



*SUA 2013 student interns. © IOM 2013*

### Interns Get Hands-on in Ghana

Since 2010, IOM Ghana has welcomed students for an eight (8) week summer practicum, bridging the gap between the academic and professional divide. Forged as part of a partnership with Syracuse University, located in upstate New York, USA, this study abroad programme allows the next generation of aid workers to take classroom principles and apply them in a field setting, with guidance from seasoned IOM staff members. “This internship programme is a win-win for IOM in Ghana and the Syracuse students. Their remarkable enthusiasm and knowledge leave a lasting impact,” according to Dyane Epstein, Chief of Mission, IOM Ghana.

The 2013 group of students was comprised of three undergraduate students and one graduate student, eager to learn about IOM programmes and adapt their experience to match their unique area of study (photojournalism, social work, public health, and international relations). The Syracuse students were in a way a cross-section of a typical non-profit aid organization. A team of individuals working to implement projects in their specialised area at the request of and for the benefit of their assigned community, and taken as a whole contributed more than just a development project or proposal, but also a knowledge bank and a contagious enthusiasm for making a difference in the lives of others.

The internship started off with a one-week orientation to IOM programmes and Ghanaian language and culture.

This was followed by a six week internship assignment and completion of a community development project for those in the field. Finally, the programme concluded with a one-week proposal writing and debriefing seminar in Accra.

To fully capture the students’ experiences and allow them thereby to reflect on such an intense cultural exchange, each week they wrote a blog entry featuring their most memorable interactions, reactions and perceptions. The following is a series of excerpts from a weekly blog



*Learning to shop at the market place. © Lauren Murphy 2013*

written by the students.

“Day number three was the start of orientation week at the International Organization for Migration in Accra, Ghana! It was packed with activities and field trips out of the office. Dyane welcomed us warmly and gave a brief overview of the IOM globally and in Ghana. I was even more impressed with the organization than I had been before; it's truly a wonderful place that creates so many successful projects on positive and regulated migration.” - Lauren

“Today was one of those days so chock-full of memories it's hard to know where to begin...In the last 12 hours I walked through the canopy of a rainforest, touched a live crocodile, and stood in a place that had seen unimaginable suffering. Two of these experiences seem great, but it was actually the third that will likely stick with me for the rest of my life.” - Benjamin



*Our new neighbours in Immuna were eager to meet us.*

“It did not take long for word to spread throughout the village that the *obroni* (meaning white people in Fante) had arrived. When I exited the IOM van, I walked the perimeter of the property to see it. When I reached the front security wall, I heard giggles from the other side. When I peered over the wall, I found two curious little ones, Zuala and Mustapha, trying to look in and see their new *obroni* neighbours.” – Alexa

“I knew this experience would impact my life, what I didn't know was how much it possibly could.” - Siera

After settling into their new community Alexa, Laura and Siera spent the remainder of their six week internship in Immuna mentoring school children and assisting teachers at the Srafa Westley Community School. During this time they spoke with children and parents in the community to identify a development project that was needed and welcome. In just a short time the students were able to identify three projects that not only tied into their personal studies and interests, but that will have a lasting impact on the people of Immuna.



*Alexia teaching the upper primary school students how to*

“I built and installed two hand-washing stations at the Srafa-Wesley school and educated the students on personal hygiene and water sanitation. The project was a success. The students and teachers were very receptive and I am convinced that they will utilize the hand-washing stations effectively.” – Alexa

One student completed their internship at the IOM office in Accra. Benjamin was assigned to the counter-trafficking unit and was tasked to assist in the finalization of the Child Protection Toolkit, and activities related to the new human trafficking legislation approved by the Ghanaian government; he further drafted an anti-child labour proposal as part of his final project.

“This afternoon was very exciting for me as it marked my first lead on a meeting here at IOM. Come to think of it, it was the first professional, non-academic meeting I have ever run!” – Benjamin

Reflecting on the outcome of their practicum, the students referred to their time as a “life changing experience” and that they “gained an understanding of a completely different culture”, and they would “recommend interning at this office to anyone”. Of course as anyone who has worked abroad can attest to it is the final days of your stay in a new place when you realize you have learned a great deal more, even in a short period of time, than the impact you have undoubtedly left behind. So too was it difficult for our students to say goodbye, far too soon. Although, we know they are better prepared for their future careers and will always receive a warm welcome in Ghana.

Even if you have been working on aid projects for 30 years or perhaps you have just started with your first position, these students remind us how, even in a short period of time, just one person can make a difference in the lives of others and what a privilege, challenge and joy it is to be an aid worker.

Please visit the IOM [website](http://www.iom.int/countries/ghana) to read the full feature story.

IOM Mission to Ghana

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