

## Another country, another world

### Young reporters count their blessings after a harsh reality check among the children who work the stone quarries of Accra, Ghana.

*Two Children's Express reporters discovered how much British young people take for granted after they'd spent a week in Ghana.*

If you asked most British children whether they loved going to school the answer would almost invariably be "no". Well, travel to Ghana in West Africa, like we did last month, and you'll get a very different answer. In the capital Accra there are tens of thousands of children who have to work to survive. For them education is a dream.

Walk into any British school and you'll find pupils with trainers worth a hundred pounds or a mobile phone worth two hundred pounds. Make the six hour flight to Accra and you'll find children selling water, being a porter in markets and breaking stones in quarries to earn just a few pence a day.

Things we take for granted in this country like an education, our safety and a meal when we get home are rarities for so many young people in Ghana. We witnessed children, some as young as four or five, breaking rocks with no protection for their bare hands or eyes. We met children with appalling eye and hand injuries. It was quite a shocking sight for us to take in. But if these young people didn't work like this they simply wouldn't be able to afford to eat.

The quarry we visited on the outskirts really opened up our eyes. The scorching sun beat down on the children who worked there from sunrise to sunset. The images of toddlers working so hard is one we shall never forget.

11 year old Samuel, a former quarry worker, showed us round:

"I started at the age of six. Life was very difficult in the quarry. It was a very difficult time for me and my mother. We woke up at four in the morning. Sometimes I couldn't take a bath. We'd walk from the house to the quarry. And then work from six in the morning until six in the evening. We sometimes didn't eat at all."

Wandering through the run down market, based alongside the tracks of the city's main railway station made us reflect on how lucky we are. The minor hassles that we face everyday pale into insignificance compared to the world in which so many Ghanaian children live:

"It's such a hard life," 12 year old Sylvia, a former street porter, told us. We could see that for ourselves. The dirty railway was both workplace and home to so many people. Sylvia used to work late into the night carrying spices on her head, for a tiny sum of money.

"There are a lot of children suffering here. They are struggling to get some money to eat and struggling to get some people to care for them. I feel so bad staying here because there are armed robbers, and lots of people who get pregnant. There was one girl here who gave birth at nine years old – that's not right."

It's desperately sad to think that so many of the young people we met in Accra may never find a way out of the poverty in which they live. They struggle day in, day out just to make enough money to survive.

Many of the children we spoke to don't even get a basic education. So they really don't have much of a future to look forward to. Education is the key to a good life, development and opportunities. Without it you're at a dead end.

Though it's illegal to have young children working in Ghana, it was a common sight on our travels through Accra. There were so many people of all ages selling absolutely everything on the streets to make ends meet.

The strange thing was virtually everyone was trying to make money legitimately. We hardly came across any beggars. In fact you probably find more in London. Walking around the streets of Accra held none of the menace that you sometimes experience travelling around some British cities.

We were relieved to see small signs of a brighter future for some of those we met in child labour. We visited the charity, Children in Need Ghana, which now provides a foster home for Samuel and Sylvia and also pays for their education. The charity hands out gloves and eye goggles in the quarries for protection.

It has also set up a quarry classroom where children can at least spend some of their day getting an education. But the most encouraging news of all came from the owner who told us he had plans to introduce machinery to his quarry to replace the children.

We really feel we were lucky to become friends with Sylvia and Samuel. We were so impressed to meet children who just a short while ago had nothing, but now are talking about putting their natural talent to good use. Samuel has amazing musical ability. He's a natural singer and impressive piano player.

Samuel already knows what he wants to do as an adult.

"In the future I'd really like to be a musician and help children," he told us.

Sylvia also attends the appropriately named Future Leaders School, and she too has high hopes for her own future. "I feel so bad about children suffering in Ghana," she told us. "So I pray that one day I can be somebody great so I can have my opportunity to help children who are suffering here."

It's easy in our pampered lives to take for granted what we have. There are so many people around the world worse off than us. Compare our Gap jumpers with their torn hand-me-down-shirts, our cushioned beds to the tomato boxes we saw young people sleeping on in the markets in Accra. Our experience has given us so much to reflect on and made us realise how lucky we are.

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### About the team

This story was produced by Gabriella Gay, 16, and Zak Garner-Purkis, 14. It was published on Sky television's [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

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