

## Anticipation

I started preparing for my trip to Ghana early January 2017. I was so excited, and I think I was far more excited than the students I taught. I wanted to visit 20 or more schools. I thought my impact was going to be made through the number of schools I was going to visit. I had collected over 40 PSAT and SAT books to give to Senior high school students. I had prepared several programming tutorials and had a very hefty list of volunteers who were going to help me to make this program successful.

## Kumasi Bootcamp

I wanted to have a boot camp to prepare my volunteers for the positions they were going to hold. I taught them coding (HTML/CSS and Python) for over three weeks to prepare my volunteers. Our boot camp was very interesting. The people who were supposed to hold the talking sessions all dropped out due to having things to do over the break. Some of them also had church conferences and mission trips and I didn't want to stand in the way of that. The boot camp had about 10 people who wanted to help out in the different regions. Prempeh college granted us access to their old computer lab in exchange for me to teach their students, mostly the robotics students coding using JavaScript. I ended up having about 15 people who were helping and 8 of them were in the hostels.

## Kumasi schools

Most of the schools (3 out of 4) agreed upon to allow TeachGhana to come to their school, but during our check-in with them, some of them resigned. The headmistress at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Senior High School told us "NO" when we told her about the idea. It seemed the assistant principal who got our letter initially loved the idea and gave us permission and didn't consult the head. When we tried to explain to her that we just wanted to help the students and not charge them for any of our services, she still told us that she was not going to allow us to participate. We were able to establish a full partnership with Kumasi Anglican Senior High School. Their headmaster, a very innovative pastor with a knack for raising strong and brilliant future leaders, was very welcoming. He handed us to a teacher who had a basket of excuses each time we visited them, but we got it all sorted before I left Ghana. We ended up working with the beautiful and brilliant young ladies at St. Louis, the gentleman at Prempeh college, and established a long-term partnership with Kumasi Anglican.

All the volunteers agreed and first pointed out the fact the young women were learning JavaScript a lot faster than the guys at Prempeh college. This was a little surprising, because this was my second time working with the guys at Prempeh and they worked at a faster pace even when compared to overall best performing school in Ghana, St James Seminary. The girls were so determined and hardworking and I was glad that my guys recognized their work ethic before me, because then they would have said I am/was being biased. They are the only school in

Ghana to my knowledge that allow their students to have their personal computers with them for programming purposes.

## Feeding

Feeding my volunteers was a little tricky. I was thinking I could cook for them to reduce the cost for food, but the hostels and halls at KNUST did not allow tenants to bring stoves that are not electric to the kitchen to cook. I did not know this information as I didn't have a lot of time to deal with the picking of the halls. I wasn't sure that we were going to even get them as students were still in school even though they had vacated. Most of my volunteers who needed a place to stay were in Kumasi and had to share rooms with friends who I knew, because we couldn't get a room until the second week of boot camp. Because the whole process was so very stressful, I didn't ask a lot of questions, I just booked it and moved on to other things. Electric stove was not part of the already tight budget as well, so I ended up paying for the guys to eat out every day. This made the money run a little faster than anticipated. In Kumasi, a bowl of food was costing an average of 12cedis and they ate three times a day. I used We had to pay for drinking water, toilet paper, and transportation as well. Feeding eight people was stressful especially since they were all guys. I purchased a lot of snacks and that was a lot of help. The snacks however got to Ghana very late but was helpful nonetheless.

## Renting

It seems the prices we thought we would receive (10 cedis per night) was for students only. When we started boot camp, I was so stressed out about finding a place for my volunteers to stay. I just needed a place and didn't think of ways I could have gotten the dorms at that price. We ended up being charged 30 cedis per day for each of the two rooms for over 40 days we spent there even though the manager was generous enough to charge us for only 38 days. The price was reasonable because we had access to light even when lights went off. There was access to wi-fi all the time and we had ceiling fans in our rooms. It was very comfortable as well. I later found out that I could have let my friends who were students check out the rooms in their names for us for a cheaper price, but should have known is always at last.

## Kumasi Incident

Kumasi was very stressful, but it went well considering I have never had to look over volunteers at a rented place and have never had volunteers to begin with. One of the guys, Jesse was Bi-polar and that isn't and wasn't a problem at all. I didn't sleep in the guys' room, so I wasn't aware as to whether or not he was taking his medication. When he told me he was bi-polar and spoke about how he suffered from maltreatment at the hands of his family, the police who always had to come and arrest him to take him to mental hospital at the request of his father, and at the hands of the workers at the mental hospitals, I felt terrible. I knew patients were treated poorly in mental hospitals in Ghana because that was public news and it had been that way since forever, sadly so. I could empathize as I myself sometimes suffered from depression

and extreme stress that sometimes affected my entire life. I advised him to the best of my knowledge and showed him all the support one could show, and he even said I was like a sister to him. We took long walks in the mornings while singing our Christian songs and discussing how to change the education system in Ghana by teaching students STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics).

He was an old actuarial science student at KNUST and was liked by some of the professors and was in the process of applying for his master's degree in mathematics. We all lived very freely and happily in the hostels until he started acting unusual. His debates with the guys which I wasn't part of were getting heated all the time and I advised them not to engage in such discussions to keep peace. He would scream and yell his points across to shut down all the other people speaking it never crossed my mind that he could have been off his medication. One Saturday morning on our way to St. Louis, he attacked me for repeating a joke that one of the guys made to the guy, a joke that all of us laughed at. I was very fed up with his yelling and screaming and told him to learn how to debate with people. He then came to me after we returned from the trip and said he was quitting. I was very hurt, because he was like a brother to me during the summer and I didn't think a joke could lead to something like that, but then again, I didn't know that he was off his medication. I travelled to Berekum to set up the schools we were going to be visiting there and while away he kept coming back and terrorized my guys. He peed on the floor, insulted me and all of them, took their phones and made calls and texted their contacts insulting them, he was walking into people's dorms and terrorizing them, and acting strange. We contacted the professor friend of his at the university to come for him and the thought of having to go to psychiatric hospital was making him cry and he kept running away. The very next morning, I rushed back to Kumasi, leaving all my duties in Berekum behind. I prayed on my way back as I had done all throughout my time in Ghana. When I got there, he had been arrested for threatening to shoot up a bank in a robbery. Thankfully a guy who knew him was close by and told the police that he was only sick and not harmful. The professor assured me that what was happening would be controlled as we struggled to get him into a psychiatric hospital without a family member present to sign the forms. The professor ended up signing all the forms and got him admitted.

The manager at the dorm wanted to press charges against him since he was no longer part of us but was disturbing people, but we begged him not to, because mental illness didn't discriminate, and he didn't deserve to be in jail for being mentally challenged. Before he quit working with TeachGhana he told me that I wasn't humble among other hurtful things, and I wrote those things off since he was obviously sick during that time. However, later, I heard about the terrible things he said about me to the guys who all thankfully didn't believe me as they knew my character and knew how much I loved my country and wanted to help. They all laughed at his attempts to tarnish my image. I decided to never associate myself with him not because we was mentally ill but because even when he was doing great, he was laughing in my face and tarnishing my image or attempting to do so behind my back. I was so depressed from July to August. Some of the guys were also stressed and depressed because none of us had witness

something like that ever. His behavior was truly scary, and we were all taken aback by his behavior of talking behind our backs and smiling in our faces. I felt so responsible for the fact that the guys had to experience something like that, but they all kept assuring me that it wasn't my fault, because he even quits weeks before whatever happened did, so he was not part of the team. It took me a lot of time to heal and I made sure I checked on all of the guys and kept them in my prayers. Schools closed for vacation late July which was when I got to Berekum, so I waited till the reopened in September to start working again since our plans for vacation classes didn't work out at all.

## Berekum

This year I did something I hardly ever do, I worked in Berekum for both the times I was meant to be in Berekum and Accra. My decision to work in Berekum was one that was intrinsic and well thought out. My mom thought it was going to be great to give back in my hometown and I agreed. Besides, I had never done a project like so there, so it was only going to be fair for me to do such. For the most part, the teachers and administrators were excited. They said they never got opportunities like this for their students and each school wanted me to stay with them for over 3 weeks. I was recovering from my borderline depression from the Kumasi event so I agreed. One of the schools, St. Augustine's was being headed by one of the old administrators from St. James seminary so I was very excited to work with them, but couldn't because they only had 4 computers and it was going to be impossible to teach that way. JINS, PRESEC, and Bess were all ready for the program, but couldn't go ahead with it because they had final exams, promotional exams coming up and the teachers and I agreed to not put stress on the students and to let them focus solely on their promotional exams. The teachers and I thought the vacation would be great for them to come and study, but unfortunately not enough students signed up to partake in ICT classes.

I was almost discouraged at this point, because my suspicions about my students not caring about computing was proving to be true. They signed up for the other classes but no one seemed interested in my class, so we put things off for the beginning of school.

You see, the thing about the students in Berekum is they for some reason, and they and their teachers agree that they don't aim high. They are grateful and satisfied with the status quo, being that life begins after high school instead of life beginning after college when you have a career instead of just a job. I had an opportunity to hos several talk sessions at the secondary schools while focusing PRESEC for computing (two grade levels, 4hrs a day). My talk was with girls. A friend of mine wants to help young ladies to study abroad in America, all expense with the exception of school fees and flight ticket on him. He as such told me to look for very brilliant young ladies with chances of scoring close to perfect score on the WASSCE. I was encouraged and excited when I entered a science class at Bess. Many of the young ladies has so many questions for me. They were ready for the experience and wanted to know more. I was then put into a home economics class and the willingness to take advantage of this same opportunity was nonexistent. You see in Ghana, we gave students courses based on the scores they have. It comes from a good place of wanting the students to pass and do well in high school. A student with C or higher on the BECE for math and science will do elective math and science and most likely will be a science or business students. Even if he or she is a general art

student. He or she will take elective math. If a student scored very low on the BECE, and is a girl they will be placed into home economics and I know this to be true as I spent most of my time shadowing administrators through their protocol process this year after my teaching work. At first, I had a lot of my own opinions about how this was done, but after having a front row seat in all this, I knew how vital their decisions were and how much they cared about their students. In Berekum, we don't get all the resources given to Prempeh, Louis, and the rest or the top schools in the capital cities. Teachers make decisions for their students with their parents and sometimes without since the parental presence is sometimes not existent. Most of the children are taken care of by parents who are farmers and traders. These are not big time farmers, these are peasant farmers, farmers who do enough to survive and it scares me that if we don't encourage and push these children they will end up doing enough to survive and while that isn't bad. I want them to want more than that. I want them to be hungry for a future beyond what is in their comfort zones.

So, the home Economics class, most of the young ladies were not interested in what I was saying after the mention of close to perfect score on the WASSCE. Just in the same school the students in the science classes asked if they could pay to attend school abroad and even partial scholarship, but these young ladies were not interested.

One of the other problems is these young women just want marriage and that is nothing bad. That is an amazing thing, but it puts them in a situation where they do enough to survive, to where they can't even insure their children and take them to the clinic when sick. At their age they should be dreaming about college just like I was. I admit some people at my age in US weren't dreaming about college but very few, but over at that place a lot of people weren't. You can't have a perfect case where everyone continues into higher education and get a great career, but you shouldn't have majority uninterested. It hurts me so bad that they placed more importance on their relationships than on school. I felt like I had failed my town. I felt like citizens abroad had failed our town. I cried so much that night when I went to bed because I couldn't imagine that most of these girls were content with being peasant farmers and small scale traders after high school if it meant they would earn about 50 (10dollars) cedis a day.

Growing up in the same town I always knew I wanted to go to university. My mother always allowed me to dream she told me I would be a doctor or work on phones and computers because I messed up all of hers. She brought in extra academic help for my siblings and I and on vacations we had two tutors to help us prepare. There was not a time I didn't know the subjects being taught in school during the first semester, that was always the refresher. My mother cared about our education and the same is true for that of my little sister. She is not the most brilliant of all, but we are making sure she will perform. My mom had flexible relationship with my teachers and that of my siblings while I was in school, coming by randomly sometimes to ask about my performance. This is not because she has money but because she always says she wanted us to become more than she could have ever been in her entire life. She never wanted us to become like her not that it would be a bad thing, but she said that was every parent's wish or should be.

With the education system for high school changed into a double track system where half of the students are home for three months while the other half schools, most of our fears were and still are that students will forget what they learn by the time they return from their breaks and this isn't a break that takes them into another year. It's a break within the same year. I mean, we

forget stuff over Christmas break, lets shoot for Memorial Day so how much more having a three months break. Most parents don't even care and that hurts me so bad! I want them to care. I want us to raise a community of strong and intelligent people who will lead our country and to do that, teachers, parents, and students need to work collectively together to make it successful. I was disappointed that my initial suspicion about there being a lack of interest in my line of work in Berekum but I am happy with what I discovered because I can raise more awareness and bring in help now that I know. I don't blame the students, with no mentors, nothing to dream about, very minimal opportunities, it's not their fault. I want students to want more than they do.

My little sister's friends were fine with their scores which are super high in the 30s on the BECE because the schools they got have nice uniforms. That is unacceptable. Why are we raising a generation of people who are comfortable with the status quo? No!

We need prayers and we need a mentorship program in place for Berekum. With the teenage pregnancy rate so high and young women dreaming about marriage and not a career, we need to do more. We failed them. we the citizens of Berekum. The government began in this failure and we continued. We can't just keep blaming the government, we are the keeper of our brothers and sisters and need to do more.

When you compare the students at Prempeh and Louis and even St. James to that of Berekum schools, the teachers will agree with me that there is a clear difference and while teachers seem to want it for their students its hard and its getting harder for teachers to make their students want it. I, now more than ever want to work in education in Ghana. That was the dream before because I thought I could do great but now I have so much more at stake. I will do it for my community for my little sister who is a first-year student who I love and adore so dearly, my nephews and nieces and the people who I am close to who all deserve nothing but the best. This entire trip was very challenging. I ran into problems that I never could have imagined running into, I got sick over ten times with terrible fevers, colds, and stomach problems, but I persisted. I enjoyed teaching and influencing the lives of the students, and I hope I can do it again and again. As I always say, this isn't just a passion for me. As someone who truly love education and is also religious, I feel like this is my form ministry. Some were born to preach, some to sing, some to play instruments, I was born to influence my community positively and to give back. I don't feel comfortable seeing students and their sources of education being in terrible states. I feel responsible to fix it. I feel like I owe it to myself, my community, my family, God, and the entire world to give back. Education is a privilege, but a quality education is a luxury. It is a luxury that very few people from my side of the world in Berekum can afford physically and mentally. Parents must wake up and take the futures of their girls and boys serious. Teachers must encourage their students and push them, the students must work hard themselves, and the community must mentor and care for the future generation. When it comes to the futures of the children on this planet, I am selfish! I want it all for them. I want great education, great support systems, and great resources to support them starting with my community back home in Berekum.

## The headmaster who inspired me

One of the schools that we picked to work with when we were sending out letters was Jinjini Senior High School, popularly known as Jins. Jinjini is about 25 minutes on the outskirts of Berekum. You can only find a car to Jinjini at one location in Berekum. Because of how far it is, the school provides transportation to and from the school to town. When we went to Jins, we were directed to the headmaster who was recovering from his spinal cord surgery at home. He told us that because of his condition, he was advised by his doctor to go home to lie down if he felt any pain from sitting down in the office for too long.

Administrators are usually provided with a place to live with their families on campus in high schools around Ghana, so his house wasn't so far from the school. He was so welcoming. He spoke with Marvin (CEO of Berekum City organization) and I for over 2 hours about his experience as an educator in Berekum and Ghana as a whole. He recounted an incident where one of the political figures in Berekum wanted him to lie about the status of his school to receive money. The man wanted him to say none of the students at his school were boarders which he didn't feel comfortable doing since it was going to affect the school's chances of getting some of the resources a boarding school needed. If the school were not a boarding school, the government was going to give the feeding program to the District Chief Executive. He was going to control who cooked for the school, and he could keep some of the money for himself that way.

The case was so severe that he and his family were receiving threats from the supporters of the politicians. He made the case public and took it to court when the man refused to give his school beds that the government provided for the boarding schools in Berekum. The politician did everything he could to sort of punish the man, and when he made the case public, the public jumped to his defense. The politician then started apologizing but went ahead to try to get the man replaced with someone that he knew so that he could still control the feeding program at the school. The headmaster declined the offer from the education office to stay home with pay while another person comes to complete his term as a headmaster. He said the pain wasn't getting any better, but his love for his work and the children he headed was enough motivation for him to get up every day to go to work. He inspired me so much that day. Few months later, in August, the headmaster died. When I heard the news, I cried the entire week and even told my family about it. He was so inspirational, definitely an example for all the teachers and administrators around the world. He embodied what an educator should embody. He was a great example for everyone not just educators. He loved his job and didn't give up even on his death bed. His words and his encouragement always run through my mind and I wish I could tell him one last time that he inspired me so much that I have decided to go ahead and start my master's in education program. You hardly come by such people, especially in Ghana where most administrators care about their pockets more than their students and it was refreshing to meet someone like him.

When I returned back to the school, a banner made in remembrance of him was hanging on the gates of the school, and I stared at it and recounted all the great advice he gave me that day. The teachers told me that they could only pray for a headmaster like him. They missed him and were planning on how they could honor him at his funeral. I am just glad that I could meet an inspiration person as such before he passed on.

## Reflection and Next Steps

I was not able to visit twenty schools with all that happened and with schools dropping out, since it seemed the letters were not given to the rightful persons in some of the schools. I was also not able to do so because I found more value in working at a few schools in Berekum after school reopened. The community clearly needed and still needs a lot of work and it wouldn't have been fair for me to travel to the city to teach in schools while my community was suffering. Ideas were bound to change, I was bound to change my mind on a few things as I gained insight into things. I however love how things turned out and appreciate the work I did in the six schools I visited. I will continue to keep in touch with my contacts at these schools as I continue my work with TeachGhana. My next step is to shift TeachGhana towards a Girl Child Education model. I want to mentor the young ladies starting from middle school since records show that there are more girls in schools from early childhood through elementary. I want to join forces with some of the influential people in or from Berekum. I also want to join hands with some of the associations and groups that have citizens of Berekum and Brong Ahafo in general, so that we can brainstorm and help these students. I have the idea, I know I want to help them, but left to me alone, I wouldn't know which route to take, so I hope together, we can come up with beautiful and effective solutions that can alter the lives of the young ladies in Berekum and all over Ghana. I used to believe that the more students I meet and teach, the more schools I visit the more influential my project becomes and while that is true, I now find value in being able to deeply influence and alter the lives of those who need it most but may or may not know that they do. I find more value in being able to help young people to find a worthy path for their amazing potentially vibrant futures. I want to change the narrative of the average young girl in Berekum. I want us to be known for amazing things in Ghana and the entire world. I want them to want more for themselves and for their communities. I want to help my community, my country, my cousins, my sisters, friends, and neighbors. I want to help the world!