

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Students explore ways to stop child trafficking in Ghana

BY CLAIRE JORDAN



From May 17–June 6, a team of four faculty members and 10 students immersed themselves in the West African culture of Ghana. Tony Lowe and David Okech, associate professors in the School of Social Work, and Patricia Hunt-Hurst and Laura McAndrews, associate professor and assistant professor in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, respectively, led students on the Maymester program’s 15th trip. Consuela Henry (MSW '16), Briana Farlow (MSW '17) and David Kobe (BSW '17) represented the School of Social Work students alongside seven fashion merchandising and textile majors.

The 2016 trip focused on child trafficking. Out of Ghana’s population of 27 million, an estimated 103,300 are trafficked, according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index. The U.S. Department of State 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report placed Ghana on their Tier 2 watch list, meaning that the government has not met the minimum required standards for preventing the trafficking in persons.

“Trafficking of boys and girls is a major problem in Ghana because of the fishing and street portering industries,” said Okech. “Boys are mostly used in the fishing industry, while girls are used as street porters, selling wares and carrying merchandise in the bigger cities of Accra, Cape Coast, and Kumasi.” In collaboration with Nathan Hansen of the UGA College of Public Health and John Anarfi of the University of Ghana Department of Sociology, Okech is presently conducting a study to assess the needs of trafficking victims and to establish an evidence-informed intervention for survivors.

The group reconnected with the Lifeline Project, a nongovernmental organization based in the city of Accra that helps homeless girls safely get off the streets. They also visited a village in the

eastern region of Ghana built by City of Refuge Ministries, another NGO, for children who had been rescued from trafficking.

Johnbull Omorefe, City of Refuge’s founding director, updated the group on best practices in rescuing and caring for trafficked children. The sprawling campus includes a school, dormitories, and a workshop.

“What they’re doing is very exciting and this agency is receiving a lot of attention,” said Lowe.

Students received training on how to spot signs of trafficking victims and situations – a valuable skill in Ghana, at home and abroad.

“I was able to learn physical indicators of child trafficking,” said undergraduate David Kobe. “At first it was difficult to distinguish, but after some education it was not hard to spot with a trained eye.”

The trip was a jarring experience for many of the students. Despite preparation, students said the level of abject poverty still came as a shock. Progress has been made in the past decade, though, noted Lowe, as some Fortune 500 companies have moved into the region and a few skyscrapers have made their mark on the horizon.

“I have been travelling to Ghana for 12 years,” said Lowe. “Ghana has made substantial improvements in infrastructure.”

Look for more about recent study abroad experiences in Ghana and Northern Ireland at ssw.uga.edu/academics/studies_abroad.html.

Above, left to right: David Okech, Emily Sparks, Molly Mastin, Sarah Harrison, Laura McAndrews, Brittany Savoie, David Kobe (BSW '17), Briana Farlowe (MSW '17), Gordon Hobbs, Molly Dodd, Consuela Henry (MSW '16), Patricia Hunt-Hurst, Siriu Yu and Tony Lowe.

Opposite, clockwise from top: Opposite, clockwise from top: Students engaged in a service project at City of Refuge Children’s Village; learning a traditional West African dance; presenting school uniforms and supplies to the Togome community; listening to Lifeline Project personnel; fishing boats; a former slave prison known as the Cape Coast Castle.

PHOTOS: TONY LOWE