for the very poor is below par, leading to many children not attending school. We understand that child trafficking and forced labour in Ghana is caused by poverty and economic hardship, lack of parental care and support for children and ignorance of the issues.

OUR STRATEGIC POSITION

Challenging Heights seeks to protect and improve the lives of young people and their communities affected by child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. Through education and empowering women and families, we believe that the practice of child exploitation can be ended. As children are educated and learn their rights, they will be less vulnerable to being trafficked into slave labour.

Many families in Ghana struggle to provide for their children and when the opportunity for a child to work for

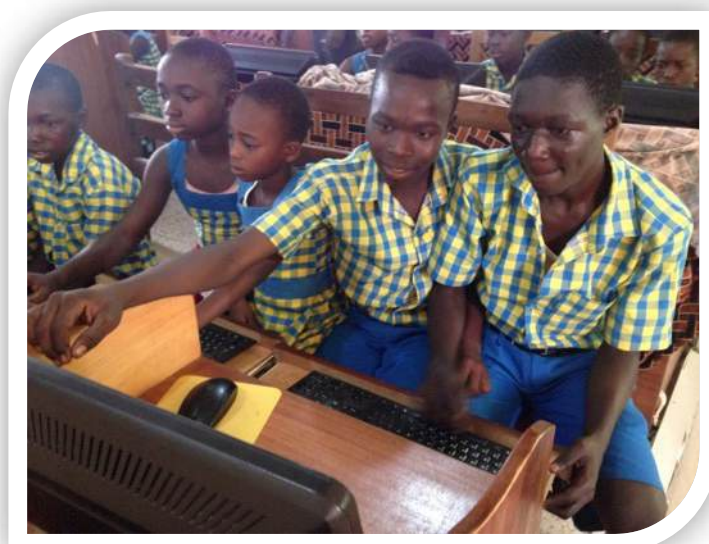
him or herself presents itself, it can be appealing. Since we are part of the communities we serve, our goal is to improve economic situations in families and we do so by offering solutions that are in line with the community's needs.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

As we work to eradicate child slavery in Ghana, we know there is more to it than simply rescuing children. With a holistic approach, we start from the root causes and along with bringing children home from dangerous and vulnerable trafficking situations, we focus on education and elevating families from poverty.

Through rescue, recovery, livelihoods, education and advocacy, we aim to reach all levels of change from the individual and family level, to the community level (changing attitudes and practices), and systemic level (changing laws and policies).

Our Rescue and Recovery programmes work to rescue children from slave labour on Lake Volta and prepare them for life after trauma, which rehabilitation and reintegration with their families. Education focuses on teaching



that every child has a right to learning, no matter where they are from or what their background is. We provide education and vocational training for young people who have missed out on traditional schooling opportunities as part of our Livelihoods programme, which offers support to caregivers of survivors and at-risk children by providing skills training and micro financing to set them on their way toward economic empowerment. With advocacy, Challenging Heights works to influence national and international policies on children's rights and the rights of all children to education and freedom from slavery.

ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Through 2015 Challenging Heights continued to grow its internal capacity and the capacity of its programmes to impact a wider range of beneficiaries, in line with our 5 year strategic plan.

PERSONNEL

We expanded provision at our rehabilitation shelter, including an additional social worker and improved the gender balance amongst care staff to provide the mostly-male rescued children with role models. To oversee staff development of our inspiring team we recruited a new Human Resources Manager, whilst a dedicated member of staff now manages our grants in order for us to successfully meet the growing reporting requirements made by funding partners. Staff numbers at the school have also increased to provide smaller and more specialised classes for our students.

In 2015 we provided extensive training to ensure we maintain the highest levels of child protection and maximise our ability to provide therapeutic care for children. At the shelter, care staff were provided with specialist training in new therapies and case management techniques. All staff participated in an in-depth child protection programme, with in-house trainers trained to ensure ongoing provision. And individual teams were provided with bespoke workshops including database management and media engagement. In addition we continue to support staff to study for formal qualifications, and are pleased that a growing number are attaining university level qualifications whilst employed by us.

PROCEDURES

As part of our ongoing strategy to professionalise the organisation we have developed and implemented a new Human Resources Policy and a Finance Policy, in line with Ghana legislation and our aspirations. All staff members were given an induction into the policies and are now employed on formal contracts setting out conditions of service and employee requirements.

Staff are also expected to abide by a newly developed Communications Policy, which includes an "informed consent protocol". This focuses on preserving the privacy and dignity of rescued children and all beneficiaries whose stories we wish to share with our supporters.

For the first time our annual accounts have been managed entirely in QuickBooks – professional accounting software that allows full transparency of our income and expenditure to funding partners.



INFRASTRUCTURE



Thanks to fantastic efforts by some of our longest standing supporters we were able to purchase a new bus to support our work. In 2015 the bus was used to bring rescued children back from the lake, as well as to take children at the shelter to their weekly ICT lessons. It has been used by the school for excursions and also by the sports programme for away matches. In addition it has enabled us to host visitors to Challenging Heights and show them around, generating income and spreading the message of our work.

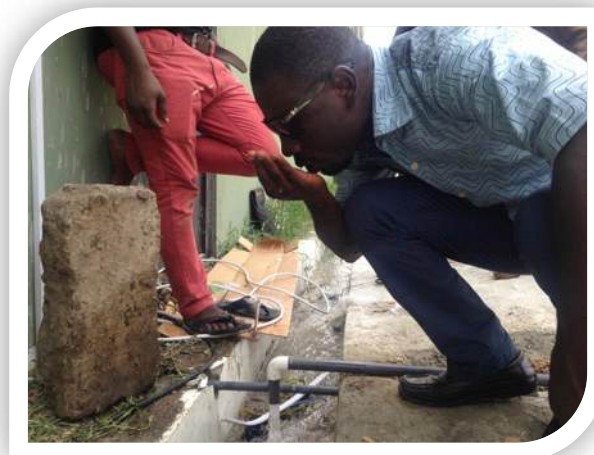
Challenging Heights School is expanding, with the construction of three more classrooms almost completed to accommodate more children and facilitate smaller class sizes as the school becomes ever more popular.

Our Livelihoods site expanded significantly with a smoke oven housing over fifty ovens and a flagship cold store currently under construction. This is a major investment and will significantly raise the economic prospects of hundreds of families in one of the poorest parts of Winneba.

Our office has also seen upgrades, including having a borehole dug, so that our staff and beneficiaries can access fresh water without needing to be connected to the city water line. This is expected to reduce costs moving forward.

FRIENDS OF CHALLENGING HEIGHTS

Friends of Challenging Heights (FCH) continues its efforts to garner support for Challenging Heights in the US, engaging individual supporters and offering potential donors the advantages of 501c tax status.



In 2015 Friends of Challenging Heights hosted a number of events, including key occasions attended by James Kofi Annan, to raise funds for our work in Ghana.



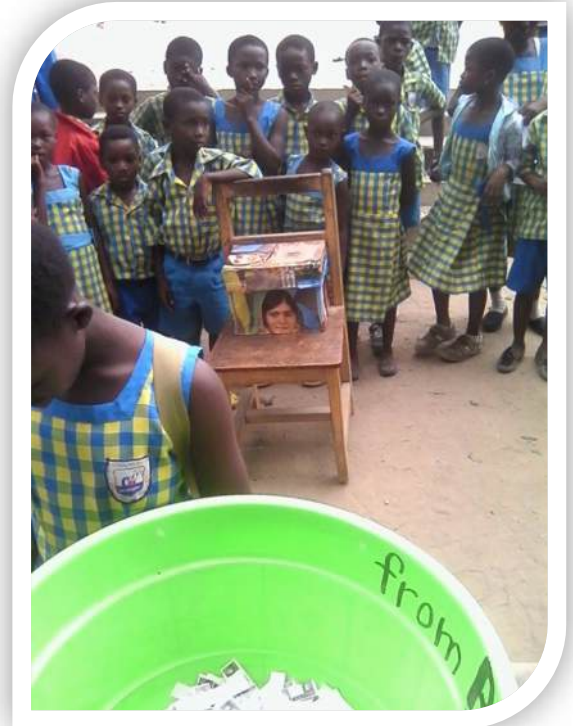
Rescue and Recovery



RESCUE AND RECOVERY

At the heart of our mission “to promote youth and family empowerment and children’s rights to education and freedom from forced labour in Ghana,” is a desire to prevent child trafficking and restore those trapped in slavery to a normal life. Prevention comes in many forms, including our community-level sensitisation and awareness programmes and supporting Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs). This year we enhanced support through child protection training for parents of reintegrated children, PTA members and CCPC members. We also engage children in learning their rights in our continued participation in voting for the annual World’s Children’s Prize (which James Kofi Annan won in 2013). Through our programmes we educated thousands of boys, girls, men, women and community leaders about child trafficking and the rights of children.

In line with international best practice, we significantly restructured our protection programme in 2015, to more closely integrate rehabilitation care and long term reintegration support. Children now engage with the reintegration officers who will monitor their progress in their communities whilst still at the shelter, and will also maintain contact with the social workers who oversee their rehabilitation after they go home. Underpinning this is a new case management system for all children brought into our recovery programme, ensuring better continuity of care and early identification of breakdown in support.



RESCUE FROM SLAVERY

Following painstaking victim identification work in source communities, the Challenging Heights field team set out for Lake Volta in March and again in October with lists of children whose families have asked us to find them and bring them home. In total 41 children were directly taken away from abusive situations where they were forced to work on the lake and were unable to attend school. As well as those directly removed from the lake by Challenging Heights staff, there were others whose guardians were accused of mistreatment and willingly turned over their children to our custody before we called in authorities.

Where possible, we try to ensure children are returned voluntarily. Such community rescues are achieved by working through intermediaries to contact traffickers and threaten them with prosecution. During both operations we made traffickers send back some children who were on the rescue list beforehand. But in all cases the children were in severe need of rehabilitation care and were taken to our shelter. There they join other survivors of slavery on their pathway to education, health and self-sufficiency.



In the days following the rescue, family members and traffickers made their way to the Challenging Heights office in Sankor, Winneba, to plead their cases as to why their children were sent to Lake Volta, and oftentimes, claiming they did nothing wrong. The law, though, reminds them that child trafficking of any kind is illegal. They were informed of any restitution or potential jail time they face and are warned not to send children into forced labour on Lake Volta.

Details of a Rescue

During the October rescue operation we rescued 23 children from forced hazardous labour. With tips from villagers, the team found the children in fourteen different remote communities across the lake. Before the mission began, covert investigations took place to locate the children whom Challenging Heights had been requested to bring back to their families. With backing from local authorities (police, the Navy, and Social Services) the field team prepared for its journey.

During the first full day in Yeji, some members of the team were on the lakefront and noticed a boy wearing ragged clothing and eating from a small bag on the ground. When questioned he said that he was from Winneba but working on the lake with relatives – a common description by those who have been trafficked. The boy was hungry and said he would do extra chores for women near the lakefront to get extra food in the evenings, so we took him to our temporary shelter whilst the team went to meet with the trafficker and summon him to Winneba.

The rest of the week was spent navigating to various communities around the shores of Lake Volta. Negotiations sometimes lead to altercations, and a couple of the times, law enforcement joined the Challenging Heights team as they rescued children. On one occasion, two children were found following identification by a social welfare officer from Yeji.

REHABILITATION

As part of our multi-faceted rehabilitation programme, rescued children begin formal education at our 65-capacity modern rehabilitation shelter, Challenging Heights Hovde House. There they are provided with nutritious food, medical care and safe shelter as they learn, but also counselling and help to develop social and life skills.

In 2015 we cared for 118 children at the shelter, including 70 new admissions. How long children spend at the shelter depends on their needs, with typical residency of 3-9 months.

When children arrive at the shelter from a life of slave labour on Lake Volta they have usually endured violent and emotional abuse. This means many of them suffer from some level of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

As the care team works to lessen the effects of trauma, they see children with troubling memories, aggressive behaviour, difficulty concentrating in class, fear, social withdrawal, sleeping problems or anger issues. The children are tested for PTSD and re-screened at later junctures, so that social workers can track their progress. Some children will start with high scores, but these often reduce after weeks or months in the therapeutic environment of the shelter.





For those children whose scores do not reduce, which means they are still highly affected by the trauma they have endured, staff try a new technique. Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) was introduced to the care team. This is an intensive style of counselling that allows staff to get to the heart of a child's trauma, without digging too deep. It's not meant to take away their past, or make it all better, but to alleviate the symptoms. Not something that is used with every child at Hovde House, it's a new way to work with the children who are under the most stress and anxiety. This is all part of the efforts to help the children overcome the trauma they endured and move forward to become successful, happy adults.

Our team has also incorporated art therapy into regular group counselling sessions. We hired an art therapy staff member who is one of our security guards with an interest in art; he does sessions with the children two times a week. This type of creative therapy is to help children express their feelings. They

have been through a lot and cannot often talk about how they are feeling, but through drawing, drumming, music or other arts and crafts activities they can learn about themselves and our social workers and staff can gain insight to help in their counselling. Classes focus on themes varying from confidence building to emotional help and also some fun.

During their time at the shelter, parents, siblings and grandparents are shuttled to Hovde House to visit their children. Many have not seen each other for years and may not even recognise each other.

While many children at Hovde House expect to join schools close to home when they join their families, some of the older children prefer to look into apprenticeship opportunities. In June, shelter staff implemented its first bus-tour style "Career Day," offering crucial exposure to many different apprenticeship opportunities in the area. They stopped at a hair dresser, tailor, concrete designer, auto mechanic, welder, carpenter and more. A common theme for each job was that it takes time to learn and perfect a craft. If the children are serious and hardworking, focused and goal-driven, they can achieve much.

The children have been used to a life on Lake Volta without much knowledge of a world beyond. As they re-join, or even begin, their formal schooling at the Hovde House before they are reintegrated to their community schools, we hope that introducing them to options will encourage them to work hard and remain hopeful.

Other excursions for the shelter included a group field trip to the Kotoka International Airport in Accra and the Kwame Nkrumah Museum. Named after Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, the museum showed the children how Ghana became independent. The students got to hear Nkrumah's life story, which in many ways, can inspire them to aim high and work toward any goal they set. The trip was set to help the rescued children develop their social and outing skills,



since many of them have little interaction with a broader slice of Ghanaian life than what they saw on the lake or at the shelter.

REINTEGRATION & MONITORING

In 2015 we reintegrated 74 children to their families, with field officers continuing to monitor 82 children from previous reintegrations at home.

Reintegration comes with much anticipation. Staff spend months with the children, helping them catch up at school and become emotionally prepared to join their families after they had been working in often dangerous conditions on the lake. It also takes time for our Field Team to monitor the families, to make sure they are ready and able to provide and care for their returning children.

The children are given haircuts and bags of new clothes and supplies, but leaving their close friends behind makes the return home bittersweet.

In April, as staff at Hovde House waved goodbye to 17 children, they welcomed 12 more the same week, who had been rescued by Mercy Project. The rehabilitation shelter is only a stop on the children's path to rejoining their communities and participating in society as they grow.

Reintegration at the end of August brought tears in Senya, as friends said goodbye through windows on the Challenging Heights bus.

At each home, the social worker speaks directly to each child's care givers. He reminds them why their child has been away and that they should never sell their children into slavery of any kind again. The parent or guardian is asked to "sign" a form (which is done by thumb print for most parents who may not know how to write their names), which acknowledges that the child is now in their care and they accept responsibility to make sure the child is in school and not re-trafficked.

One family member of a child responded to the social worker's plea with, "it was a mistake, yeah." She shook her head emphatically, expressing her concern and showing remorse.



Challenging Heights paid for and registered all reintegrated children under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) for a period of five years. The NHIS is a Government of Ghana health insurance policy for the poor and needy to access free medical care, relieving families of these costs, which are usually a source of income drain and financial burden.

Our field team works to reconnect with families and find supportive homes for the children. Once they're home, Challenging Heights and our community volunteers actively check up on them to make sure they are happy and doing well at school. To make this happen, we provide educational support to children and economic empowerment to their care-givers. In 2015, our field team monitored 156 children who had been reintegrated after completing our rehabilitation programme.

The Challenging Heights Field Team organizes all the details getting rescued ready to join their classmates, from asking specific principals to allow a new student into their school, to making sure each child has enough pencils, erasers and notebooks to participate in their studies.

Each reintegration comes with challenges, but our goal is to help the children get back to school and away from dangerous slave labour permanently.

COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES (CCPCs)

In order to build strong community resistance against child slavery, Challenging Heights relies on volunteer community members in different communities across the region to be on the lookout for what could be child trafficking. Community Child Protection Committees are comprised of local and religious leaders, students and community members. Most neighbourhoods are relatively small and some members are able to notice if they have not seen a certain child for a while. When they hear word that a child has not shown up to school, or didn't come home after a couple days, they can then inquire within the family to see where the child is.

In 2015, we had 11 CCPCs in various communities, and they receive regular trainings, including this year's new child protection training

"Though some may come from poor family... education [can make children's lives] different, and then our [community's] future life too, is children to have a good start in education, when they grow up, they will know and do better. So we have devoted ourselves to do this work so that our children's future will be better." – CCPC different. So if we help the Member



One member in the Sankor-based CCPC said he stopped a mother from selling her son after hearing from others that she received money from a trafficker. He warned the mother that she would go to jail if she did not give the money back and send her son to school. The CCPC members then check up on families like to make sure the child is home and has not been trafficked after all.

COMMUNITY SENSITISATION

As a way to create awareness about the dangers of child trafficking, Challenging Heights' field team organises sensitization programmes in local communities.

In November, a crowd of hundreds gathered at the Methodist Church in Senya, which is nearly an hour drive from Winneba, on Ghana's coast. Over a couple of hours, they watched a film showcasing the reality of child trafficking and forced labour on Lake Volta.

Men, women and children of all ages waited for the Challenging Heights field team to work through setting up a projector and getting speakers working and as the movie played, more and more people showed up to see the excitement.

It was evident that many in attendance hadn't known the atrocities, but others among the faces had been rescued child slaves themselves, or even traffickers or former Lake Volta fishermen.



Education



EDUCATION

While Challenging Heights seeks the realisation of every child's right to education, our school is growing in size and reputation, becoming a premier school in Winneba with our non-violent discipline measures and rising academic performance.



We operate the school in Sankor, one of the most underserved and vulnerable communities, to provide subsidised education to children who would otherwise likely be working and out of school. Ensuring children are in school helps prevent future trafficking, enables children to regain hope for their future, and help them secure a life of stability.

In 2015, we celebrated our 10th Anniversary as an official NGO and the students at Challenging Heights School participated in multiple celebratory events such as a community durbar and an advocacy march through Winneba promoting "Education for All".

Some of our students are actively engaged in

promoting equal rights and expressing the rights of all children to be in school. One after school club, Girls Learn International, connects our students to students in North America.

We believe that education is essential in ensuring all children are getting access to their rights of school, health care, a loving family, freedom and ultimately to the elimination of child labour. Education is empowerment.

CHALLENGING HEIGHTS SCHOOL

As enrolment at Challenging Heights School grew to more than 720, Headmaster Eric Asamani had to turn away families wanting to add their children to our classes. As part of the 2015 Classroom Campaign, three classrooms were constructed at the school to allow for more space for students to learn. While more classrooms are needed, these will be utilized early in 2016.

The second graduating class of Challenging Heights, the class of 2015 – continued the tradition of a 100% pass rate in their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), which is the test necessary to move on to Senior High School. All graduates have moved on to SHS, and Challenging Heights is supporting them during their first year in this next level of education. Challenging Heights School is one of just a few in Winneba with a 100% BECE pass rate and it is now being considered one of the best rising schools in the area.



Continuing our non-violent discipline protocol, teachers and staff at CHS promoted its new "Roll of Honour." The program was implemented to reward the best behaved students and encourage other students to behave well. In March, students were honoured with gift prizes in front of the whole school. Later in the year, the youngest Roll of Honour

students were presented with a special meal, while the older students were taken on a field trip to an upmarket shopping mall near Ghana's capital, Accra. The introduction to elevators, escalators, flushing toilets and automatic hand dryers was mind blowing and exciting for most of the students.

CHS students participated in their first ever school election process in 2015. Headmaster, Eric Asamani, believes that teachers and staff will benefit from having students help self-govern and keep their classmates in line, organized, and quiet. Along with participating in overseeing aspects of the school, taking part in the election process will help students in their futures. They will better understand the democratic process and become better versed in public speaking.

Teachers and staff participated in ongoing child protection training to discuss best practices in their classrooms, and learned and discussed new/better ways to discipline children without physical contact.



CHALLENGING HEIGHTS HAND IN HAND FOR LITERACY COMMUNITY LIBRARY

In 2015, Challenging Heights celebrated the first anniversary of the Hand in Hand for Literacy Community Library. By the end of the year, we had more than 1500 registered members and at least 1000 are active members.

There are about 8000 books at the library, and more than 900 have been checked out during the year. Most of the books checked out were returned in good condition.

Students from Challenging Heights and other nearby schools use the library the most, but families and adults from the community do make use of the library, too. Fiction picture books are those most popular books checked out. In August, the library began showing educational videos to the nursery school students for their visits to help them learn English and numbers.

The librarians organised multiple competitions for students to improve their reading comprehension and to encourage positive reading habits. In June, Challenging Heights hosted an inter-school Quiz Competition. In November, CHS students and those from four other Winneba schools competed in a Recitation Competition. Students were charged with exercising their creativity, reading a story and were asked to answer questions and memorize lines. These competitions foster unity among participating schools.

The library welcomed multiple volunteers to help with reading assistance through 2015, and the "Library Lady," Deb McNally, who started the library's sponsor Hand in Hand for Literacy visited the facility in August, pleased with the growth and success of its establishment in Sankor.



A photograph capturing a moment of daily life in a rural setting. A woman, wearing a vibrant blue headwrap with a colorful floral pattern and a yellow top, is seated and feeding a young child with a spoon. The child, dressed in a yellow top, is looking up at her. To the left, another woman, wearing a grey top with a white lace collar, is smiling and watching the interaction. In the foreground, a red bowl filled with white rice and a brown, meaty sauce sits on a blue and white polka-dot cloth. The background shows a wooden structure and a dirt ground, suggesting an outdoor or semi-outdoor environment.

Livelihoods

LIVELIHOODS

Challenging Heights recognises that a key driver of children being kept out of school, or sent away to work, is economic deprivation. While we continue to rescue children from slavery and abuse, we also need to address the underlying causes and vulnerabilities in order to prevent trafficking and other child rights violations in the first place. Through our livelihoods programme, we work with the parents and care givers of survivors and the families of children at risk to find sustainable livelihoods through economic empowerment.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME (WEEP)

In 2015 we supported 254 people through our WEEP programme, and we only expect that number to grow in the years to come.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Every beneficiary who participates in our training programmes receives financial management training, market access and food security lessons as part of the classes.



FISH PRESERVATION

As we build a brand new fish smoking facility and cold store, women in the community have already begun smoking fish on our newly constructed ovens, plus using supplies given by Challenging Heights for their at-home ovens. 30 women were given four nets to smoke fish on at their homes, and those women were all trained in fish preservation best practices. As the facility was built, beneficiaries even helped to pound dirt into clay to make the first ovens on the site.

The beginning of the cold store construction was a highlight of 2015. The store is based in a deprived area of Winneba, where resources and facilities to help people smoke fish, or store fish, are limited.

SOAP MAKING

There were 105 women (and some men) who were trained in how to make liquid and solid soap and given opportunities to form co-operatives with others. They pooled resources and were given micro-grants for supplies to start their own soap making businesses to sell to stores and restaurants and in markets. Skills training helps women jumpstart financial self-sufficiency. So far 8 women have been given micro-loans to help them to start their own businesses.



HORTICULTURE TRAINING

With visits to farms across the region, the Livelihoods team offered supplies like seeds and fertilizer to local farmers needing some assistance to get their growing going. 50 women, and some men, were given micro-financing and seed capital to expand the planting on land that they are already in care of. Their training lasted for 90 days since it involved time between steps in the growing process.

MICRO-FINANACE

Following business and rights training women are eligible for support through micro-loans or, where appropriate, micro-grants, to establish business or develop their ventures. In 2015, 39 people were given micro-loans with 12 month instalments to be able to start their own businesses and cultivate their own income to support their families.

YEP Case Study

Computer skills are what Asemani Kwamene, 19, is glad to have mastered. He is the first in his family to go to senior high school, and he plans to be the first to go to university. He said programs like Microsoft Publisher and CorelDRAW will help him in future studies. Asemani wants to become a teacher or lecturer, so he can share knowledge with others. As the oldest son, he wants his ICT training to be an example for his younger siblings to follow.

YEP Case Study

Florence, 29, is a teacher at Challenging Heights School. As a YEP graduate, she appreciates the leadership skills she now has, including experience in how to communicate with people and manage money and resources. Florence hopes to start a local market in her area, Waterworks, which currently does not have one.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME (YEP)

With nearly 100 applicants for each session, Challenging Heights' Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP) has become so popular that interested candidates are turned away as the classes fill up. In 2015, there were four different graduating classes and 235 students received certificates for completing the programme. Young people aged 15-25 participated in ICT training to learn basic and essential computer skills, entrepreneurial training and leadership training as they become inspired to transform expectations of young people and look for jobs and create their own to provide for their families. With continued support from EMpower, young people in and around Winneba are on their way to successful futures.

Each graduation ceremony is filled with inspirational speakers and messages reminding the students that their future is now in their own hands and they have the skills to improve their financial situation, but also improve their communities at large.





Advocacy

ADVOCACY

Educating the public and advocating for child rights is at the forefront of our mission. Through our advocacy work, we see shifts in attitudes toward children and governmental agencies taking note and making promises to bring about lasting change for children across Ghana. We demand freedom from slavery and the right to education for every child, and we have had many successes influencing attitudes and shaping policy.



With high regard and reputation, our President continues to travel the globe, sharing his story and our child rights agenda. We have had multiple film and documentary crews at our doorstep to tell Dr. Annan and our stories, and we have garnered recognised expertise in child slavery as we work towards rights for all children in Ghana and internationally.

CAMPAIGNING

ENDING MODERN SLAVERY IN GHANA

In 2015 our Stop the Bus campaign, run in partnership with Walk Free, reached a successful conclusion. On 5th June 2015, Ghana Police leaders pledged to take the lead of our *Turn Back Child Trafficking Campaign* at the Ghana Police Headquarters in Accra. At the event, President James Kofi Annan addressed a wide range of media representatives. This campaign asks the police and other authorities to pay close attention to passengers on tro tros, taxis and buses, and question suspicious behaviour. The goal is to notice when unaccompanied minors are travelling towards Lake Volta, which could indicate that they are being trafficked into hazardous labour.

Since the "Turn Back Child Trafficking" campaign launch, Challenging Heights has been demanding vigilance and awareness through the media. With press releases, press conferences, radio shows and interviews, we challenge Ghana Police to step up enforcement and pay attention to the reality that is putting Ghanaian children at risk and keeping them from inalienable rights.

Our advocacy team worked with local transportation leaders to build public engagement through a widespread sticker campaign, putting brightly coloured awareness stickers on buses, tro tros and taxis and educating leaders and drivers. We also pushed an online pledge programme.

The momentum of *Turn Back* comes after a successful petition to the government from the previous year in our *Stop the Bus* campaign. We continued *Stop the bus* in September with a bus raid that successfully intercepted five children from being sent to work on Lake Volta. This reiterates the fact



that most internally trafficked children in Ghana are moved on public highways in vehicles that pass through numerous police checkpoints without being properly screened.

Charity Althul, secretary of Swedru's GPRTU, joined our advocacy manager on Radio Peace, a local Winneba radio station to discuss the stickering and voice full support of Challenging Heights' efforts.

Her consistent push toward awareness is the kind of splash we hoped to make in our campaign, and we expect others to jump on board as our message to prevent child trafficking is shared.

Also working with Walk Free, we launched an online petition against domestic slavery in Ghana. We call on the government to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention No.189 (C189) to take measures to protect and extend national legal protections to domestic workers. We believe this ratification is vital to ensure the government's commitment to taking action to address domestic slavery in Ghana.

SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Our advocacy team petitioned the Minister of Gender and Social Welfare to expand Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme, based on Challenging Heights-led research on the benefits and shortfalls of LEAP.

The research came from 2013, highlighting the positive impact on the wellbeing and care for children but noting issues like delay and irregularity of payments and the struggles that families face with the current cap on eligible household members.

Hon. Nana Ove Lithur admitted the need for improvement and committed to expanding LEAP from 90,000 families to 150,000 and her department plans to focus efforts in areas that need the most help, including coastal areas that we requested. She plans to lift the household cap to help all beneficiaries and to raise the minimum amount paid to families. The government plans to change their benefit distribution process to e-payments, which will also cut down on corruption.

By the end of 2015, the National Plan of Action (NPA) towards the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) came to a close and Ghana had not met the specified goals it set when the plan began in 2009. The Challenging Heights advocacy team spoke out demanding accountability and we caught the attention of the Minister of Education. Dr. James Kofi Annan defended our claim that 75% of what was planned in the NPA was not achieved directly to the ministry.

STAKEHOLDER TRAINING

In 2015, Challenging Heights hosted the "Training workshop for GPRTU and Traditional Leaders in the Central and Greater Accra Region of Ghana on Turn Back Child Trafficking." It was a day-long information



session and discussion for the Ghana Private Road Transport Union, religious leaders, and chiefs in the area. Supported by the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives the session served as a way to sensitize the community and create awareness in public transportation drivers who may unknowingly be the vehicle with which traffickers pass along child slaves.

The drivers and transportation leaders said they had no idea that so many young people were sent to Yeji to work on Lake Volta without much in terms of food, shelter or education. Participants learned signs to look for in children who could be at-risk, or those who could be on their way to forced labour.

The taxi and tro tro drivers, union leaders and community leaders were given "Turn Back Child Trafficking" stickers to put on their vehicles and stations, to remind each other to stay watchful, because it is everyone's responsibility to keep Ghanaian children safe.



PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT

Great interest in Challenging Heights has been shown in 2015, with various groups visiting the office, school and shelter to learn about our programming, to volunteer and sometimes to take on internships. We are proud that the educational value of our service-learning opportunities is being recognised, including providing bespoke teaching programmes for US universities as part of their courses. We added a second Partners in Development staff member to help support visiting groups and volunteers. An Israeli group, Project TEN, has come to Winneba and we're supporting them to develop their volunteer projects. We have also launched a new Ambassadors Programme to start in 2016 through the online community, Amizade, to attract some of the most passionate change makers to our cause.

ADVOCATES PROGRAMME

We have seen that by introducing those who come to Challenging Heights to all facets of our organisation, we broaden our reach in citizen activism. As a grassroots organisation based in Ghana, we cannot eradicate child slavery on our own, and we need the power of international voices raised in defence of vulnerable children.

When the Ambassadors, Advocates and Interns are in our programmes, we keep children's wellbeing as the top priority. We focus on needs-lead programmes to provide life-changing experiences along with opportunities for visitors to engage in culturally appropriate global learning.

Challenging Heights welcomed two groups of Advocates during 2015. The first was in June, where group members signed up individually. Two of the Advocates stayed on for an internship over the summer. In December, a group from Arizona State University participated in the two week Advocates Programme. Grand Valley State University continued their annual visit to Challenging Heights, with an abbreviated

Advocates introduction, while some of their students participated in our internship programme, helping in our Hand in Hand Community Library and the Hovde House shelter.

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- ♥ Women in Social Enterprise (WISE)

CHALLENGING HEIGHTS BOARD

We are privileged to have in place a five-member board of trustees that supports the President in making strategic and policy level decisions.

Doris Annan Nortey *Chairperson*
George Essel *Financial Secretary*
Gloria Kankam *Member*
Emma Gharthey *Member*
James Kofi Annan *Secretary (non-voting member)*

CHALLENGING HEIGHTS MANAGEMENT TEAM

The following people constituted the executive management of Challenging Heights in 2015:

Dr. James Kofi Annan *President*
Dr. David Schley *Vice-President for Campaigns, Research and Strategic Development*
Dr. Kate Danvers *Vice President for Psychosocial Programmes and Survivor Support*
Araba Korsah *HR & Admin Manager*
David Kofi Awusi *Advocacy Manager*
Linda Ataa Osabutey *Recovery Manager*
Stephen Addo *Rescue and Community Engagement Manager*
Eric Asamani *Head of School*

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