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Madison Wait

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Rescue Race 5k raises funds to free children in Ghana from forced labor



Photo by Drew Peden

Story by: Madison Wait

To raise funds to rescue two children from labor trafficking in Ghana, Gardner-Webb's Release organization hosted its first 5k this past Saturday, September 17th.

The Rescue Race 5k started at 9 a.m. in the LYCC parking lot, where over 100 people from the student body and community showed up to support the cause. The course weaved along the perimeter of Gardner-Webb's campus, amounting to roughly three miles. At the end of the race, bananas and fair-trade Rescue Race t-shirts were handed out to the race participants and volunteers.

The entrance fee was \$15 for students and \$20 for community members, all of which helped fund the rescue and rehabilitation of two children from forced labor in Ghana. To achieve this, Release partnered with Challenging Heights, an anti-trafficking organization based in Ghana that provides support for underserved communities and rescues victimized children.



Photo by Drew Peden

"We first got in contact with Challenging Heights in 2015," said Mariah Case, a member of Gardner-Webb's Release group who headed up organizing the race. "And they told us about some of the fundraising options that had worked in the past, [especially] the 5k."

To prepare for the event, Case worked with Brain Arnold, the assistant director of student activities. "[He's] given us a lot of guidance," said Case. "It's been quite a learning process, but we really think [it's] paid off." In the end, Release raised roughly \$1900, meeting their financial goal for the event.

According to Challenging Heights' website, "It is estimated that over 242,000 young people are engaged in forced labor in Ghana and more than 20,000 are enslaved in the fishing industry on Lake Volta." Since Challenging Heights has specific donors who cover administrative spending, Gardner-Webb's Rescue Race 5k proceeds will go directly to the rescue and recovery of the children.

Private investigations and rescue missions will be performed to remove enslaved children working on Lake Volta. Those children will be brought directly to the Challenging Heights Rehabilitation Shelter for evaluation and treatment. Rescue Race participants who fill out contact cards will receive regular updates on the children they've helped to rescue.

"I am overwhelmingly grateful for the people in this place, people who share hearts for justice and compassion to prevail in the world," said Bekah Rhea, a Gardner-Webb student who participated in the Rescue Race. "I'm glad we could fight for freedom together today. I'm glad my first 5k was this one."



Photo by Drew Peden

More photos from the 5K are available [here](#), including those by student photographers Drew Peden and Chase Hockema.

To get involved with Gardner-Webb's Release group, contact Mariah Case at mcase@gardner-webb.edu. For more information about Challenging Heights, visit <http://challengingheights.org/>.