



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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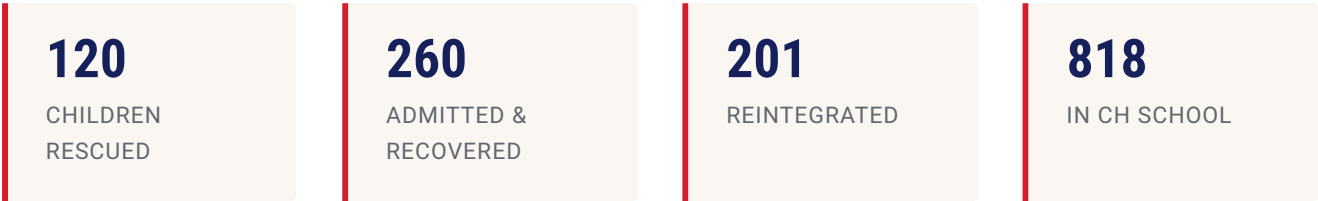
FIGURE 1 — Sex disaggregated data of rescue, recovery and reintegration of children

FIGURE 2 — Enhanced reintegration and mentorship reach

FIGURE 3 — Summary of Women and youth and livelihood empowerment



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In the year 2025, we reinforced our commitment to ensuring the rights of children and the environment. We undertook activities to rescue, recover and reintegrate children with their various families and communities in efforts to protect them. We also undertook preventive activities to ensure they are not forced to encounter such challenges again.

We directly rescued 120 children from Lake Volta in situations of child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. Again, we admitted and recovered 260 children from January to December in the Recovery Centre. We offered health, education, psychosocial, nutritional, and many other supports to all children at the recovery centre. After recovery, we reintegrated 201 children back into the communities to continue their education. We enrolled them into mainstream education and vocational school per the discretion of the child and their families.

Within the period, we monitored about 285 children reintegrated into the communities over the past two years. Children were visited at homes and in schools to monitor their progress in school and assess their integration into homes and communities.

Our extended reintegration and mentorship program supported 194 (107 in basic school, 52 in senior high school and 35 in tertiary) beneficiaries in the program. They were provided with feeding, health, accommodation, extra classes, school application and admission support, mentorship sessions and opportunities, training, counselling, amongst others within the year.

The Challenging Heights school provided high-quality and affordable education to 818 (448 girls, 350 boys) children from January to November 2025. The school continues to offer opportunities for children of vulnerable families to enrol and be provided good education.

We provided livelihood support to 1194 young women, girls and boys through our several livelihood interventions, skills training, cash transfer and financial assistance programs. Significantly, the majority of the beneficiaries were women and young girls, reflecting our deep programmatic gender focus in addressing issues of child labour, child trafficking and other forms of child labour. We conducted preventive activities such as forming 7 (seven) new community child protection committees in seven communities across the central region of Ghana as a way of creating awareness and enforcing the safeguarding of children in the communities.

Again, we strengthened the child rights clubs that empowered children to be aware of their rights and to serve as advocates for other children. We conducted sensitisation in the Northern region of Ghana through durbars and community meetings.

Advocacy on children and environmental rights was strengthened through actively participating in conferences and meetings. Our contributions and those of others shaped the communiques that are produced for government action. We successfully organised and commemorated the 2025 World Day Against Child Labour 2025 with community members, chiefs, representatives of state agencies, among others, in the Northern region of Ghana. This event aimed to strengthen the voice of communities on the rights of children.

Our environment and climate change activities for the year included commissioning and undertaking two significant research projects on the environment, mining and children's rights in Ghana. The findings led the organisation to support families of identified affected persons.

In spite of these remarkable achievements realised in 2025, the organisation encountered some challenges that limited its operations. The organisation experienced financial challenges largely due to the delay in the release of funds by donor partners. These invariably affected our operations, especially the rescue, recovery and reintegration aspects of our work. It further had an impact on staff numbers, as we were forced to put some staff off pending the release of funds and normalisation of the financial situation.

Challenging Heights still remains on course to protect and provide a safe place for children within and in an improved environment for their growth and wellbeing. While we have achieved a lot within the year, we still strive to have a greater impact and ensure respect for human rights and the protection of the environment.

"Challenging Heights remains on course to protect and provide a safe place for children—within an improved environment for their growth and wellbeing."

INTRODUCTION

Challenging Heights remains steadfast in its mission to create a safe, nurturing, and empowering environment for every child. Throughout the 2025 program year, we continued our dedicated work to protect children from exploitation, support their recovery and holistic development, and champion their rights within families and communities. This report details our comprehensive efforts from January to December 2025, highlighting both our significant achievements and the persistent challenges we faced. The past year was marked by direct action and sustainable impact. We rescued children from situations of trafficking and hazardous labour, provided critical care and rehabilitation at our recovery centre, and successfully reintegrated hundreds of survivors back into society with ongoing support. Our preventive initiatives strengthened community protection mechanisms, while our advocacy amplified the voices of children on national and international platforms. Furthermore, we expanded our focus to include environmental protection, recognising the intrinsic link between a healthy planet and children's well-being.



PROGRAMS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

RESCUE

Five (5) successful rescue operations were undertaken in the Volta Lake area of Ghana. The first rescue for the year was undertaken in February 2025, and then the other ones were done in May, September, November and December. These lake rescues resulted in securing the freedom and restoring the dignity of 120 children (51 girls, 69 boys) from all forms of abuse, trafficking and worst forms of child labour. In addition to direct lake rescues, Challenging Heights, in collaboration with the Ghana Police Service, rescued 81 (21 boys, 60 girls) cross-border victims of human trafficking. These young boys and girls were trafficked from Nigeria into Ghana for cyberfraud, sexual exploitation and prostitution.

120

RESCUED FROM LAKE VOLTA (51 GIRLS · 69 BOYS)

81

CROSS-BORDER VICTIMS RESCUED (60 GIRLS · 21 BOYS)



RECOVERY

260

CHILDREN SERVED AT THE RECOVERY CENTRE

130 / 130

GIRLS · BOYS

Our Recovery Centre served 260 (130 girls, 130 boys) children in 2025. All 260 children admitted to the recovery centre received recovery support. All children received medical, psychosocial, educational, feeding, clothing, accommodation, and many other forms of such support. All children admitted into the shelter received initial and subsequent health screening and treatment.

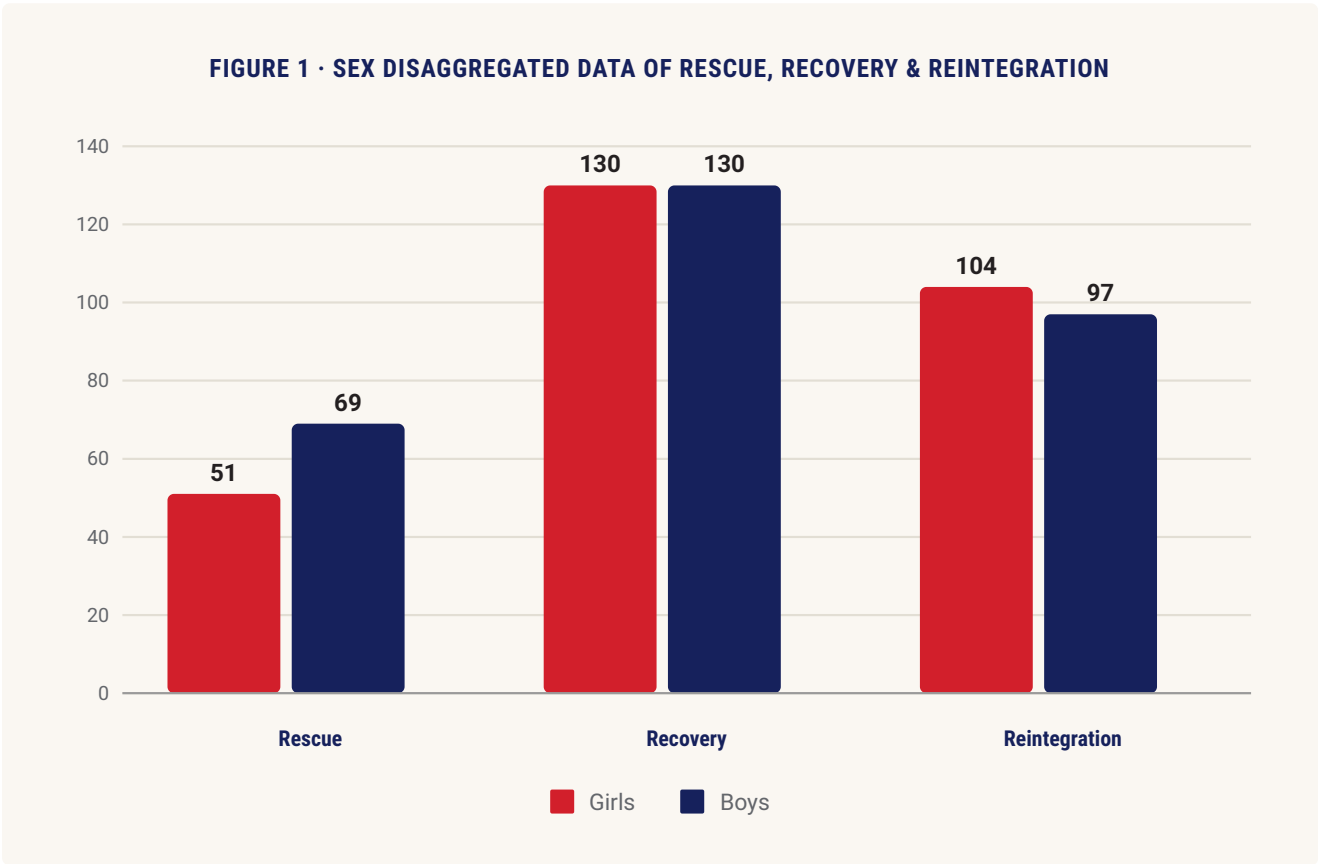
At the centre, the majority of children successfully passed all examinations that enabled them to proceed to the next level. The remaining, who had never been to school, were given special tuition and guidance in the basics (identifying, writing and reading alphabets and letters).

All cases of children were reviewed by the rescue team, recovery team and the department of social welfare. This was to monitor the progress of the children until they had completed recovery and were reintegrated into their homes. Monthly family visits were organized in this period. Family tracing and needs assessment were conducted before all children were reintegrated to ascertain the readiness of the families to receive the children back home. Again, the economic needs of the families and caregivers were assessed before the child's return home, which informed the need for caregivers' support.



REINTEGRATION

We reintegrated 201 (104 girls, 97 boys) children between January and December 2025. Overall, nine (9) reintegration sessions were held. These reintegration sessions included the reunification of victims of cross-border trafficking to Nigeria. Children received reintegration packages that included food items, cash, clothing materials, and health insurance, amongst others. Children were reintegrated into both apprenticeship or vocational training and mainstream education. Figure 1 gives a graph view of rescue, recovery and reintegration for the year 2025.



POST-REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

We continued to provide school supplies, monitoring and counselling services to reintegrated children this year.



SCHOOL ENROLMENT & SUPPLIES

171 (85%)

ENROLLED IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

30 (15%)

INTO APPRENTICESHIP / VOCATIONAL TRAINING

We engaged with schools and caregivers to enrol 171 (85%) of our reintegrated children into mainstream schools within this period. Children were selected and enrolled on their preferred schools. The majority of caregivers and the children themselves preferred public schools, with whom we already have established several years of cordial relationship. 30 (15%) of children were reintegrated into apprenticeship or vocational training.



MONITORING

285CHILDREN
MONITORED, 2-YEAR
PERIOD

Three major mass monitoring of children were conducted in 2025. In all, about 285 of our beneficiaries who have been reintegrated within the 2-year monitoring period in basic schools have been visited to assess their academic performance and at home to assess their safety and well-being. Generally, school monitoring for the year showed that the majority of children were punctual and were gradually improving in academics. However, challenges with feeding and constant school charges remain a difficult financial problem for the children and caregivers. Home monitoring showed the children are generally displaying improved behaviour. Constant monitoring has significantly reduced the risk of re-trafficking and has ensured caregivers provide as much good care as they can provide to children.

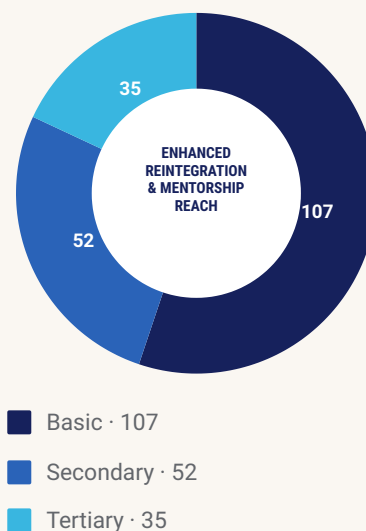


ENHANCED REINTEGRATION & MENTORSHIP

The enhanced reintegration and mentorship program supported 194 (59 girls, 135 boys) children and young people in 2025. This consists of 107 (33 girls, 74 boys) children at the basic level, 52 (20 girls, 32 boys) at Senior High School (SHS) and 35 (6 girls, 29 boys) at the tertiary levels. 17 of the children moved from basic to Senior High School, 11 transitioned in senior high, 22 completed SHS and are transitioning to tertiary. 10 have completed tertiary education.

Other activities carried out for the beneficiaries include home and school monitoring, Caregiver-Challenging Heights meetings (for the caregivers whose children were transitioning from one level to the other). Two tertiary students served as panellists on survivor engagements and discussions at an international conference held in Accra, Ghana. Tertiary students are performing well and are currently studying courses like Law, Nursing, etc. Generally, we have about 80% of final years successfully passing and transitioning into the next phase of their education.

FIGURE 2 · TOTAL = 194



17

PROGRESSED
FROM BASIC TO
SHS

22

COMPLETED SHS,
MOVING TO
TERTIARY

10

COMPLETED
TERTIARY
EDUCATION

80%

FINAL-YEAR PASS
RATE

Two of our tertiary students served as panellists on survivor engagement discussions at an international conference held in Accra — proof of how far the mentorship journey can carry a child.

› **EVERY TRANSITION MARKS A STEP CLOSER TO TRANSFORMATION**

PREVENTIVE ACTIVITIES

This year, we formed 7 new groups of Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) made up of 97 members in Senya, Mumford, Ekumfi Arkraa, Aboano, Immuna and Ekumpongano to assist the work of Challenging Heights to identify and report child trafficking related cases. The CCPCs, who serve as community watchdogs, provided data that led to identifying, rescuing, and recovering children in their communities.

One District Child Protection Committee (DCPC) was formed in Northern Ghana towards the same goal of child protection with the district-level actors. Ten new Child Rights Clubs were formed in Northern Ghana, comprising about 30 children each. A total of 300 children continue to benefit from this club that equips, educates and empowers children to be role models in the communities. The Child Labour and Trafficking Prevention Advocacy Project in Northern Ghana supported and promoted advocacy by enforcing the work of existing CCPCs and further forming DCPCs to advocate for children.

The project engaged media through the play of radio jingles in local dialects, weekly radio engagements and many others. The end of project evaluation showed an increase in knowledge/awareness on child labour, child trafficking and other child protection issues in project communities. The project was also reported to have led to enhanced capacities of community and district level stakeholders, including the DSW, CHRAJ, CCPCs and DCPCs, changes in behaviour of community members, while making state actors and community level duty bearers more responsive to issues of child labour and trafficking.

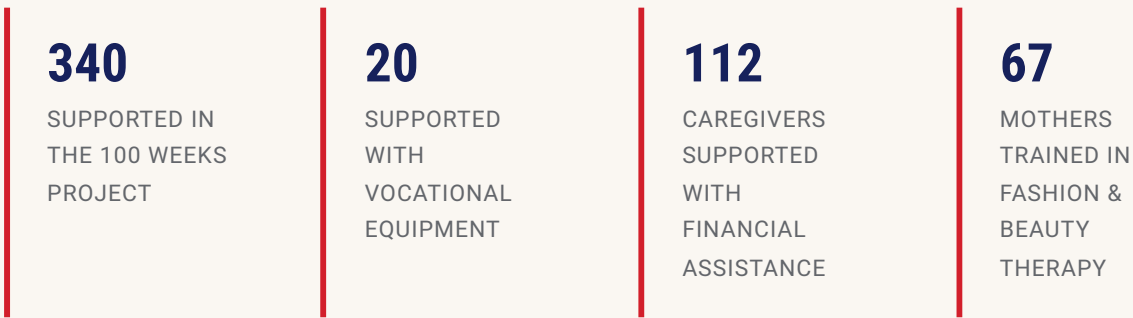


LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS

WOMEN AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

We supported about 539 young women with livelihood support. Our vocational schools at the Max Stenbeck Recovery Centre and Halsted Women's Vocational Centre continued to train young girls and mothers in fashion and beauty therapy. The two centres together trained 67 girls in fashion and beauty therapy. Children of the young girls were provided with all their needs, including daycare support. Meals, personal supplies, accommodation, learning materials and all items needed were provided to the girls. The Max Stenbeck Recovery Centre received a visit from donors this year. Also, a borehole was constructed for the centre to support a constant water supply. Fashion shows/exhibitions were organised for the girls to display their skills. The 100 Weeks project also supported about 340 women with direct cash transfer. Also, the Child Labour and Trafficking Prevention Advocacy Project in Northern Ghana supported 112 caregivers with financial assistance and 20 young boys' and girls' vocational equipment.

FIGURE 3 · SUMMARY OF WOMEN, YOUTH & LIVELIHOOD EMPOWERMENT





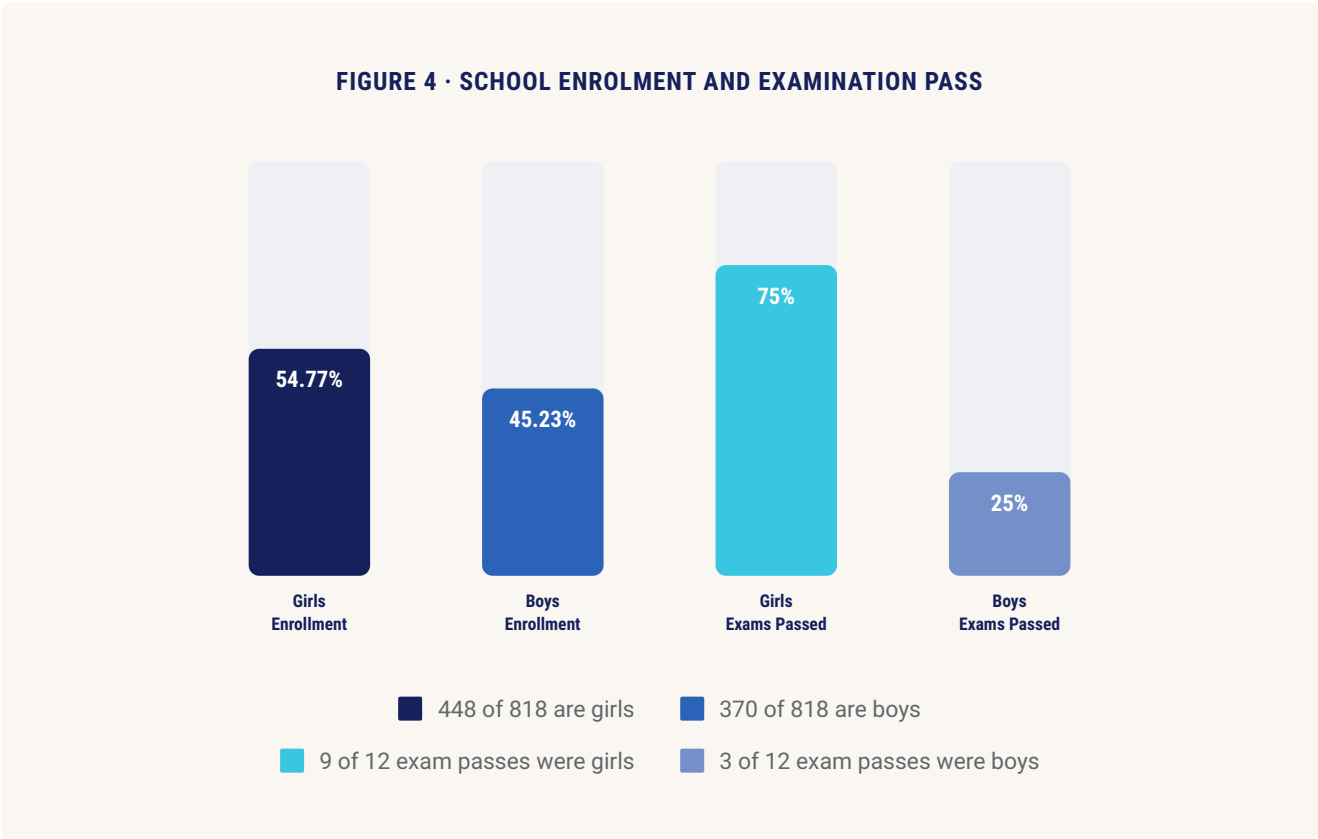
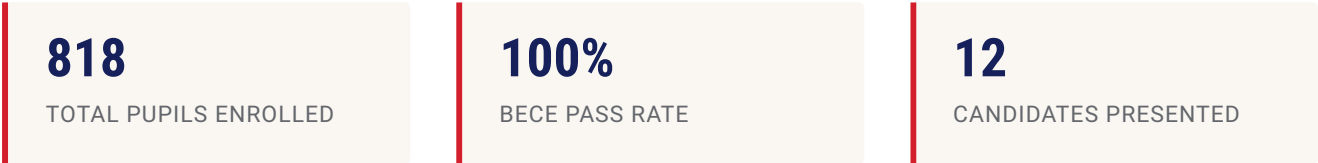






CHALLENGING HEIGHTS SCHOOL

The school continues to provide low tuition, quality education and well-structured and functional infrastructure to children in Winneba and its environs. We had on enrolment a total number of 818 (448 girls, 370 boys) children in the year, with adequate teaching and non-teaching staff. This year, the school undertook a rigorous assessment of teaching staff to ensure improved quality of teaching and learning. The school presented 12 (9 girls, 3 boys) students who sat for the final Basic Education Certificate Examination. All students passed their examination, graduated and have moved on to various senior high schools across the country.



Every child who sits the BECE and graduates from Challenging Heights School carries forward a future that hazardous labour once foreclosed.



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ADVOCACY & PARTNERSHIPS

We successfully organised the World Day against Child Labour in the Northern region, inviting traditional leaders, children, parents, state agencies, amongst other to advocate for the rights of children. We engaged radio, television, print and online media to push advocacy campaigns that ensure the rights of children and the environment. We actively attended, engaged and participated in conferences and meetings that had beneficial platforms for advocating for children and the environment. Challenging Heights was the local partner for the Faith in Action Conference against modern slavery, organised by Walk Free Foundation and Global Freedom Network. Challenging Heights managed the participation of survivors in the event and also provided key resource persons for some panel discussions.





CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

We conducted two research in the beginning of the year on mining and mining-related activities and their relation to child labour. The first one was on the "Intersectionality of gamamsey, health, environment and child protection (IGHEC): A study of cocoa growing communities in Ghana conducted in the Dunkwa areas of the Central region of Ghana. Again, the Obuasi Social and Environmental Rapid Assessment was undertaken. The findings of the reports led the organisation to offer support to children and families of victims. These two quick studies informed the organisation of the prevailing challenges and their causes in the selected areas, which led to further action being and could be taken.

This year, we commemorate the Environment Day by embarking on a beach clean-up exercise at Akosua Village in Winneba. 70 people, including staff of Challenging Heights, community members, staff and students of the University of Education, Winneba, participated in the event. Again, we embarked on a tree planting exercise with 250 women of our livelihood empowerment beneficiaries planting trees in their various homes and schools in Winneba, Pomadze, Apam and Mumford.



LIFE STORIES OF SOME CHILDREN SUPPORTED

STORY 01

A Brother's Sacrifice: Traded to Pay for His Sister's Medical Treatment, Rescued for a Future

Twelve (12) years old Kofi was schooling while staying with his mother after his parents divorced. Unfortunately, his sister got sick severely, rendering her mother run out of money entirely. Considering the cost involved in restoring his sister's health, he had to drop out of school. Because of this, his mother had no option but to send him to work with a fisherman at Yeji to be able to raise money to further treat his younger sister.

The child worked vigorously with his master for three years, fishing on the lake. His core duties included assisting in casting and pulling nets, paddling, scooping water from the canoe, and counting and sorting fish. He also did some domestic chores whenever they did not go fishing. He mentioned that his mother received a sum of GHC 1600.00 as his wage from his master, which was used to cater for his sister's medical needs. He shared a room in a mud house with wood and grass roofing, together with another child known as Joe-Ligi, who also worked with his master and slept on a mat on the floor.

While working on the lake with his slave master, Kofi lived in a poor environmental condition with poor sanitation and was fed twice daily with insufficient meals. His basic needs were largely unmet. He was poorly attended to each time he got sick, resorting to herbal medicine and over the counter drugs for his treatment. His household did not have access to safe water and sanitation rendering them to drink and use water from the lake.

He reported that his master only abused him verbally, however, he was severely bullied and beaten by the other children of his master. The community posed dangers to his well-being in that, he usually witnessed violence such as people fighting with knives/cutlasses, quarrels, observing boats capsizing, and hearing scary stories. The child was rarely monitored and also did not enjoy adequate free time. He expressed his dislike for the community and the rigorous nature of the work he was engaged in.

Since coming to the recovery centre, Kofi has settled in completely, made friends, and trusted the staff at the recovery house and has been very happy at the house with the support of trauma therapeutic approaches such as art therapy, counselling and dance therapy. He is able to express himself and able to speak up for himself and his friends at the recovery center. He has expressed his desire to be reunified with his family so he can further his education to the highest level to support his parents in the future. He is yet to decide on what his future aspirations and goals he has set for himself.

Trapped on the Lake Because He Just Wanted to Learn: The Story of 11-Year-Old Angel

Angel was initially staying with his mother but was never placed in school, he was just helping with some house chores and running errands for the house. He then decided to go visit his father because he had never seen him before. The child was then taken to stay with his father. He was as well not enrolled in school. After staying with his father for some months, he was sent to live a woman promising to enroll him in school but to no avail. The child was rather assisting the woman's husband in his fishing business on the Lake Volta.

According to him, they usually sleep around 10pm and wake up at 3 or 4 am every day to go for fishing. His responsibilities on the lake were paddling, scooping water from the canoe, casting and pulling of net and removing of the fishes to the net when being caught. Angel was insufficiently fed twice daily. When they go for fishing at dawn, they return around 12-1pm to have their first meal of the day. They then rest small then go back around 4pm and return in the evening around 7pm to have their last meal of the day.

Angel was restricted from participating in activities held in the community like church service, jams, parties, etc. He had some friends in the neighborhood but he hardly saw them because he was not allowed to go out and play with them. He was exposed to domestic violence and physical abuse in the community. The woman's husband happened to be a drunkard he tends to beat the child for no reason whenever he came home drunk. This affected him emotionally and made him unhappy in the community. He never received any personal care, encouragement or monitoring during working.

Angel was rescued by the Challenging Heights officers because he was denied basic formal education, proper medical care and was into hazardous works on the Volta Lake which is a threat to his physical wellbeing. The child was happy to be rescued and he is currently undergoing comprehensive rehabilitation at the Recovery House.

CHALLENGES & CONCLUSION

CHALLENGES

- 1 We encountered financial challenges due to the delay in the release of funds from some donor partners, thereby affecting our operations.
- 2 The recovery centre renovation could not be undertaken due to the unavailability of funds.
- 3 One of our rescue boats developed a fault and has become risky for rescue missions. This affected our rescue capacity in 2025.
- 4 While there is considerable demand for the Mother and Child Recovery Centre, there is no space for additional admissions. In addition, more classrooms are needed for practical spaces at the centre.

CONCLUSION

Challenging Heights is focused on liberating children from circumstances that are detrimental to sound growth and development. We continue to rescue, recover and reintegrate children to reach their potential. Our 2025 performance showed continued commitment to our mission and goal, as well as our capacity to serve more children and families in the year ahead.



To every donor, partner, volunteer and staff member: thank you for standing with the children of Ghana in 2025.

GET IN TOUCH

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