



Collected viewpoints on
international volunteering
in residential care centres
Country focus: Ghana



Better Volunteering Better Care is an initiative led by Better Care Network and Save the Children UK

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Methodology

This overview is intended to contribute to discussions on international volunteering in residential care centres as an anecdotal research piece on the situation in Ghana. Ghana was chosen as a focus country due to recommendations from a range of informants who raised concerns about extent of the practice in residential care centres in Ghana. Availability of research also contributed to the choice of Ghana as a country focus.

This overview was informed by online resources, academic and institutional literature, and interviews with informants.

Ghanaian context

Over the last six years, Ghana has been one of the best-performing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, with an average annual growth of six per cent (African Development Bank Group 2014). In 2011, the nation achieved lower middle-income country status. It is among the few countries in Africa expected to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving income poverty by 2015.

Ghana has also made progress on social development outcomes. The 2013 Human Development Report recognises Ghana as a “high achiever” for its better than average performance in the areas of health and education, relative to national income; the country ranks 135 (out of 187 countries) in terms of Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2013).

However, poverty reduction in Ghana has not been distributed equally; there are significant disparities in regards to geographical area (in particular between urban and rural areas and between the South and the North), gender, and age. Over 28% of the population continues to live below the national poverty line (Ghana Living Standards Survey 5 [cited in *Mapping and Analysis of Ghana’s Child Protection System*]).

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups of the population. Malaria, malnutrition, and

lack of access to adequate sanitation contribute to high rates of child mortality. A third of all children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labour; over 50,000 are living and/or working on the streets. (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2013, Ghana: Advocating for Development That Leaves No Child Behind) Over 1.1 million children in Ghana have lost one or both parents; about 12% of orphans have lost their parent(s) to HIV/AIDS.

Residential care in Ghana

Residential care homes are the primary form of formal alternative care available to children outside of parental care in Ghana. The concept of the children’s residential care centre was originally introduced many years ago by European missionaries who took in orphaned, abandoned, or sickly children, perceived to be undesirable to stay with families (Department of Social Welfare, 2008).

There has been a tremendous increase in the number of residential care centres in the last 30 years. In 1985, Ghana had just three residential care facilities, all run by the state (Martha Muna, Kaeme). By 1996, ten private homes were also in operation. However, a decade later, in 2006, a national study mapped 158 private residential care facilities with 3,388 children (UNICEF, Child Frontiers, Child Research and Resource Centre (Crrecent), Government of Ghana). These facilities were un-licensed, and the majority lacked adequate records, quality care, and gatekeeping policies and procedures (UNICEF, Child Frontiers, Crrecent, GoG). Through the Government of Ghana’s Care Reform Initiative (see *Legislation and the Care Reform Initiative*), some of these homes have been closed. However, the number of children living in residential care continues to increase. As of December 2013, there are 114 children’s homes serving 4,432 children and adolescents (Keshavarzian, G., Forthcoming Better Care Network and UNICEF *Ghana Country Care Profile*, 2014). Only ten

of them are registered with the Department of Social Welfare (<http://www.ovcghana.org/>).

Most residential care facilities are concentrated around Accra, other Gulf of Guinea coastal areas, Kumasi, north of Kumasi into the Brong-Ahafo region, and around Hohoe in the Volta region (see Google maps reference in end notes).

While the increase in numbers of residential care facilities may be partially explained by pressures placed on traditional care arrangements such as kinship care, Western donors and volunteers, including those from faith-based communities, have also contributed to this growth (Galama, A., 2010).

“For reasons that I am struggling to understand, it became a fad in Western giving circles to create and sponsor orphanages in Ghana and in many parts of Africa without asking if that was even needed.”

Martha Muna, Kaeme

Government officials report that 80% of children living in children’s homes have one or both parents still living (Ms Helena Obeng Asamoah, former Deputy Director, Department of Social Welfare now Director, Department of Children). According to the *National Standards for Residential Homes for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Ghana*, the push factors for children entering residential care include:

- Family breakdown;
- Migration (i.e. husbands leaving families in search of work; or rural-urban migration of families);
- Parents’ limited capacity to care for their children;
- Disintegration of traditional family structures and mechanisms (i.e. shift from matriarchal households);
- Poverty;
- Practice of families discarding HIV infected children; and
- Incarceration of parents”

Department of Social Welfare, 2010

One children’s home administrator explained that financial pressure is the biggest push factor for voluntary institutionalisation:

“Well, mostly it is because of poverty. So even if they are a full orphan, most children have extended family. But that extended family, like it would be a grandmother, in many cases a grandmother, she cannot afford to feed them, because the women in this society have no means of earning money. And without a welfare system, there is simply no money.”

Galama, 2010

There is also evidence of superstition leading to institutionalisation; in particular, in some parts of Ghana, children whose mothers die in childbirth and children with disabilities are accused of witchcraft and are rejected by families and communities (Galama).

Issues associated with residential care in Ghana

Children’s homes have attracted much media attention in Ghana over the last several years, with many cases of negligence, abuse, crime, and corruption being exposed (see listed Ghanaweb links to news reports in the “references” section of this study). One of the most revealing reports came in 2010 from undercover journalists with The New Crusading Guide who were able to observe life at one of the oldest government-run residential care centres. Their first-hand accounts of the squalid conditions, lack of care, and abusive environment shed light on the reasons for child mortality in the home (reported by Anas Aremeyaw Anas on Ghanaweb: *Undercover in the Orphan’s Home of “Hell”*, 2010).

While some residential care centres may strive to comply with standards of care, news reports and accounts from child protection specialists suggest that children’s welfare is not always of paramount concern. The 2008 report from the Department of Social Welfare states that “the

operations of most of these children’s homes do not conform to the required minimum national or international standards.” Although there are no studies to indicate how widespread these practices are, some specific issues that have surfaced around residential care in Ghana include:

Separation from families

Most children living in residential care have at least one living parent. Yet informants reported that many of these children do not see their families. In some cases, family members regard the children’s home to have sole responsibility for the upbringing of their child. However, it is also common for care facilities to place restrictions on family members’ visits, denying children interaction with their relatives (Galama, 2010). There are even reports that orphanage administrators intentionally “recruit” children from distant areas to ensure separation. In the most extreme cases, facilities refuse to release children even when family-based care is a viable option.

Active recruitment of children

There are reports that “orphanage recruiters” entice parents to give up their children, with promises of quality education, food, and clothing that will lead to brighter futures for their children (*The Illegal Orphanage Business in Ghana*, Ghanaweb, 2013). They “sell orphanages as a boarding school” (Interview with Kaeme). “There are many reports of cash transactions for the children, though these are usually referred to as donations to the families.”

There have also been cases of children being sold out of residential care facilities. Several children’s homes have been investigated for releasing children in their care to foreigners in exchange for money (*Kids for Sale*, Ghanaweb 2010, *EOCO Probes Sale of Kids at Orphanage*, 2011).

Negligence

Caregiver-to-child ratios are low, and children receive little attention, stimulation, or supervision (OAfrica, Annual Report 2008). In some reports, young children and those with disabilities “are left sprawling helplessly on the floor, usually at the mercy of the elements without being attended to” (*Undercover in the Orphan’s Home of “Hell”*,

Ghanaweb, 2010). In 2009, the negligence of caregivers was blamed for the rape of a baby by another child in a private institution (Afful, K., 2009). The institution was subsequently shut down.

Abuse

Physical and emotional abuse is experienced by children, both from caregivers and older children living in the homes. A report on life in one children’s home, for example, “reveals a pattern of abuse from adults which has translated into ripples of violence and a never-ending stream of hostility among most children in the home. From verbal to physical and emotional abuse, the children are being initiated into a culture of abuse on a daily basis” (*Undercover in the Orphan’s Home of “Hell”*, Ghanaweb, 2010).

Corruption

There are accounts of financial and material goods being used for the personal benefit of staff, instead of for the children in care. Reporters who visited Osu Children’s Home, for example, observed children being made to carry bags of donated food from the home to taxis for transport to caregivers’ residences. Meanwhile, children living in the home showed symptoms of malnutrition (Anas Aremeyaw Anas, *Undercover in the Orphan’s Home of “Hell”*, Ghanaweb, 2010).

“Children’s welfare at these orphanages has become secondary to the profit motive.”

Eric Okrah, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist

“Material gain and personal gain override the best interest of the child... A majority of orphanages are seen as a source of livelihood rather than child care centres.”

Richard Adabrah-Klu, Projects Director, Orphan Aid Africa

“The running of residential homes for most managers is a means of livelihood.”

Iddris Abdallah, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ghana

Exclusion

Children living in residential care are also separated from community life, which has implications for their short and long-term well being. This happens not only through the physical

isolation associated with their life in the children's home, but also by stigmatisation of children in care by communities and broader society. (Orphan Aid Africa, 2008)

“Besides the evidence of abuse and criminal activities in orphanages, they also detach children from society and make them lose their self confidence when they become adults.”

Awo Boatemaa Aboagye-Dankwa, Head of Family Support Services, OAfrica

“There are many disadvantages to raising a child in an orphanage. The child becomes emotionally disabled here. They are confined to the orphanage and they don't mingle with society as a whole. Home becomes a strange land.”

Anne Anglaaere, Head of Child Rights Program, Northern Region Department of Social Welfare

Visitors to residential care centres

In June 2013, Ghana's Daily Graphic reported, “Over the past decade, Ghana has been invaded. This invasion has not come in the form of killer bees or illegal miners. No; over the past decade, Ghana has been invaded by voluntourists” (Arku, J., 2013). Ghana is popular amongst voluntourists because it is perceived to have economic need, while offering political stability and security. In fact, Ghana is the most popular destination for one of the largest volunteer sending organisations, UK-based Projects Abroad; accounting for 40% of its revenues. (Vrasti, W., undated)

While statistics are unavailable, the Daily Graphic indicates that voluntourists come from North America, Europe, and Asia. Anecdotal research has described volunteers as “mostly inexperienced” and “young,” (Voelkl, 2012) and “middle-class high school and college graduates from Western countries” (Vrasti). In-country specialists observe that most volunteers are between the ages of 18 and 25.

Volunteer motivations

A study examining the motivations of over 400 international volunteers in Ghana found that most volunteers are driven by altruism and their desire to learn; other motivations include wanting to contribute to poverty alleviation and have a good time (Otoo, F. and Amuquandoh, F. 2014).

Of the former orphanage volunteers that were interviewed for this research, none of their motivations specifically related to work in children's homes. One wanted “to give back” and thought volunteering “would be a great way to learn about other cultures,” while another was “looking for an adventure.” Where individuals had volunteered internationally before, they were influenced by their previous experience.

A child protection specialist highlighted that most volunteers come with the very best intentions; the challenge is to redirect these well-intentioned efforts in more ethical ways.

How volunteers hear about placements

Volunteers hear about opportunities to work in children's homes in Ghana in a variety of ways. A Google search for “volunteer orphanage Ghana” turns up thousands of results, many of which are the websites of international and Ghana-based volunteer placement agencies, as well as the websites of residential care centres. Volunteers also hear about opportunities through their personal networks of family and friends, religious affiliations, and tour companies.

Volunteer Sending Agencies – Many of these agencies operate out of volunteers' home countries and offer a variety of placements in nations around the world. However, there are also a significant number of Ghana-based placement agencies. Examples include:

- Disaster Volunteers of Ghana (www.divog.org)
- Volunteer in Ghana Service (volunteerghana.africacalling.org)
- Ghana Volunteer Network (www.volunteerghana.net)
- Dream Africa Care Foundation (www.dreamafricacarefoundation.org)

- Help the African Child Foundation (hacghana.wordpress.com)
- Student and Youth Travel Organisation (www.sytoghana.org/about_syto.php)
- Volunteer Partnerships for West Africa (www.vpwa.org)
- Passionate Youth Voluntary Organisation (www.passionateyouthvoluntary.org)
- Robbooker Voluntary Organisation Ghana (www.robbo.org/orphanageWork.php)
- Blue-Med Africa (Ghana) (www.bluedafrica.org)

While some agencies operate as companies, many are registered as non-profit organisations. Placements range from one week to two years. The majority of agencies charge fees to volunteers for their services; sometimes a small percentage of this fee is passed on to the receiving organisation (in the form of a financial or material contribution), but this is not always the case (Galama, Voelkl).

Volunteer Hosting Organisation Websites – A number of children’s homes in Ghana have their own websites, advertising their needs for volunteers. Examples include:

- Royal Seed Home (www.royalseedhome.org)
- HardtHaven (www.hardthaven.org)
- Christ Outreach Orphanage Ghana (www.christoutreachghana.wordpress.com/volunteer)
- New Life Orphanage (www.newlifeorphanage.co.uk)
- Hanukkah Children’s Home (www.mchildcare.nl/en/volunteer)
- Light for Children Ghana (www.lightforchildren.com)
- Hohoe Charity School (www.hohoecharityschool.com/66815325)

Children’s homes, too, charge variable fees for volunteer placements based on the duration of stay.

Family Members and Friends – Many of the former volunteers interviewed for this research had either (1) been directed to their receiving organisation by a personal connection, or (2)

referred others to their receiving organisation after their volunteer experience. Referrals from personal networks were particularly important for those who had previous negative experiences with placement agencies. There is also the perception of “inherent trust” for the children’s home and “no need to question the legitimacy” of the organisation when it comes as a recommendation by a family member or friend. (volunteer interview)

Mission Trips – Other groups and individuals plan their visits to children’s homes through religious affiliations, as mission trips. Group trips are promoted and organised in a variety of ways; for example, through churches (e.g. www.woodsfieldchurchofchrist.org), faith-based charities (like www.feedingtheorphans.org/how-to-help/volunteergo, www.kingdomcares.org), and high schools (e.g. www.nlcs.org/missions, www.macademy.org/upper-school/student-life/missions/ghana). There are also websites that cater to individuals who want to organise their own mission trips; these websites contain databases of projects around the world. Many of the Ghana-based projects are linked to the offerings of local volunteer placement organisations (see above).

Tour Companies – While this is less prevalent in Ghana than in other countries, some travel companies promote volunteering in residential care centres amongst tour offerings. (www.ashantiafricantours.com/index.php).

How volunteer opportunities are advertised

The marketing strategies used by volunteer placement agencies and volunteer receiving organisations seek to evoke emotional responses from prospective volunteers. Children are described as “needy” and “vulnerable,” and the conditions of homes are characterised as “understaffed” and “overcrowded.” International volunteers are put forth as the solution.

“Unfortunately, many Ghana orphanage projects are without strong financial support, under staffed and face additional hurdles with trying to effectively run their programs. Help is needed with every task: cooking and serving food to the children, assisting with their basic education and physical fitness (sports) and there is an

immense need for English lessons, but the most important thing you offer these poor children is love and attention that they so desperately crave. Resources for orphans are spread thin. Orphanage workers in Ghana do their best, but manpower is low and it is the face-to-face contact that this children desperately need. Love and support that comes from volunteers working with orphans in Ghana are priceless! Many volunteers joining orphanage Ghana program as life changing and rewarding. This is the perfect project if you want to serve humanity or share your love, passion and time with children deprived of their parents love and care.”

IFRE Volunteers Abroad

Some organisations also play on the HIV/AIDS discourse to attract volunteers:

“Many countries in Africa, like Ghana, face the problem of homeless and neglected children due to AIDS, of which only 5% get any kind of support. Due to this problem efforts are being made to help these young ones. This outcome has resulted in the construction of more orphanage homes.”

Passionate Youth Voluntary Organisation

Generally, volunteers are not required to have special skills or qualifications.

“Volunteers with qualifications and experience are welcome but you do not need to have either to volunteer. Energy, passion and commitment to the work at hand should see you through.”

Projects Abroad

Volunteers’ activities

Volunteers take on a range of activities in residential facilities, most of which involve direct interaction with children. Former volunteers who were interviewed reported that they played with, fed, bathed, and dressed children. Some volunteers taught English at the orphanages’ schools and/or helped children with their homework in the evenings. Those who did not teach took on other responsibilities while the children were at school, including purchasing food from the market, cooking, maintaining the home’s farm, and performing building maintenance.

However, one former volunteer acknowledged

that not all volunteers’ experiences are the same. She explained that some volunteers, who came through the same placement agency, were assigned to residential care centres in Accra, where there were higher caregiver-to-children ratios. She explained that there was not a lot of work for the volunteers to do, so many of them just had “a big party.” This is consistent with anecdotal research conducted in the Volta Region, where some volunteers felt “useless” (Galama, 2010).

Volunteers’ financial contributions

A former volunteer questioned the impact she and other volunteers had on children in residential care in Ghana, explaining that the activities that they did “would happen without the volunteers.” She thought she offered greater benefit to the children through a fund-raising project she coordinated upon return to her home country. She and her friends and family raised AUD \$22,000 to support expansion of the residential care facility, a project that they argue fulfils a “real need”¹. This situation, while not common, is also not unique. There are examples of former volunteers raising large amounts of funds, setting up charities, and establishing volunteer placement organisations that support the children’s homes where they volunteered.

Interviews with administrators of children’s homes in Ghana’s Volta Region suggest that the greatest value they see in volunteers is their fundraising potential. Some expressed their expectations for volunteers:

“I am expecting that if they can help us, advocate us when they go back and get us some funding, we will love it. [...] Money can do a lot of things. [...] But when you go back, you can tell people about us, maybe those who can help us, little, little. They make some contribution, send to us. It will help us, to do something with or what do you say?”

Children’s Home Administrator

¹ This was perceived as a “real need” based on the former volunteer’s discussions with the children’s home director. The director explained that the home was not meeting government regulations for standards of care because it was overcrowded, so their government funding was at risk of being pulled. She also explained that the police continued to bring children to the home. With the moratorium on adoptions, the number of children in care continued to increase. Expansion was seen to be necessary.

While most volunteers do not raise funds when they return to their home countries, at least some children's homes claim to secure the majority of their funding through previous volunteers.

“Without volunteers, you can't work. We don't get money for anything, we can't do any projects and other things, you know? Supposing we don't have volunteers, how would we be able to construct a classroom block in the village and [...] a computer lab [...]?”

Children's Home Administrator (cited by Voelkl & Voyk)

Stakeholders observe that most funding for children's homes comes from Western donors and sponsors, particularly from faith-based communities. (Keshavarian, 2014)

Volunteer experiences

Current volunteering practices in residential care centres in Ghana create the potential for negative impact through creating an increased risk of harm to children, adding to children's workloads, creating attachment issues, contributing to sustained institutionalisation of children, and fuelling corruption.

Child protection issues in residential care centres

The experiences of the volunteers interviewed for this study suggest that child protection mechanisms may be either insufficient or inadequately enforced by some volunteer placement agencies and some children's homes. Only some of the former volunteers were required to submit criminal background checks as part of their volunteer application. International volunteer placement agencies were more likely to require these than smaller, locally-operated placement organisations. Former volunteers highlighted a lack of screening processes as an issue. A quick exploration of the first 25 results on Google for the term “volunteer orphanage Ghana” demonstrated that only 20% of organisations offering such placements requested a background check, only 8% had a child protection policy, and only 28% gave the name of the orphanages where volunteers

would be placed (i.e. no details with regards to registration or policies at the orphanage). Details of the organisations explored in this web search are given in the references section of this document.

Once placed at the children's homes, volunteers tended to have full access to children.

“There aren't really any rules or guidelines; you just sort of jump in. It's like jumping straight into motherhood; you make sure they eat, bathe, dress, do their homework, everything.”

Former Volunteer

One volunteer reported taking children on a hiking trip with his friends, without any supervision from residential care centre staff. Where adequate child protection systems are not in place or enforced, volunteering increases risks of harm and abuse to children.

Children as servants

Some volunteers interviewed for this study reported that they were largely treated as guests by both staff and children. At some homes, this translated to children cooking, cleaning, and catering to the needs of volunteers:

“I would have thought that we'd need to do a lot more ourselves. Because yeah, they [the children] even wash our clothes. But yeah, they do that for Emma too, for everyone actually... They cook the food for you too. Well, that is something I did expect, that the food would be arranged for us and there would be water in the fridge. But I did think I would have to wash my own clothes and make my own bed and clean the room and sweep and that, but the children do that too.”

Former Volunteer

While these practices may be shaped by cultural norms, they are also influenced by staff perceptions that happy volunteers are more likely to make donations or return in the future.

Risk of corruption

When volunteers make financial or material contributions to children's homes, there is a risk that their well-intended donations are used for the personal benefit of staff, thereby fuelling corruption. While many volunteers are unaware of this injustice, some

volunteers have been perceptive of this.

“It really seems like the staff take our donations and use the money to better their own lifestyles... The kids are crammed into small dormitories while the orphanage administrators have well furnished houses on the property.”

Former Volunteer

“It felt like the only reason they wanted us at the orphanage was for our money. They see us as a piggy bank, which is hard to take because we’re there to help with the kids.”

Former Volunteer

“Sometimes we wonder why people want to open an orphanage. They go on to the net to advertise and look for support. We reckon if you do not have resources, you cannot take care of the children. We suspect that some people open orphanages for personal gain. Some of them gain by volunteers coming to them. They receive funding for them.”

Department of Social Welfare Officer

Attachment Issues

Voelkl and Voyk’s studies (2012, 2011) draw attention to children’s attachment to volunteers, and the emotional stress that their departures can create for children. From the perspective of an eight-year-old boy in care:

“I don’t like it when they [the volunteers] leave... They should stay with us everyday.”

Voelkl, 2012

Sustained Institutionalisation of Children

Volunteers are also perceived to sustain the institutionalisation of children, primarily for the benefit of residential care administrators.

“Despite the good intentions of some volunteers to provide the needed care for children, their presence are often exploited by proprietors. These proprietors embark on “recruitment drives” of children, telling parents that the whiteman/woman has come to help children in the community.”

Iddris Abdallah, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ghana

“It is apparent to me that institutions use volunteers to find funding and to justify the existence of institutional care.”

Johanna Ericksson, Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Ghana

Voices for change

Many stakeholders recognise the problems associated with international volunteering in residential care centres and call for change.

“[Orphanage voluntourism] encourages orphanages to operate as businesses, where children are a business model.”

Meredith Bailey, Kaeme

“Uninformed donors can make poor decisions about how they give, but their good intentions and resources may be directed more effectively through education and persuasion.”

The Way Forward Project Report

A supervisor with the Department of Social Welfare expresses particular concern about how volunteers are, or are not, being screened, and the resulting risk of child abuse. He calls for the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) to be involved in the regulation of volunteers. (Galama, 2010)

UNICEF Ghana has drafted a national *Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy for the Protection of Children in Ghana*, which addresses the institutionalisation of children, among other child protection issues. The strategy, which will be rolled out through national and regional Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Coordinating Committees, targets a wide range of audience segment groups, including parents, community leaders, and leading volunteer recruitment agencies to deter the use of institutions in favour of family care for children. The intention in targeting volunteer sending organisations is to help them understand the problems around volunteering in child care institutions and to encourage them to move away from sending volunteers to such facilities. UNICEF reports that Department of Social Welfare officials and National OVC Coordinating Committee

members have already had discussions with Student Youth and Travel Organisation (SYTO), a volunteer recruiting agency. Although it was reported that SYTO no longer sends volunteers to residential care facilities, orphanage placements continue to be advertised on SYTO's website.

Alternatives for Volunteers: A Case Study

Kaeme, a US-based 501(c)3 non-profit organisation, promotes volunteering that adheres to Ghana's Care Reform Initiative (CRI). Working in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) social workers, Kaeme's volunteer interns help to aggregate existing written information to build profiles of each child living in residential care centres. These profiles are subsequently used by DSW to either reintegrate the child with his/her family or determine the best family-care option for the child. In this way, Kaeme volunteers are playing a supportive role in the deinstitutionalisation of children in Ghana.

Kaeme's American founders originally set out to build an orphanage in Ghana. However, while on a research trip, they met Helena Obeng Asamoah, now Director of the Department of Children, who informed them that the government was working to stop the growth of residential care centres. It was under her guidance that Kaeme's approach was designed to support the Care Reform Initiative.

Kaeme volunteers are students from US-based universities. The organisation has traditionally had links with Stanford University, but they are now recruiting from a number of colleges across the USA. They advertise volunteer positions on public health websites, on online volunteer boards, through universities, and through their alumni.

Kaeme screen candidates using an application and interview process. Successful candidates pass through two interviews (in-person when possible) with recruiters who have formerly served as volunteers.

Volunteers spend two months in Ghana, but they also commit significant time to pre-departure preparation. All volunteers complete a preparatory course, which if done in person, takes two hours per week for 7-8 weeks (otherwise, the course is

done online and through Skype calls). Half of this time is allocated to Twi language training, while the other half is allocated to more general preparation for their role, including classes and discussions on:

- Ghana's culture and history
- Orphans and vulnerable children issues
- HIV/AIDS impact in Africa, generally, and in Ghana, more specifically
- How Ghana's residential care system came about
- Ghana's Care Reform Initiative (CRI)
- How to enter residential care centres in a non-hostile manner
- Travel logistics

Volunteers travel as a group. Until 2014, Kaeme organised one volunteer trip per year; however this year they have begun to offer both a summer and winter program. Volunteers cover all of their own travel expenses; the internships are unpaid.

Once in Ghana, the volunteers visit children's homes with Department of Social Welfare social workers and Kaeme's Program Coordinator (also a trained social worker). While the social workers conduct interviews with children and the house mother, the volunteers peruse the paperwork the residential care centre has on file -- including medical records, academic report cards, documentation on legal termination of parental rights, etc. -- to make sure that this information is included in each child's profile. Volunteers also lead social activities with children while the interviews are taking place.

Over the last three years, Kaeme has helped to complete profiles for over 2,000 children. Their goal is that children are moved from residential care centres within six months of their profiles being completed. However, Kaeme's Executive Director shared that timing depends largely on the motivation of the DSW officials, as the care plans are the responsibility of the Department. Kaeme has tried to expedite the process by organising "disposition conferences," in which national, regional, and district representatives convene with Kaeme's social workers to review all profiles and decide on the best option for each child. Whereas Kaeme used to profile all children's homes in

one geographical area before moving to the next location, they have also refined their strategy so as not to “paralyse” the DSW office in one area.

Meanwhile, while children are waiting for placement outside of the residential facility, their completed profile, which is usually the only official record of their residency in the residential care centres, helps to give them some level of protection.

Kaeme’s approach, and its use of interns, offers a model of one way that volunteers can be used to support the government’s strategy for deinstitutionalisation.

Final thoughts and recommendations

In Ghana, perhaps more so than any of the other countries that have been examined, volunteers tend to arrange their placements prior to departing from their home countries. This has implications for any future awareness campaigns that will be targeted at prospective volunteers. Campaigns are likely to be most effective in reaching people in their countries of residence, as opposed to targeting those who are already in Ghana.

There is a need to map volunteer sending organisations in order to be better prepared to target them with messages about the problems associated with international volunteering in residential care centres. There is also a need to establish alternatives that will appeal to these businesses.

UNICEF Ghana’s draft *Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy for the Protection of Children in Ghana*, which will be rolled out through OVC Coordinating Committees presents a potential opportunity to link a global engagement strategy with local engagement with volunteer recruiting agencies.

In-country specialists note that the vast majority of volunteers have the very best intentions. The key challenge is educating them and redirecting their efforts to more ethical alternatives.

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Interviews

Volunteers

David Brown (former orphanage volunteer in Ghana)

Kathryn Pisco (former orphanage volunteer)

Natalie Scicluna (former orphanage volunteer in Ghana)

Emma Sykes (former orphanage volunteer in Ghana)

Volunteer Hosting Organisations

Meredith Bailey (Executive Director, Kaeme)

Child Protection Specialist

Johanna Eriksson (Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Ghana)

Email Correspondence

Iddris Abdallah (Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ghana)

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www.globalvolunteerprojects.org/orphanage/ghana.htm

www.volunteeringinafrica.org/orphanages_ghana.htm

www.globalcrossroad.com/ghana/workorphanage.php

www.hardthaven.org/

www.workandvolunteer.com/orphanage-volunteer-projects

www.ifrevolunteers.org/ghana/work_in_orphanage.php

www.volunteeringsolutions.com/ghana/volunteer/volunteer-orphanage-ghana

www.dreamafricavolunteers.org/

www.divog.org/ghana-orphanage-volunteer-program-abroad/

www.robborg.org/orphanageWork.php

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www.planmygapyear.co.uk/tours/ghana-orphanage-volunteers/

www.lovevolunteers.org/programs/volunteer-ghana

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www.eliabroad.org/volunteer-internship-ghana

www.unitedplanet.org/volunteer-in-ghana

www.unearththeworld.com/volunteer-experiences/orphanage-school-ghana/

www.villagevolunteers.org/volunteer-abroad/destinations/ghana/ryvanz-mia-orphanage/

www.lovekidsfoundation.org/o/tag/ghana-orphanage/

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<http://ashleyinafrica1.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://christoutreachghana.wordpress.com/volunteer/>

<http://graphic.com.gh/features/features/10881-ghana-attractive-to-voluntourists.html>

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<http://volunteerghana.africacalling.org/>

<http://woodsfieldchurchofchrist.org/>

<http://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/ghana/ghana-economic-outlook/>

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<http://www.bluedafrica.org/>

<http://www.christianvolunteering.org/>

<http://www.divog.org>

<http://www.dreamafricacarefoundation.org>

<http://www.feedingtheorphans.org/how-to-help/volunteergo/>

<http://www.hardthaven.org/>

<http://www.hohoecharityschool.com/66815325>

http://www.ifrevolunteers.org/ghana/work_in_orphanage.php

<http://www.irinnews.org/report/84582/west-africa-protecting-children-from-orphan-dealers>

<http://www.kaeme.org/>

<http://www.kingdomcares.org/>

<http://www.macademy.org/upper-school/student-life/missions/ghana>

<http://www.mchildcare.nl/en/volunteer/>

<http://www.missionfinder.org/>

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/201573/1/is-maame-dokono-a-victim-of-political-vendetta.html>, <http://www.ghanadistricts.com/news/?read=13894>

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/314285/1/abolish-orphanages-ngo-urges-govt.html>

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<http://www.newlifeorphanage.co.uk>

<http://www.orphansofghana.org/our-story>

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BETTER VOLUNTEERING BETTER CARE

Country focus: Ghana

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<http://www.unearththeworld.com/about/history/>

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<http://www.volunteerghana.net>

<http://www.vpwa.org/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iZwmpxlAMk>

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<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/u/o/edit?mid=zkgqSMgNT1uY.kNMWMFV7EOeQ>

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