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After this summer, I can now say that I spent nine weeks living and working in a village in West Africa. I spent the summer volunteering for the organization United Planet in the Volta Region of Ghana. During my internship, I lived in the village of Sokode-Etoe near the city of Ho. My internship responsibilities entailed teaching English to the junior high students at the local village school and working in various clinics in the nearby city of Ho.

Each aspect of the internship was very different. The initial challenge was getting accustomed to an entirely new place where most things were different including the culture, social interactions, the language, and the food. The way of life of the people that I just moved in with was completely different than my own, and it took some time for all of that to sink in. I ended up living in the spare house of a family that lived in a different town. I had a sort of host mother who looked after the other Notre Dame volunteer, Augie, and I during our time in the village.

My primary responsibilities included the medical part of the internship, but I chose to add the teaching volunteering as well because I wanted to get to know the children of the village. Augie and I taught English to junior high students ranging in ages from twelve to seventeen. Getting to know the children of the village was one of my favorite parts of the entire internship. It was challenging to figure out what the students actually comprehended because often they could not understand us, because of our accents and the speed at which we talked. Our lesson plans included reading comprehension, grammar, and writing exercises. We worked to prepare them for their end of the year examinations that determined whether they passed on to the next

class. The kids were also eager to teach us some of the local language called “Ewe.” They could not control their laughter every time we attempted to speak in the language. However, the community appreciated our efforts.

The other aspect of my internship was medical volunteering in the nearby town of Ho, about a fifteen-minute taxi ride from the village. During this part of my internship, I volunteered with various clinics in town. At the clinics, I mostly observed doctors consulting patients although I also observed rounds through the clinic and sometimes checked patients in and took vitals. Through these observations, I learned a lot about Ghana’s health care system and its policies and practices. I also spent a lot of time with doctors and listened to their perspectives on the health care system and each of their particular experiences in practice.

This internship presented many challenges among all of the benefits and experience. One of the most frustrating things was the language barrier. At first, I felt very isolated from the village and hospitals because not only did I not know anyone, but it was also very hard to communicate with the village community and some people at the clinic. The best thing I learned was to keep attempting to talk to people, to find different ways of communicating with others, and to not be discouraged. Most of the people around me in Ghana were very willing to try to talk to me and to help when they could. When people say Ghana is a very open and friendly country, I can now readily agree based on my experiences there.

Another very challenging part of the internship was not feeling busy and productive enough. One of the reasons for this feeling was the culture of Ghana itself. The Ghanaian culture is very relaxed and slow paced, so part of the experience was the adjustment to this type of culture. Another thing that helped with this feeling was learning to feel productive about different accomplishments and forms of progress than I normally would. My internship started

in an area in which United Planet had just recently started partnering; therefore, the village and the clinics were not as accustomed to United Planet volunteers. This was daunting at first, yet I soon found that taking initiative by asking questions when I had them and jumping in on activities in the clinic at every opportunity were the best things to do to make progress in my experience.

Overall, I definitely benefitted from my experiences in Ghana. I cannot say that it was not difficult and overwhelming sometimes. However, I will say that it was a great experience. I observed a different culture's healthcare system firsthand and worked in their education sector. These two areas, healthcare and education are some of the most vital areas of communities everywhere. Being a part of these healthcare and education systems during my internship allowed me special insight into the lives of individuals in Ghana. While living in a foreign culture, I learned the most about things that I did not expect and in ways I did not expect. These experiences included learning to take initiative in a foreign culture where there was no set schedule or strict rules on the developments I could make with my internship and not getting discouraged with difficulties in this new culture. I did not expect to be as effected as I was at first by the language barrier and cultural differences, but continually making efforts to overcome these issues and to develop an understanding of the new culture is what led to my progress throughout the internship. These learning experiences ended up being the best and most beneficial aspect of the internship, and they are what encourage me to travel abroad again.