

Ghana Visit

When we first organised our visit to Ghana we relied heavily upon the knowledge and guidance of “Madadventurer” who we travelled with. We had to take medical advice on inoculations which seemed to vary doctor by doctor! Nevertheless, by the time we assembled in Newcastle airport, our arms were like pin cushions as we boarded the plane into the unknown.

I had been warned about the ‘smell of Africa’ which was noticeable as soon as we landed – wood smoke. Moving luggage into the minibus and travelling to our first stay gave us the opportunity to view the suburbs of the capital, Accra. It was a mixture of the sort of buildings you would expect to see in a capital city with poverty. Poor markets existed on the roadside with many street sellers trying to sell through car windows. The quality of roads varied from tarmac to mud. They worsened as we moved around our destination.



The greeting we received from the villages in Lume was humbling. Children and adults greeted us with drums, songs, dancing, processions and speeches. We were all overwhelmed. This warmth continued throughout our two week stay with waves each morning as we walked through the village to the building site and children

running to give you a greeting and hold your hand. You were even more special if you had a digital camera as the children could see the photograph of themselves.



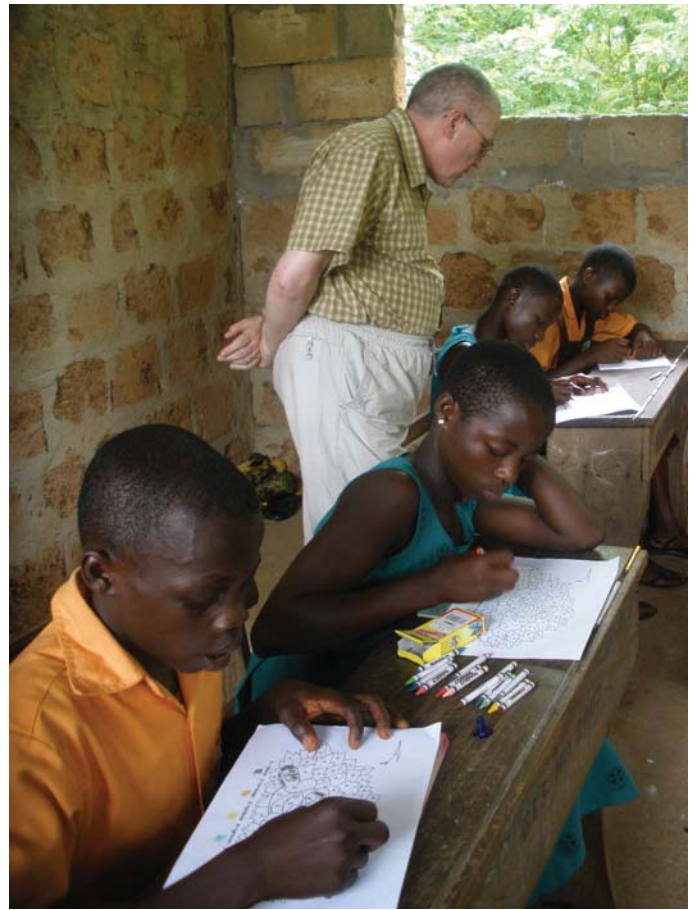
It is difficult to find the words to describe the pride I felt of Red House Academy students. Wherever they went they remained professional, polite and hard working. They were exemplary ambassadors of the Academy. They worked hard each morning on the building site, completing the school on time. They made bricks, painted, plastered, laid bricks, mixed cement and concrete and dug foundations. They helped teach in the school each afternoon and played with the children in their spare time. They maintained good humour when we were without water and electricity and supported each other if they felt homesick. They followed guidance when we were out, were friendly to villagers, sat through long speeches and a church ceremony and were polite in accepting food they did not always like. I watched them grow as people and marvelled as I listened to what the experience in Africa had taught them. They all came back appreciative of the life they live and the material elements in it. They all acknowledge the poverty they had witnessed and the lives of poor, hungry people.

We finished our journey with two days by the sea, living in reed huts in the sand with beds in them, enjoying the heat and the relaxation. We had spent two weeks away

from newspapers, computers and radios. We picked up snippets of news and a single opportunity to use very slow computers. Instead we talked, played games, had domino competitions and played cards. We kept diaries and read books. We all got along, had good fun and enjoyed laughter and each other's company. We enjoyed hard, physical work and interacted with young children eager to learn.

We watched children grasping education when they were not entitled to it. They knew and understood education could change lives and give them the opportunity to have a different future for themselves and their children. In England we have free education and we all have that opportunity. My wish is that all the students at Red House Academy value what they have and make the most of their chances to guarantee their own future.

We are now interviewing students for next year. When we depart in 2012 we will know what to expect. It was a privilege to go in 2011; it will be a bigger privilege in 2012 using the experience we now have to make a difference to both the lives of villagers in Africa and children from Red House Academy.



Thérèse Quincey.

Our Ghana travellers returned to us safe and sound after half term. Over the rest of this year we will bring you, via this newsletter, their personal feedback about all that they experienced during their two weeks in Ghana.

We start in this newsletter with thoughts from Mr Cooney, Natalie Davison and Jade Tansey.



Our first feedback from the group came 3 days after they had left school, from Paul Callaghan.

"If you haven't heard from anyone, the welcome from the village was wonderful. The kids were tired after the flight and a hot night in Accra then the bus journey to Lume but they were excited and the village welcome just overwhelmed them. Drumming, dancing, swamped by little kids who were at first shy then just wanted to hold our kids hands and sit on their knees. The elders of the village and all the mums came out and we paraded through the village to chants of Weyzoo (welcome)."

My reminiscences of Ghana 2011

When I was in Ghana I tried to consider several times about the impact the experience would have on me. I found it difficult at the time because we were so immersed in what was going on about us that it was really a case of just getting on with it. I did promise myself I would give some thought at a later date to what the trip really meant to me. Even now though I think it's still a bit early to say whether the experience will have any great long lasting impact on my life. At this point I think I would just like to comment on some of the various themes of the preparation for trip and the trip itself. Hopefully these may give a taste of what our adventure was like and some things to consider for next year's intrepid Adventurers!

Injections:

We were all aware from early on that we would need some vaccinations and as we went through the Summer and into the Autumn I think it would be true to say that some of us felt a bit like pin cushions as went for our (seemingly) weekly jabs for something or other. We certainly must be the best protected group of people in the Academy – it will be interesting to see if this translates into excellent attendance rates for the students in the next few months.

Food:

I think food was on all our minds. Could we eat the rats (actually a type of guinea pig and a local delicacy) or were these just scare stories and we would really get steak and chips every day. The truth was somewhere in the middle and the food was sufficient and nutritious. Some of it was bland but some was very tasty. It was certainly a healthy diet and some of the party even managed to lose a bit of weight.

The village:

The village was picturesque in an unusual way. It was really three villages connected together around a crossroads. Made up of mainly shanty style dwellings, the village nestled in a lush valley. The school was at the centre of the community and the house we lived in was probably the best in the village with running water and electricity. Everybody was very friendly and helpful and very glad to have us there. The welcome we received on our first day was unforgettable and set the scene for our stay.

Washing:

We all were a bit apprehensive about the washing and toilet facilities but we were very lucky in that our house had running water for the first week. Only after that did we have to resort to bucket showers which were actually fine and we all got used to them. The buckets of water also provided the flushing facility for the toilets so if managed well one bucket of water could cover both tasks!

Working on the site:

I think we all shocked ourselves when we worked on the building project. We all realised that we had skills we hadn't known about and we all found a resilience in ourselves that was surprising. We had to keep going in the heat and were all determined to complete the project – which we did.

Working in the school:

The primary school we worked in was very different to our experience of school in Britain. The facilities were very basic and the discipline used by the teachers was harsh by our standards with the cane a regular feature. The children loved to learn from us and were on balance a confident bunch. A real highlight was seeing how our students worked with the local children and some

excellent relationships were formed. My main memories of working with my class will be the excellent team spirit we had in preparing for the lessons, the impromptu dancing we had in every lesson and the many renditions of 'Old MacDonald had a farm!'

There is so much more I could write about but I would just finish by saying that I would not have missed the experience and I would recommend anyone who has the same opportunity to jump at it. It will open your eyes and hearts in many ways and will be quite possibly be a unique experience in your life.

Mr Cooney



Ghana

16/10/11 – 31/10/11

The day that we all found out we were going to Ghana was probably one of the most anticipated days I've had in my life. The day itself was long and it seemed as if I was constantly watching the clock, as we didn't find out until the end of the school day. While some of our names were being called to go and sit in the other room I thought that was it, they were going and the rest of us that were left over were the 'rejects'; I didn't think to count how many had been called into the other room. We all sat and watched as Paul Callaghan counted out twelve envelopes onto the table and then eventually announced that we were the chosen twelve. Everybody instantly began cheering, screaming, crying and jumping on each other for hugs and to celebrate. It was such an emotional moment. The nerve-wracking application and interview process had been more than worth it, we were going to Ghana!

We found out that we were going to Ghana roughly six months before we actually left, so we had plenty of time to prepare ourselves, get all of our injections and medication sorted, along with all of the shopping that needed to be done to ensure we had everything we needed, plus the gifts we were taking for the people that lived in Ghana. Finding everything that I needed was quite difficult, considering it was nearing winter so a lot of shops had stopped selling summer clothes, and we had a few rules about what we could and couldn't wear,

which had been requested by the Chief of Lume (the village we were staying). As well as clothes, we obviously also needed two weeks' worth of toiletries to take with us, but it was much easier to buy all of those than it was the clothes. One of the hardest things to find was a thin waterproof jacket, though my Mum and Dad managed to find one in the end. One downside to the preparation of the visit has got to be all of the injections we needed; I absolutely hate them. There were compulsory ones such as Yellow Fever and there were optional ones such as Rabies; though they were all as equally horrible as each other!

If I'm honest, the majority of the packing was done by my Mum and Dad, though I did my hand luggage myself! My Mum washed, ironed and folded all of my clothes prior to packing them and then my Dad did most of the packing, letting me know where everything was as he put it into my holdall. Once everything had been packed, as you can probably imagine, my holdall was packed to the brim and ridiculously heavy. I'm surprised it didn't weigh more than the luggage allowance.

The night before we left was hectic. I was ridiculously excited but anxious at the same time; it had eventually sunk in that I was going to Ghana. I didn't really know what to expect anymore; I'd had a previous image of mud huts, dirty water and absolutely no electricity but I just wasn't sure anymore. One thing I did know, however, was that the next two weeks were going to be some of the best in my life.

Waking up on the morning of the day we left was so exciting, the wait was over! I don't think I've ever got out of bed as fast in my life. My Dad cooked me a breakfast that morning, my last meal at home for the next two weeks. I got up and began to get myself sorted about two hours before we left for the airport, but it felt like ten minutes, it was such a rush! When my Dad loaded my holdall into the boot of the car I remember pulling everything out of my hand luggage and putting it all back in again just to make sure I had everything I needed; after all, there was no going back if I had forgotten anything. On the way to the airport I was at an all time high, I couldn't believe the day had eventually come. It seemed like it was only yesterday that I was sitting in front of the interview panel.

Once everyone had arrived and found each other at the airport we put on our luggage tags and began to check in. It was so emotional when we all disappeared up the stairs leading to the departure lounge, we must have stood there for at least ten minutes hugging and saying goodbye to our loved ones, there were definitely a few tears! We walked up the stairs and then stood at the top waving and shouting at our families for a few minutes until we turned to go and await our flight to Amsterdam. Our time in Newcastle airport went quite quickly and before we knew it we were on route to Amsterdam; it was

only a matter of time before we would be setting foot in Africa.

When we were in Amsterdam everybody enjoyed a McDonalds and then a few of us paid to use the Internet. The six hour flight from Amsterdam to Accra went by quite fast; we all had plenty to keep us occupied. We could watch films, listen to music and play games on the aeroplane's entertainment system and we had all brought books and/or activity pads as an alternative.

When we stepped off the plane at Accra the heat hit us as if someone has just thrown a brick off your face; it was unreal. The airport was very basic, with three or four separate booths for things such as check in and departure. We queued for a good hour before eventually getting through customs, and then we had to wait for our bags and for our money to be converted to Cedis, the Ghanaian currency. After we had got through the airport we were greeted by Bene, a Madventurer crew member that would be with us for the next two weeks, leading the project with Rebecca, who had travelled with us from Newcastle. When we left the airport and started walking towards our transport (a minibus/campervan that would be our transport for the next two weeks) we were instantly flocked by people offering to help with our bags to try and earn some money. While we were sitting on the bus waiting for Brady and Dr. Quincey (who were still in the airport trying to sort out a problem which had occurred; Brady's bag had ripped somewhere between leaving Newcastle and arriving in Accra.) a couple of people were outside of the bus demanding money for 'helping' with our bags, though he had just grabbed it from Jade and put it on our bag trolley, and some were also trying to sell us goods.

When we eventually set off we travelled to the hostel we were staying in for the first night, which was located not too far from the airport. It was quite run down but it was only for one night so none of us minded that much. Shelley, Jade and I shared a room, though Meg and Alice ended up joining us because of a 'huge' bug in their room!



When we woke up on the day of our journey to the village I don't think any of us had had much sleep. We all got ready and packed our stuff into our cases and ate

breakfast, then we had a chance to just chill for a bit until we set off. We were fascinated with our surroundings as we were travelling, it was so surreal. Women were walking around carrying things on their head, anywhere from something as small as a book to something as huge as a mini portable shop. One thing you notice straight away though is the way that Africans drive, it's completely different to the way English people do. They just put their foot down, road rage style. It's scary at first but once you're used to it, it's actually quite fun!

The journey to the village that day would have dragged on forever if we hadn't made a stop at a hotel located right next to Lake Volta for our lunch. The scenery at the hotel was beautiful, the Lake stretched on for miles with a huge forest located on the opposite side of it to where we were. The hotel had its own monkeys and crocodiles which were caged, which was quite sad but it was amazing being able to see them. No wild animal should ever be caged up though in my opinion. As well as the caged animals, there were also these lizard-like animals called geckos that were free to roam wherever they wanted and were common to Ghana, as we ended up seeing a lot of them throughout our time there. One downside about Ghana which was first noticeable at the hotel was 'African time'. If you order food, you're guaranteed to wait an hour at the least before it comes, probably longer. Everything is so slow and laid back. We were all enjoying our meal until suddenly a group of about twenty or thirty huge red ants dropped from the ceiling of the wooden canopy we were sitting in and landed on Alice's pasta. All I can say is that it put a few of us off from the rest of our meal.

After our time at the hotel, we set off for the final part of our journey. In roughly an hour we would be arriving at Lume. Excited wasn't the word.

When we arrived at the village the local people immediately made us feel welcome, before we'd even stepped off the bus. They were smiling and waving as we drove through the village to our accommodation. The house we were staying in was nothing like we expected; it wasn't a mud hut, it was an actual house, made of concrete. The house was actually quite big. The main



living area was the room you stepped into after walking through the front door. It had a large settee that could fit the twelve of us on easily with a dining table and chairs at the far end of the room, with a door leading into the kitchen. There were three bathrooms in the house altogether, all with running (dirty) water. The girls all shared one room with an on-suite bathroom and the boys all shared one room but without a bathroom. Mrs Crompton had her own room, Dr Quincey and Mr Quincey shared a room, and Mr Cooney and Thomas Quincey shared a room.

After we had unloaded our bags and cases into the house, we headed back along to the site of the primary school and the welcoming ceremony we received was absolutely out of this world. The local people were all dressed up in traditional African dress and were singing, dancing and drumming for us whilst leading us around the village. The children were also joining in and wanted to hold our hands; we had already made friends for life. It got dark incredibly early as we learned within a few hours of being there and, as it was coming to the end of their rainy season, a tropical storm hit us place that night. It was like nothing any of us had ever seen before, with huge bangs of thunder and bolts of lightning to go with the rain, which came down as if someone was standing pouring a huge bucket of water over us. Unfortunately, as we were to discover, every time there was rain, there was a power cut to go with it. So here we were, first few hours of being in the village, sitting in complete darkness and only a few torches because nobody had had a chance to unpack them yet. We also got introduced to sand flies that day, which were local to the village. They didn't hurt when they bit you, in fact you didn't notice they had until afterwards when the red mark came up on your skin. We all ended up being savaged by them within the first few hours.

The second day in I felt slightly homesick but nothing drastic. We got straight stuck into work which soon took my mind off it. I'm not sure what time we got woken up each day, but breakfast was always served at round about seven thirty. Breakfast consisted of bread and butter/jam and fruit. We worked up until lunch time and then came back to our accommodation to get showered and eat lunch. After this we would then travel to the primary school to teach and then head back and do things such as play with the children, clean the house, shower, write in our diaries and play games. Then at about five every day we'd have our tea. The food in Ghana was delicious. We had a cook who had been hired by the MAD foundation to prepare all of our meals for us for the full two weeks and she was great. She served us things such as spaghetti bolognese (my favourite), redred (baked beans in a thick tomato sauce), fufu (the African equivalent of a dumpling), vegetable curry and rice, chicken and chips, soup, yams, spinach sauce and joloph rice. One thing which none of us liked was fried pantene (sort of like a huge banana).

We also had another power cut on this night due to another tropical storm. This storm, however, was one hundred times worse than the previous night. The thunder was deafening and the lightning was bright enough to light up a room. Shelley, Eleanor and I were all huddled under my mosquito net absolutely terrified. On a night everybody usually came into our room and we would all sit and have a group conversation and a good crack on; it was one of the many highlights of each day.

The third day in was usual routine, it flew by. We were plastering and painting on the building site with all of the local people chipping in; they were always keen to lend a hand. During the afternoon when we were teaching, we were in separate groups so each group could teach a separate class. I was in a group with Corey, Adam, Mr Cooney, Thomas Quincey and for the final week or so, Jade joined us too. We taught art on this particular day and we made finger puppets with the children. At the end of the lesson we blew up some balloons and gave them out to the kids; they had never seen balloons before we were absolutely amazed. They were screaming and jumping around, chasing each other with the balloons. One kid even sat on his balloon and tried to pretend he didn't have one just so we'd give him another one.



After we had left the classroom and returned to the accommodation, Mrs Crompton came back and told us of how the kids were fighting one another for the balloons. We'd caused uproar without meaning too. I have to admit it was hilarious though. Meg, Jade, Dr Quincey and I walked around the village taking photos before tea and I got some great photos of the local people and their homes. The way they live is amazing. They have the most basic of things yet they are inspirationally happy all of the time. It is absolutely amazing. When everybody gathered in our room again that night, we literally talked about absolutely everything, from Eleanor's Nana having to go to hospital because she missed the bus stop seat, right up to old memories and things we want to do or are looking forward to in the future. Surprisingly (sarcastic tone), we were told to quieten down because we were getting quite boisterous, howling with laughter and screaming a lot!

Thursday October 20th.

It was no doubt the hottest and sweatiest day of the week. Going in the shower when we returned from the building site was a luxury. I was absolutely coated in paint, plaster and cement, so it took ages to wash it all off! Jade joined our group during the teaching today because she and I had pre-prepared a song to teach the kids – 'We're All In This Together' from High School Musical. It went quite well, the kids love to learn songs but teaching them an English song was tricky; they got the hand of the chorus towards the end though.

After our lesson had finished, instead of going back to chill or play with the children, most of us went hiking up a huge hill which was located at the back of the village. Oscar (a local nineteen year old boy) led us. We were all absolutely shattered by the time we reached the top and we took the opportunity to take plenty of photos. Unfortunately, our time at the top was shortened as Dillon got attacked by these huge wasp-like animals, so we quickly started making our way back down whilst Dillon's injuries were seen to at the same time. It was absolutely hilarious watching Dillon run about, flapping his hands at these creatures, whilst screaming like a girl. We were all laughing about it for ages after. When we got near to the bottom of the hill, a huge fire ant decided to crawl onto my ankle and bite me, it absolutely wrecked so by instinct I frantically started kicking my foot to try and get it off, though the only thing it did was cause my shoe to fly off and land in a bush further down the hill, with the ant still clinging onto my ankle! Luckily, Oscar went to retrieve my shoe and I plucked up the courage to flick the ant off my foot. When we returned home we ate and then I did some maths work. This was also the day that we discovered the local shop, which was a wooden stand with an umbrella covering it, sold lollies, biscuits and bubblegum. I think we bought almost everything they had. Dillon bought the full container of bubblegum. At night we all gathered in our room once again and then the electricity went off due to yet another storm. Thank goodness for our head torches!

The next day I woke up to a spider about the size of my hand in the bathroom. I screamed as loud as I could. On the bright side, it was Friday, the last day of building for the next three days! It was usual routine again and I was completely drained when we returned from the building site. Brady had come back to the house earlier because she'd been sick and she slept for the entire morning. Callum and Eleanor were also ill. One funny part of the day had been Shelley, Meg and I having a paint fight; we got absolutely coated and it took forever to get clean afterwards, but it was worth it!

A local lady from the village visited us to take any of our dirty washing so she could clean it for us, apart from underwear though obviously. A downside was that Brady and Dillon had had an argument with Jade and so

they all got pulled into Mrs Crompton's room to sort it out. At tea time Dr Quincey read a letter that Dulcie (a volunteer for the MAD Foundation who had left the village to move onto a different project) had left for us. Everybody was upset that she had gone but we all added her on 'Face Book' as soon as we got the chance so we can keep in touch.

On the Saturday we visited Ho market, which was absolutely unreal. People come at you from all directions trying to sell you their products but on the bright side they leave you as soon as you politely tell them that you aren't interested. The market was more a food market than anything though and stunk of fish but we coped. I bought fabric and elastic so I could get some trousers made, it was the most beautiful fabric ever. I also bought loads of necklaces and bracelets, African jewellery is absolutely gorgeous, you can't go wrong with it! After the market we visited a supermarket which we all basically raided. We bought chocolate, biscuits, Pringles, coke, Fanta and anything else we could get our hands on. It was heaven. Eventually we headed to the hotel where Paul Callaghan and his wife Dorothy were staying, it was such a relaxing time. We got to chill at the side of the pool and in small groups got to use the Internet; being able to speak to everyone back home was absolutely amazing and made our day. We also had a lovely meal. I ordered spaghetti bolognese of course! Shelley got proposed to by a man old enough to be her Grandad, he also took a photo of her and repeatedly asked for her phone number; it was mad, but hilarious all the same. We all discovered the song that would forever remind us of the trip on this day as well, we had it on repeat constantly. It was so catchy! African music is amazing, it never fails to brighten your mood. On the downside, Mike (a Madventurer crew member) was in a car accident during the day and Bene and Rebecca's office in Ho got broken into and their laptop was stolen. But overall it was a good day.

We attended the village's church ceremony on the Sunday. We were there for about three hours and we left early; it was still going hours later! It was amazing though. It consisted of singing, dancing, drumming, religious readings, praying, preaching and donations/collections. The dresses that the women wore were beautiful as well. After we ate lunch we all headed to the local football field to play with the kids. I think every kid from the village was there, it was so much fun. Corey sent the kids chasing after me every five minutes but I always sent them back to him! Afterwards we returned to the house to shower, eat our tea and then chill.

On Monday, instead of the usual routine we travelled to Shia. I'm surprised we didn't end up in a bus crash. There were pot holes absolutely everywhere on the dirt track to get there. Every time we drove through one we bounced off our seats. It was incredibly hot and humid as well, so

the sweat was dripping off us, which also led to everybody either tanning or burning, apart from me; I just stayed white.

We first visited Justice, a Ghanaian Politician, who spoke to us briefly of the MAD Foundation. He then showed us around his own Cocoa Farm and explained to us how cocoa is grown and the processes it goes through before being made into things such as chocolate and cocoa powder. After this we visited Shia Secondary School and were made welcome and gave a welcoming speech by the head teacher. We were then shown around the school and got a chance to introduce ourselves and to socialise with the students there. They were all so friendly. The school was on a large site, with a few separate buildings and a big football field located in the centre. They had one computer room which held about eight computers. At about one we returned to Justices house for lunch, though it wasn't ready until about 3, African time! We had Joloph rice and chicken. After lunch we returned to the Secondary School for a football match, their boys versus our boys. Playing for England there was Bene, Dillon, Thomas, Corey, Adam, Mr Cooney, Thomas Quincey and a couple of the Ghanaian students. Rebecca, Eleanor, Shelley, Meg, Brady and I were cheerleading in support but Shelley and Eleanor sat out most of the time because they felt stupid. We lost 2-1 with Bene scoring our only goal but it was quite a dignified defeat. Just as the game drew to an end the sky went black and it suddenly turned cold. We started running towards the bus but unfortunately for us we didn't make it on time and it began pelting down with rain. We got absolutely soaked!



On the way back to Lume we made a quick stop at Justices house so that everybody could pick up their bags and get changed if we wanted too. Then it was back to the pot holes for round two! When we arrived back at Lume it was dark and there was no electricity once again. Also, there was no running water. We were devastated. On the bright side, it was chicken and chips for tea. We were settling down for bed and kept getting disturbed by the lads coming in to talk and use the bathroom (even though there were another two bathrooms in the house). Eventually they left us alone

and we were just about to fall asleep when Meg decided that she wanted to get up and put the light on to find a bottle of Sprite that didn't even have a mouthful left in the bottom. All I'm going to say is never get on the wrong side of Alice!!

The last three days in the village consisted of the usual routine: wake up, get ready, build, come back to get showered, eat lunch, teach the children, chill or play with the children, eat tea, chill and sleep. As there was no running water for our remaining days at the village due to the previous storm on Monday, Shelley and I decided we would stick to getting washed with baby wipes every day, it was better than nothing!

I felt quite homesick while we were teaching at the school on Wednesday and Dr Quincey found me sitting outside of the classroom, so she came for a walk with me around the village and really cheered me up, I was so grateful for that. On the downside I got bitten more than I had for the entire time there by sand flies, it was quite disgusting having these huge red dots all over me; some of them took weeks to fade. During the Thursday (our last day of building) Shelley, Meg, Oscar and I had a dance off whilst we were painting one of the rooms. It was so much fun, attempting moves such as the caterpillar and the robot; can't say we'll ever be professionals though! I also received a marriage proposal from one of the quite old local men, it was quite awkward but I found it funny too. I said no as politely as I could and he took it light heartedly, which was good. One thing that happened during the last few days that has stuck with me was a visit we made to the local shop. We walked along to the shop and bought things such as lollies, biscuits and bubblegum, but the smallest note I had was ten Cedis, though the things I purchased only came to round about two Cedis. The woman who ran the shop didn't have change of ten Cedis and I offered her the ten Cedis for all of the products I wanted and told her I didn't want any change, but because this had happened before and she'd just took the ten Cedis last time, she refused and insisted on giving me the few lollies for free. It absolutely amazes and inspires me how they live in a world where they have almost nothing, yet they turned down money; money they could have used to buy food or drink. It's inspiring.

Some small funny things happened too, just during our chill time on a night. Just small jokes and banter, but it all added up and was part of what made the trip special. Sadly, we also experienced a traditional Ghanaian funeral during our final days. A local woman passed away and we discovered that their funerals consist of parading around the village singing, dancing and drumming; celebrating the life of the deceased, rather than mourning their loss. Also, when we finally finished the building of the school, we got to put our handprints on the outside wall of the school, leaving our mark on the village. It was quite emotional to think that we were leaving the next day.

The last day was extremely emotional. It was so hard saying goodbye to the people that had become almost like our second families over the past two weeks. There were definitely a few tears shed. During the leaving ceremony there were speeches from both parties and we handed over the finished school. The village also cooked us our last meal. Joloph rice and goat. I didn't eat the goat. There were mixed opinions about it, some said it was nice and some said it wasn't so good. As we pulled away from the village for the final time, we were waved off by tearful children and seniors. Goodbye Lume.

The journey to the beach wasn't really that bad, though we were stopped by a Ghanaian officer on the way there who demanded to see our passports. It was scary but he soon left. I think he was just trying to demonstrate his authority. We travelled most of the journey by bus, but for the final fifteen minutes we had to board an African banana boat to take us to the beach. The boat was quite scary at first but I settled after a while, though I never will enjoy travelling by boat.



When we arrived at the beach our first impression can be summed up to one word, 'Wow', it was stunning. The river was located on one side, with the beach in the middle and then the sea on the other side. During the weekend spent at the beach we enjoyed sunbathing, volleyball and gathering together to eat our meals. The toilets were a new experience, a wooden platform with a hole in the top. It wasn't very pleasant, but we coped! To get washed we had to fill a bucket with water from a tank and go into one of two cubicles, though the water often had fish in it.

On our final night we enjoyed a performance by local dancers and a bonfire. We were all ready for bed afterwards. It was unreal how fast the two weeks had gone by, we were going home the next day. It felt like we'd only just arrived.

When we woke up on Sunday morning we were definitely ready for home. We packed all of our bags and cases and then had time to relax until we left. On our way to the airport we sang along to the African songs on the radio that we had learned over the two weeks. The

journey back from Accra to Amsterdam seemed to fly by, as we just slept most of the time as it was a night flight. I used the Internet at Amsterdam to contact friends and family, letting them know I was almost home.

When we arrived back at Newcastle, this time it was the cold hitting us instead of the heat. The minibus journey from the airport back to school seemed to last forever. When we eventually arrived we all hounded our families. We were finally back home.

Getting back into my home routine was easy, I had missed being able to have a clean bath/shower and simple things such as having a comfy bed and clean running water.

If there was one thing I learned from the experience, it would have to be that we are extremely lucky. I will never take things for granted as much as I used to before and I've learnt how much my family and friends mean to me.

Best experience of my life!

Natalie Davison



Ghana 2011

Preparation

A lot of thoughts had gone through my head by the time it was just a week before I was going to leave. This is going to change my life forever, the way I see things is going to be in a totally new perspective. I thought it was going to be very tough living without the essentials that I would have at home, such as a toilet and running water. I had a lot of injections to get, and a lot of appropriate summer clothes to buy, sun creams, Deet spray, too much that the brain could handle! There were also gifts for the school to buy and forever the memory will stay when people were always saying "Who brought the Pepper Pig harmonicas?" Everyone thought it was hilarious but I considered it to be something different.

Packing

Whilst packing, a lot of thoughts had gone through my head. I was worried in case there was too much to pack

and it wouldn't all fit in my hold-all, I was worried about the weight of the hold-all, I was worried I hadn't enough Deet spray. The list could go on and on! At this point I had started to get over excited too, as it was the Friday, 2 days before we were about to leave. I had just thrown everything into my hold-all then had to repack as it was just a mess!

Feelings before leaving England

At the airport I was feeling both scared and excited, I hadn't known what to expect. I'd seen Africa and poverty on the television before but I hadn't actually experienced what it would be like. The climate would be a massive change and I thought that it was going to hit me the most, as well as the poverty. I had been away from home before for 2 weeks but this is going to be the biggest one yet! My Mum got very upset in the airport. I gave both her and my Dad a great big cuddle before I went up to the security check. I knew they were both proud of me.

Journey

After check in and security check at Newcastle airport we got to the departure lounge. Natalie, Shelley, Meg, Alice and myself went into the arcades to play on the dance mats. We had great fun! We then heard the announcement that it was time to board our plane, I got extremely excited!

On route to Amsterdam I sat next to Callum and Shelley; the flight only took an hour so it was a quick journey, something the airline like to call a "City Hopper". There were a few hours to spare and everyone rushed to the 'McDonalds' that was in the airport. I then went to say goodbye on 'Face book' after I had a McDonalds as I was expecting not to get on for the next two weeks. It was then time to board the plane.

As we took off I was sitting next to two strange men. They didn't seem very polite and sounded like criminals; they were talking of being in prison. Luckily Mr. Cooney was willing to give up his seat next to Mrs. Crompton so that I felt safe. Mrs. Crompton then wanted to watch a film so I showed her how to work the television. She chose to watch "Bridesmaids"; both she and I had heard it was funny so she decided to watch it. The opening scene was very rude; she got a shock and couldn't turn it off quickly enough. It was around an hour later, maybe two that food was served. I chose chicken with leek mash potato and mustard gravy. It was very nice compared to the plane food I've had before. There were also accompaniments that were on offer which were very nice too, but I can't remember them as there was so much!

Around two hours before landing I noticed a spare seat next to Shelley and Natalie, I moved next to them so that Mr. Cooney could sit back with Mrs. Crompton. We looked out of the window to find a beautiful sun set but

couldn't get our cameras quickly enough. It had come round for time to land in Accra (Ghana's capital) to a very hot, nice 27o. There was a bus to take us about 20 yards to the building, which everyone laughed at. The heat got to us all and everyone had to take off their hoodies. We waited around half an hour to get through to immigration and then to baggage collection. Sadly, we had found that Brady's bag had been ripped wide open. We hoped that nothing had been lost. We waited around until Mr. Cooney had changed British pounds into Ghanaian Cedi then headed to meet Bene (team leader for MAD foundation).

We carried on to the bus with around three hold-alls per trolley that got us into a problem as the kerbs were very steep and narrow. Five yards away from the bus we collected our own hold-all and carried on towards the bus. There were Ghanaian men waiting around to collect our bags from us but we had to beware of some. One man tried to help me, when I didn't need. I tried to fight him off but it didn't work out; he took my hold-all from me and carried it onto the bus. Mr. Quincey then had to try and move him as he wanted money. I wasn't at all happy at this point as I thought it was his own fault, I didn't need help, I told him politely too. Mr. Quincey then handed over a Cedi or two but the man wanted more, the door on the bus was closed so that he couldn't come into anymore contact with us. We were told that we were only a short journey away from the hostel which turned out to be around a half an hour journey. We had changed rooms with Mr. Cooney and Thomas Quincey due to a faulty fan in the room and settled to bed in the sweltering heat.

First day at the village

We then made our way to the village on the Monday via Lake Volta to have lunch. We arrived at the village to find very warming and excited villagers. We dropped off our bags and headed along to the school where everyone was waiting for us. There was a beautiful welcoming with children singing and dancing along with some boys drumming, we were then shown around Lume while people were still singing and dancing. This was heartbreaking to see what effort had been put in for just a small group of people. After we were shown round we were presented with some speeches from village elders. They welcomed us with open arms and offered the adults palm wine. Paul Callaghan and Dr Quincey then said a few words to represent the group. We were then shown the school that we would be working on; it looked like hard work but it would be worth it in the end. After that we got the chance to play with the children as they were really excited to see us. However, when we had to go back to the house we were staying at, the children followed us home and wouldn't let us go. They were outside the window singing and wanting us to go back outside. They gave in the end and went away and waited for us to play tomorrow.

Funny times

- Dr Quincey and Mr. Cooney falling and breaking plastic chairs
- Corey being traumatised by a man with a freezer on his head. Worried in case he was going to walk into him, he leaned back and the chair snapped and broke
- The fact that all of the chair incidents happened on the first day of work
- The rampage the children went on fighting each other for balloons
- The little funny outbursts from everyone
- Dr Quincey's haggling skills
- I thought that an aeroplane was a helicopter
- The Chuckle Brothers (Mr. Cooney and Thomas Quincey)

Strange and weird times

- Getting marriage proposals from both young and old men, but it was just a bit of banter
- A man being able to carry a freezer on his head

Happy times

- The bonding I had with both teachers and peers. I got to know people I would never normally talk to and made new friends
- The acceptance from the village was absolutely amazing
- Children were always smiling, no matter what was in front of them

Sad times

- How the villagers had only the very basics; the children got very excited when they had things such as glue and balloons
- Seeing children being caned at school



Work

The work I liked to get involved with the most was the physical side to the project. I mostly helped to make bricks, build a wall, carry head pans with either cement or water in and mixing cement. I also painted on the final day of the project as that was where all the work needed to be done. I also enjoyed teaching in the classrooms after we had finished work and had a wash. It was great to see the children smiling all of the time

and engaged with the lesson as they were enjoying themselves. If there was extra work after we had taught in the school I would volunteer myself to go back out and give a helping hand.

Special days

There was no one specific special day, everything was special!

Last day in Lume

As we knew "Africa time" was going to happen today of all days. We had to have a short leaving ceremony due to the villagers being in their same old African time. We had a wonderful send off from the teachers in the school and were offered goat with rice and a spicy red sauce, which was very kind of them. As well as Dr Quincey, Brady and Corey I said a few words just to show our gratitude for what they had taught us. We then went back to pack up the bus to leave. I didn't really want to leave but it was something that had to be done. We would be getting a rest at the beach anyways.

As we reached the school all of the children waved good bye and ran alongside the bus, I got very emotional and shed a tear. I couldn't believe the last 12 days I'd had in the village.

Last days in Ghana

We spent our last days in Ghana at a beach resort, sleeping on beds on the sand in a wooden hut. This felt more like Africa as we were in luxury back in Lume. The toilets were a hole dug about two feet deep where we would have to cover with sand, they had a disgusting smell but it was just for 3 days that we would have to cope. By this time it had become very hot and we no longer had rain! After the beach resort before we headed to the airport, we visited the Accra market that was pretty much the market for all of the tourists. My group had the best haggler ever... Dr Quincey! It was hilarious watching her get the prices down to as much as she could. I really enjoyed myself. We then went to a hotel to have tea for the final time in Ghana. I then thought an aeroplane was a helicopter so everyone thought I was the clown of the holiday!

Back home

Brady's, Callum's and Eleanor's family were waiting for us as we touched down in Newcastle airport. They were holding a huge banner saying "Welcome home Red House Academy" and cheered very loudly as we walked through the doors. This was a very nice gesture from them. I got onto the mini bus back to school to find that my Mum, Dad and very good family friends were waiting for me. They all gave me a massive cuddle as they had missed me so much. I got back home to my room having been decorated as a little surprise from my Mum and Dad.

For the first few days I felt as if I should still drink more than what I was as I was drinking around 4 litres of water

per day. I also went to move my mosquito net from my bed but then realized it wasn't there. I made a fool of myself but it's something that would happen when there is such a big change.

Life changing experiences and personal reflections

Now that I am back home I have realised what I take for granted back at home, such as the little things like the tap running when I'm brushing my teeth, I now turn it off as I know that those back in Ghana have limited running water and it is also dirty. I turn off any plugs that I'm not using as they have no electricity. I never had a phone before I went to Ghana as mine had broke, I still don't as I believe I have to wait for Christmas to be awarded anything. I am now looking forward into doing some charitable work, more of going into the British Red Cross and I hope to fund raise for the MAD Foundation and other charities in the near future.

Jade Tansey



Year 9 Business Fundraising Appeal 2011

A group of year 9 students have recently completed a business module that involved them raising money for a local charity. The students attended workshops along with students from other schools and learnt about local business people and how they became successful. Some of the companies had stands displaying the items that they manufactured or information about their area of work. Part of the programme involved the students understanding how challenging it can be to make money and it was decided that the best way to do this was to start a Fundraising Campaign.

The students decided that they would like to support the Grace House- North East Children's Hospice Appeal. The appeal is raising funds to build, equip and run a children's hospice for disabled children across the North East of England. Grace House is named after Grace Jones who is thirteen years of age, a similar age to the student's themselves. Grace has a disability and is unable to speak. The children researched Grace House to gain some information about Grace House so that

they could include the information in letters they sent out to different businesses and organisations. They asked for donations of items that could be used as Raffle prizes for their Fundraising Campaign. They also requested donations from staff and fellow students and their families. They held five fundraising activities. All activities took place during break and lunchtimes without any interruption to learning.

1. Prize Raffle with prizes kindly donated by staff, students and some local organisations.
2. Glass and SAFC Sale with glass items donated by Wearside Glass at the National Glass Centre and Sunderland Football Club.
3. Home and Away Raffle with the total amount raised being divided between Grace House Children's Hospice Appeal and Gifts for schoolchildren in Ghana. The children had Disney Lion King themed prizes and some football items from Sunderland Football Club.
4. Sponsored Silence. Students asked staff, and their families to sponsor them to raise funds.
5. Raffle for a signed football from one of the recent games played at Sunderland Football Club.

The final amount will be announced when all sponsorship money is collected in. Our students are hoping to be able to purchase a marble brick engraved with the Academy name as part of a walkway at the Hospice. They are hoping to raise an extra £50 by selling Grace House badges on sale at reception £1.00.



Many thanks to all students, their families, community members and all staff at Red House Academy for their generosity during the Fundraising Campaign. Special thanks to Mr Cullen for all his help with advertising and marketing.

Mrs Mahmoodshahi

Year 11 Hospitality Event

A group of Year 11 Hospitality and Catering students recently organised a hospitality event as part of their GCSE coursework. The students planned, cooked and served a 3 course meal for members of the senior leadership team and members of the Academy Trust.

The event was themed ' A Dedication and Thank you evening' in recognition of all the hard and effort that has been put in to make the Academy such a success. The guests were first entertained by some of the Academy's best musical talent, kindly arranged by Miss Tindall before being led to their seats by Louise Roberts who played the role of Maitre d.

The students all played a role in making the event an amazing success from planning the invitations, designing the menu, arranging the table and seating, preparing and cooking the food, waitressing and of course the all important clearing up.

The menu offered a range of Italian breads and dips with traditional minestrone soup or parmesan tarts for starters. The main dishes were cod with shellfish in garlic butter, beef olives or ravioli served all selection with a selection of potato and vegetable accompaniments. The meal was finished off with a choice of mouth watering desserts, either chocolate or lemon torte, served with homemade ice-cream. For those who had room, there was also tea or coffee with vanilla shortbread to finish off.

The guests were so impressed with the attention to detail and the students were immensely proud of what they had achieved. A great atmosphere, amazing team work and a thoroughly exhausting day!



Community Action

Parents, carers and friends of the Academy decided to bring some Christmas cheer to the young homeless of Sunderland by holding a Christmas Fayre to raise money for the young people. A great time was had by all and £300 was raised to help the young people celebrate Christmas.



The Community Choir

Congratulations to ALL staff and students who are in our audition choir for The City Sings 2012. We got through!!! This means we will be performing at the Sunderland Empire on the 26th February 2012.

The email that has gone to all the finalists from the adjudicators says:

"The standard of auditions this year was tremendously high and the panel deliberated long and hard before unanimously agreeing the line-up for the final."

So, basically we made it to the final 4 secondary schools in Sunderland! We will be competing against St Roberts of Newminster, Farringdon and Southmoor. There has to be one song on the theme of the Olympics so I already have one or two ideas in mind (as usual)

Well done everyone.

Miss Tindall

China 2012

After completing detailed application forms, getting references from teachers and a tense interview process, two lucky year 7 pupils, Nathan Beckett and Ryan Ellison, were chosen to represent the Academy in June 2012 on the trip of a lifetime to China.

The visit is part of a wider Sunderland Cluster and together, teachers and pupils from 6 other schools, will fly off to experience the best of China. The trip will also include a visit to out link school, Harbin Middle School 113, to meet staff and pupils and develop our cultural understanding between the two countries.

Miss Humphries



Headteacher Visit

We were lucky enough to have a visit from the Headteacher from Harbin Middle School 113 on the 22nd and 23rd November. Mr Liu toured the school and spent some time observing lessons. He was extremely impressed by the behaviour of the pupils in the Academy and praised the lovely new school.



He was presented with gifts and watched a musical assembly showcasing the talented pupils within the Academy. On the final day of the visit he was introduced to the two year 7 students who would be visiting his school in June 2012. He presented them with gifts and said he was looking forward to them seeing his school.

Miss Humphries



Red House Academy Sustainability Project

A cluster of Sunderland schools has successfully won a bid from the British Council to launch a sustainability project with our link schools in Harbin, China. At Red House Academy this project will take the form of a wildlife nature garden.

The aim is to create a suitable environment for wildlife in the urban area. Pupils in 7-1 Applications lessons have been working on this project since September. We

have already completed two litter picks, surveyed the existing wildlife and designed insect hotels. We were very excited to share this project with Mr Liu, Headteacher of Harbin Middle School 113, our partner school in Harbin.

Miss Humphries



New Year Resolutions

Most people make New Year resolutions and decide that they would like to make a healthy change to their lifestyle

Would you like to attend a weight management course for FREE???

If you have answered YES then your

**Weight Loss
can
start HERE**



12 week Weight Management courses will be held at
Red House Academy Youth Centre

Starting January 2012

9.00am – 10.30am

Places are LIMITED

For more information & how to book onto the course please contact the
Lorraine Humble 0191 5615513



- Monday** 10.00 till 11.00 - Adult Exercise Classes (RHAY Centre)
1.00 till 3.00 - Healthy Cooking Sessions
3.30 till 5.30 - Family Fabric Painting
5.45 till 6.45 - Zumba Academy Dance Studio £2 per session
- Tuesday** 9.00 till 11.00 - Community Coffee RHAY Centre
9.30 till 10.30 - Active 'N' 'B' Fit
10.00 till 11.00 - Community Library
11.00 till 1.00 - Card Making
5.45 till 6.45 - Zumba Academy Dance Studio £2 per session
- Wednesday** Jewellery Making (to be confirmed)
5.30 till 6.30 - Family Exercise Classes (Dance Studio)
- Thursday** 5.45 till 6.45 - Zumba Academy Dance Studio £2 per session
- Friday** 9.00 till 10.30 - Free Weight Management and Exercise Class

All Activities to be held in the RHAY Centre.

There are a number of new activities planned for the coming term including the following:

- Bollywood Dancing
- Scrapbook Memories
- Jewellery Making
- Creative Arts
- Community Computers
- Community Choir
- Family Fabric Painting
- Parents Forum
- Holistic Therapies
- Parent, Baby and Toddler Group
- A great place to meet up for you and your children to socialise
- Family Learning Numeracy and Literacy

*Thank You for your
help and support.
from the
Community Team.*

**All activities
are free unless
otherwise stated.**

**For further information or to
book a place, please contact
Mrs Lorraine Humble
(Community Manager)
on 0191 5615513 or
07805508997**

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