

## My International Volunteer Experience by Rebecca F. Class of 2010

I remember it like it was yesterday. Getting on a plane in the summer of 2007 and going to a place that I knew absolutely nothing about. A place that you see on television, but not a place you typically hear a nineteen year old traveling to because she “felt like it.” I was finally accomplishing my dream and before I knew it, I was heading to Ghana, Africa which would change my life forever.

I started to research volunteer abroad programs six months prior to my trip. I wanted to look for a volunteer program that allowed me to work in a hospital setting, where I could learn more about illnesses afflicting Ghanaian people. After much investigation, I found Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), a nonprofit volunteer organization based in New York. They guided me on how to get started to prepare for my trip and provided all the essential information I needed to know. CCS also gave me the opportunity to fundraise, in order to reduce the expense of my trip, which including airfare, was about \$5000. I was required to get a yellow fever shot in order to enter the country. However, the doctor recommended I receive typhoid, hepatitis A and polio vaccinations, in addition to malaria pills, as well. Cross Cultural Solutions also informed me about proper attire, how much money I should bring, toiletries, information about my volunteer placement and housing. The living arrangements were a lot nicer than I expected; a house with running water that we referred to as the CCS home base, a place well known by the entire community, where children frequently came to play.

Volunteering in Ghana was one of the most amazing experiences I have ever encountered. I spent three weeks in Ghana, with volunteers of all ages, from all over the world. My days were spent working in the local hospital where I actually assisted in the delivery of a baby! I also worked in the orphanage which is what really made a huge impact on my life. Not only did I have the opportunity to teach the kids, but I made them understand what they were learning with the use of visuals, instead of just having them memorize the material. The most rewarding part about volunteering was seeing the children’s faces filled with smiles because they were so fascinated and so eager to learn, not to mention incredibly grateful.

Although volunteering is important, CCS also wanted us to have a chance to experience the country as a whole. Other volunteers and I traveled to waterfalls, slave castles, and even got to hike up mountains. I was amazed by how quickly I adjusted to this new setting. It is not everyday that you are wakened by the sound of the roosters crowing. Looking back on it, I never wanted to leave the US, and after just three weeks in Ghana, all I wanted to do was stay and never return home. However, all good things must end sometime.

After I returned home from my trip, I made a vow that I would try inspire others to follow in my foot steps. I was determined to share my story with others because people need to understand what it is like to go to a foreign country and experience a completely different culture. To learn new things, meet new people, but more importantly, to get a chance to help others, that is what volunteering is all about. To know that you have the ability to make a difference in another person’s life, or just to see the smile on someone’s face, should be enough of an incentive to want to take action. Volunteering abroad will change your life; all you need to do is gather the necessary information, take that first step on that plane and never look back. Let your heart give you that extra push you need to give all you can to a community. Your life will change before you know it, I know mine did.