



CHILD EDUCATION PROGRAMME

2021 Volunteer Testimonials

2021 Volunteers

On 10th October 2021, a group of volunteers from 9 different nationalities (UK, Greece, Spain, Poland, Iran, Ghana, Guinea, Cyprus and Russia) left Portsmouth (UK) to meet at Heathrow Airport. With a short layover at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, they flew to Conakry, in the Republic of Guinea. For all of them, it was their first visit to Guinea, and for many, their first trip to Africa.

Although all the volunteers come from different cultural backgrounds, they have a lot in common. They share a passion for helping others and a willingness to make a difference to the educational system in one of the poorest countries in the world.



Impact

Built a new library and computer room that will benefit over

10,000

children, and locals yearly.

15 People

benefitted from free health checks and consultations during a 1-day health clinic.

329 Parents

benefitted from the workshops.

7 Workshops

organised on the need for girls' education.

53 Local

teachers benefitted from the workshops.

364 Young

girls benefitted from the workshops.

The local volleyball team received great support in the form of equipment.

URBOND Child Education Programme was established in 2019 and is currently based in Koutaya, Dubréka (Republic of Guinea). The scheme has been devised specifically to advance child education by providing primary schooling and learning resources to children in areas with reduced opportunities or where significant shortfalls have been identified. Since its inception, over 2,000 children have benefitted from the Child Education Programme, with the scheme growing year on year.

The vision is to embed the **URBOND** philosophy of 'building bigger, stronger communities together' on an international scale by involving the participants from the UK in the organisation's work in the Republic of Guinea.

Volunteers are so important to the work of **URBOND**. Without our dedicated volunteers, **URBOND'S** great achievements would have never been possible. Our 2021 volunteers did an outstanding job and we are extremely proud of their achievements. With their support we provided life changing events and activities, built a library and a computer room, and each year over 10,000 children and locals will benefit from the facility. The impact the charity and its participants are having in the Republic of Guinea is just the beginning of what can be achieved by bringing people together to form stronger communities. Thank you for your time and we hope you enjoy reading our 2021 **volunteers experiences**.



——— Ousmane Drame, Chief Executive

Pavel Lavrinovic

Africa. Exotic, yet approachable. Scary, yet welcoming. Controversial for many, yet indisputable for me. **Do we belong there, or do we not?**

“You are not thinking straight,” I was told, when I decided to travel to Dubréka, Guinea. Our aim was to build a computer class and library for a local school with other volunteers, at the time of the biggest pandemic in past centuries. “What could you do to passive recipients of white benevolence”, I was told, “it is waste of time and money”. Emotions such as anger, fear and guilt slammed my doors by paper-thin skinned people. I’ve noticed behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situations. All I did was mention charity in another continent. Some tried to put thoughts into my perspective about diseases, to name a few: yellow fever, malaria or cholera, as I didn’t know about under-funded public health facilities in African continent. All efforts to make sure I won’t make irrational moves to harm myself. And I will stay home in my comfort. And I won’t do anything.

“Just don’t do it.”

Choosing not to perpetuate the cycle of judgement... I got my tickets. “Bon Voyage”, they said to us in Paris International Airport. Our destination – Conakry, capital city of Guinea, founded on a land belonging to the Soussou people. We fundraised money needed for the school expansion from exceptional people, our new friends, who believed in our cause. There was no way back. We were ready for anything impossible.

Let me deliver the emotion – placing my first step in West Africa was humbling. Deteriorated slums, non-existent roads, impoverished people. Dirty children running on streets and continuous noise from traffic jams. Thousands of busy workers around the streets selling goods or going home after work. I had a feeling I got into a formicary, and someone was observing my reaction to this chaotic environment. Everything I experienced, was efficiently organised, communal and eusocial. A bunch of locals helped us without asking when our car wheel got stuck in a huge hole. Others, having spare time, tried to manage congestion in their own neighbourhood. It was different, yet empowering.

“Certainly, schools are no different thousands of miles away from our homes,” I was told back then. Indeed, this little school in Dubréka, which needed expansion, had walls and a leaking roof. There were no windows, no air conditioning, no books, no electricity, no computers, no toilet access. There were no nurses for any sport injury or illnesses, there were no after classes and there were no girls. Little is known about young women in Africa, that they will never set a foot in a classroom because the daily grind of poverty is forcing them to sacrifice their right to education and hope for a better life. It is unsophisticated truth – we are extremely privileged having access to free education, equal rights, modern healthcare systems and countless ways of entertainment, but we tend to forget about it.

Building a computer class and library in Dubréka was the biggest gift I could ask for this year. We could throw away our cell phones if we wanted, shut down our e-mails, and disappear into the crowd. With no flags. No uniforms. No judgement, just pure appreciation and joy. A task to be done and finished in two weeks. It wasn't an escape from daily routine, it was a life. We got help from children clearing the forest from around the school. Local craftsmen joined our crew in painting walls and repairing classroom desks. There was no language barrier during breaks when we had a playtime with girls and boys, even though nobody knew French. They made us feel very welcome, they taught us African dance, local games, gave us tips how to be better in football or volleyball. We established lifetime relationships.

URBOND made this possible. We had a plan we believed in, we had hard-working and supportive crew members. We successfully finished the computer class and library, and we have created a place for cultural, technological and independent growth, a place for childhood memories and human interaction. And now we have a place to come back, as our hearts belong there.



Clara Pons Marti

I don't know what to feel. Feel in order to be sure, someone important said that. Anyway, let's start.

Poverty is normal here. Kids with no shoes, the same clothes every day, infected wounds and sad eyes. But when they smile... with those white teeth, slightly closing their eyes. Those dark eyes stare into your soul every time you lock eyes with them. It even feels a bit uncomfortable sometimes. The intensity of that look is shameless, nearly defiant.

Women dress so elegantly, with colourful and tailored dresses. The patterns they wear are vibrant and the fabric moves nicely when their bodies dance. They were born to dance, the rhythm is undoubtedly running through their veins. They seem so happy and free when they dance, they do it so effortlessly that for a second it seems it's the easiest thing in the world (until you try!).

I met a little girl, she had a shy but intense look so we danced together. Then we kept finding each other throughout the day.

We didn't even exchange many words because of the language barrier but we understood each other. She braided my hair.

Later it was time to do the sanding of the computer room and library so it could be ready to be painted. I was minding my own business scratching the wall when she came, she took one of my sandpapers and showed me the parts that needed to be done. I thought to myself that she could not be more than seven years old; at that age I barely made my own bed and laid the table.

They told us that kids belong to the community, that any adult can tell them what to do. So they can be hit, mistreated or even ripped by anyone in the street. They are cheap labour, if not free labour.

Time to speak about my new family.

It was Ousmane Drame that brought us together. He might be too humble to recognise but facts are facts.



He's from Guinea and his life's work is poured into the creation of this charity **URBOND**. Can't imagine what it is for him to watch his dream come true little by little.

URBOND is a small charity. But the money invested in them does go to the kids, I've seen it with my own eyes.

We followed a friend with a dream and we ended up in Guinea, like we could have ended up anywhere in the world doing the same.

These people, coming from different parts of the world, united by the same objective. Stopping their lives to do something completely selfless. I admire every single one of them.

Dubr ka is not a touristic place at all, the only tourists or white people besides us have been the people from the embassy. It even felt that we were intruders in their little ecosystem. They would call us 'fote' (meaning white in a respectful way) and say "hi" to us enthusiastically.

This trip has been life changing to say the least. I am very grateful for this experience.

We're blessed and we don't realise sometimes.

Jude Keating

Having to summarise my experience is pretty tough! We were welcomed with open arms and hopeful smiles. We had the privilege of seeing and experiencing what life can be like for the less fortunate communities. Being able to share this experience with the volunteer team we had made the experience unforgettable. Everyone had something great to offer and I can truly say I've made dear chums for life.

This venture has not only benefitted me by broadening my perspective of 'needing' & 'wanting' something, but also appreciating my day-to-day health and lifestyle. We are incredibly fortunate for what we have. We have no excuse not to give something back. What an honour. What a privilege. Big up **URBOND**! Much love.



Agness Walewinder

As a professional travel blogger, I find volunteering and travel to be a fantastic opportunity to see the world and learn about different cultures while also giving back. So, when I heard about the Guinea volunteering trip organised by **URBOND**, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands, feeling extremely blessed and grateful. Looking back at my decision, this has been one of the most satisfying and memorable experiences of my life!

Throughout the trip, I was able to use my blogging expertise to share daily stories and images on the **URBOND** social media channels so that the rest of the world could see what we were all experiencing there. I was able to capture a lot of beautiful and unforgettable moments in Guinea, such as the hard work of all volunteers working in the sun for hours to build the library and a computer room for the kids, and the playtime with the locals. During all of these experiences, we were always surrounded by the beautiful smiling faces of the children this project was going to help directly.

It was a pleasure to get to know everyone in Dubréka, especially the kids and their parents. They were just as curious about our culture as we were about theirs. Strangers are only friends you haven't met yet, and the affection these children displayed for a group of strangers was incredible. We came as strangers from other countries and departed as friends, and I'll never forget it!



The amount of love that was given within the group and among the Guinean community was definitely the highlight of my stay in Guinea. Everyone we met was unbelievably nice, radiating an unmistakable warmth and inviting hospitality that puts many rich western countries in disgrace. It was a genuinely humbling and loving experience for me.

Thank you to everyone on the team at **URBOND** for making this journey possible. Also, a special thanks go to the children and residents of the Dubréka neighbourhood, whose unselfish giving and strong spirit shine through despite the poverty and hardship they face. Their grins are priceless when they have almost nothing. I will never forget what I've seen and experienced in Guinea this year!

Kingsley Digby

Where do I begin?

When I was informed of the volunteer's trip to the Republic of Guinea, I thought what a great idea!

This is because, firstly, we all gladly give to charities regularly but getting physically involved, getting my hands dirty and seeing tangible results is on a different level: hence I was very keen to be considered as one of the volunteers.

Secondly, being part of **URBOND's** Volunteer pioneer group meant making the trip was very exciting and a fantastic opportunity to help the course and really make a difference.

Lastly, but not least, the chance to travel to another African country was a thrill as I love travelling and experiencing different cultures, although the motive of the trip was to help the local community.



There were teething issues, as one would rightfully anticipate, largely due to the difference in cultures and the way things are generally done over there but that was certainly part of the challenge. We embarked on putting the finishing touches to the school library building by sanding down, painting, decorating, equipping the library with furniture, electricity, laptops, air condition and fans.

Although very challenging in many aspects, the end results made it more than worthwhile. The school children, the head teacher and the local community as a whole benefitting from a library equipped with fully operational laptops and books was overwhelming to see. This will make a huge difference to their lives. Indeed, just seeing the adults and children sitting in front of the laptops and playing games for the first time was amazing.

To participate in enriching the lives of the less fortunate is a lifelong dream and ambition of mine and I will endeavour to continue to do so as long as I am able to for the foreseeable future. Hence, I have enlisted myself for next trip in 2022.

Athina Dimitreli

We often complain about our everyday life; about our busy jobs, our endless studying, our old clothes. Things that are our privileges.

People in third world countries have no clean water or food, unsafe houses, no health or educational systems, and yet, not only do they not complain, but they smile and work with what they've got instead. They remember to pay attention to the simple things; the music and the importance of one another.

This trip made me realise not only how happiness is in the simple things, but also how much happiness you can bring to others by just being kind to them and supporting them in any little way. They will help you too, and not because they have to, but because they appreciate you. They will give you smiles, hugs, excitement and love; and that is the biggest gift you could ever receive.

Before going to Guinea, we all had one goal; to build a library and computer room. Now that we've been there and done that, we know that there is so much more to be done that can help upgrade their living standards and ensure a respectable life.

Education, in the deepest sense of its meaning, is beyond necessary so that everyone can identify with their rights and obligations, build character and develop their thinking.

Forever grateful for the opportunity I was given, to pass on this message and motivate more children to get educated!



Ifigenia Gritzali

It's amazing how a simple hand gesture and touch can give so much happiness to a child that owns so little. Travelling to Guinea was a life changing experience. The people, the culture, the roads, the houses, and the way of living was eye-opening and shocking. Coming from a highly privileged background made me appreciate everything that I own and my daily comforts in life. Starting from the simplest, such as, a clean toilet, to, driving my own car on a straight road with no bumps.

I was very proud and satisfied with the work and effort we all put into our main goal which was to build a library and computer room. In two weeks, we had everything set up and running as well as being able to teach the children how to use computers. In addition to this, with the help of another volunteer who was a doctor, we were both running a health clinic for free, listening and giving advice to people in need. This made me feel very useful since, as a Pharmacist, I got the opportunity to share my knowledge and improve people's lives that could not afford a consultation with a doctor. The amount of people that did not have access to healthcare or could not afford it, was absolutely shocking to me!

Every day, I now live life appreciating how blessed I am, and it motivates me to keep moving forward so that I can continue helping the less fortunate people out there. After being a part of this trip and team that URBOND created, I will continue supporting this charity since **URBOND** is making a massive difference in improving people's lives in Guinea.



Douglas Edgar

In Guinea, young girls are forced to leave school around puberty, through fear of ridicule or the opportunity to have a family. Shown through the net attendance rate falling from **66%** at primary school level, to only **13%** at upper secondary level (**Unicef, 2021**) it continues to be a problem.

URBOND worked with the British Embassy, who, with the Ambassador David McIroy having daughters in higher education himself, was extremely keen to support the project. Identifying the barriers was greatly important to the success of the project, as without a culture willing for the children to go to school, it cannot work.

The conference we held with the parents helped to identify key problems, but importantly showed that they desperately wanted their children to go to school. As we shared our stories with them, they applauded the young women in the group who willed themselves through university and worked industry jobs, all whilst out of their native countries. This is important as Guinea holds the second highest rate of FGM in the world at approximately **92%**, increasing perceptions and heightening education levels would bring this down.

Seeing the excitement on the children's faces as they used the laptops for the first time is my favourite memory. It makes you realise that we will never have that feeling again for something new, being so used to technology. Tackling the problem of internet connection was left to Mikey, who had to battle with no WiFi infrastructure in the country, only 4G connections. The combination of the laptops and library is a great mixture, and interestingly there was as much interest in the books as there were the laptops.



When thinking about poverty, you envisage not just poverty of living conditions but that there will be a poverty of joy. After first meeting the people of Guinea you realise that this is not the case. Even with the absence of everything a modern world desires, the spirit of the people is something to be cherished. Dr Zanon and Pharmacist Ifi held a free, pop-up clinic and cases of patients without seeing a doctor for over thirty years emerged. Pains had become prevalent without the use of basic pain killers as they are unaffordable for the locals.

The locals enjoyed our international mix of volunteers as much as we enjoyed them. Every person on the trip is a product of education, whether it be university graduates or professionals. Therefore, delivering the gift of opportunity to those who have zero options was the main driving force for my involvement, and is what made it so rewarding to get involved in. I would recommend anyone who wants to make a difference to themselves and others, to get involved both at home and further afield.

Michal Lukanowski

With my background in computing, and currently working as a software engineer, I felt this was a calling to help Ousmane Drame and **URBOND** with their next project. I wanted to use my skill set and work contacts to source used laptops, still in fully working condition, re-install up-to-date software, and put them to good use.

I don't think there are enough superlatives to describe the welcome our team received - most notably from the children themselves. They were elated that we had chosen to help their community, eternally grateful that a group of unrelated foreigners had come together to create something specifically for them. Everywhere we went we were greeted with beaming smiles, laughter, dancing, and music.

My first ever IT class was probably the most memorable and exhausting two hours of my life - in equal measure! Twenty-five eager students sat at twenty-five laptops, with others curiously peered in through the windows awaiting their turn with the tech. Teaching children (who have never seen a computer - remember) to use a keyboard and a mouse for the first time - that's not something I'm going to forget in a hurry! We take it so much for granted in developed countries.

This life-changing experience (for myself, fellow volunteers, the children, and community of Dubréka) would not have been possible without the generosity of everyone who donated to the cause.



Zanoon Nazari

I have been familiar with **URBOND's** work in the UK for a few years and I have been very impressed by how they bring together people from so many different backgrounds through their events and sports activities. So, when I was asked if I would go with the volunteer's group to Guinea to help fund and build a library and computer room for a school, I didn't need to think about it. It was amazing to be part of a volunteer's group who not just gave and raised money for such a noble project but gave their time. The children and the local community welcomed us so warmly that often I felt we were a little distracted from the work we were there to do, and we needed more time there.



DAVID McILROY, HM Ambassador, British Embassy Conakry

"Thank you to **URBOND** for partnering with the British Embassy in the Republic of Guinea to help promote education, reading and good health. It was a joy to meet the volunteers during their visit in Guinea. The new library will be a great asset to the local community in Dubréka."



Mac Amara Bangoura – URBOND Country Representative

When the Covid infection rate picked up with a new variant, I became pessimistic about the 2021 **URBOND** Volunteer's Trip to Guinea. Then when the military coup happened in September, I was like, 'That's a wrap, it's not happening'. However, the volunteers were super motivated, and the UK team did a fantastic job assuring the group regarding the safety of the trip. So, against all odds, the group made it to Guinea, we completed the building of the library and the computer room, we taught computer classes, ran workshops, provided health clinics, and had a fabulous time. The group naturally bonded with the local community, making our job more manageable.

Thank you to the volunteers for their hard work, commitments, dedication, donations, and support. Because of their support, we provided life-changing opportunities to the children and the local community. Thank you for coming to Guinea; we are forever grateful for your support.



Some of our partners



British Embassy
Conakry



**RICHMOND
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Accountants



How to get involved

Your support is needed and appreciated. Whether you are interested in taking part in an event, fundraise or become a volunteer, your support will help **URBOND** to continue improving the community and the lives of its residents.



- ✓ Donate
- ✓ Fundraising events
- ✓ Volunteer
- ✓ Corporate partnerships
- ✓ Join the next **URBOND** community event

Please support our work by visiting: <https://childdeducation.urbond.org/get-involved/>

How can you donate

01 Scan and Donate



URBOND is registered with the Fundraising Regulator. All funds donated and raised goes towards providing education and opportunities to children in need. None of the funds is used to cover any volunteer or staff costs.

01 Shop using AmazonSmile

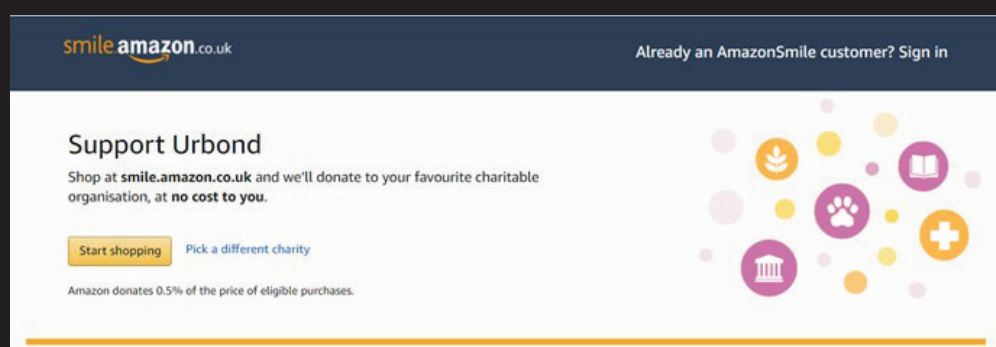


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URBOND is part of AmazonSmile's charity list. Amazon automatically donates 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to your chosen charity when you shop on smile.amazon.co.uk. The great news is, shopping with AmazonSmile does not cost you, or your chosen charity, any extra.

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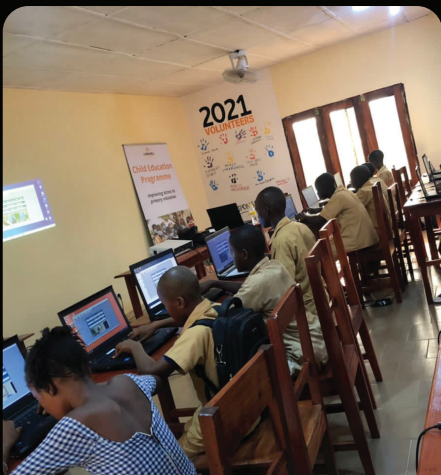
- 🔍 Search for and Select **URBOND** in the 'Pick your own charity' search bar.
- 🔍 You will receive an email from Amazon and you're ready to shop, shop, shop!
- 🔍 Fill your basket as you normally would, knowing that each purchase you make is also making a huge difference



01 Study materials, computers and IT equipment

Donating your redundant computer, IT equipment or any form of study materials can make a massive difference to children's lives.







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