



AMENUVEVE

NYU Stern Social Entrepreneurship in Ghana Alumni Virtual Reading Program Recipient of the *Innovation of the Year Award* from the NYU Alumni Association

Watch a clip of the award ceremony from the annual NYU Alumni Volunteer Recognition event during NYU Alumni & Parents Weekend (October 21-24, 2021)



About Amenuveve

Amenuveve is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in the U.S. and Ghana. Our mission is to uplift and empower the community of Woadze Tsatoe — located in Ghana’s Volta Region — as well as individuals around the world through our work. The non-profit was born out of the Social Entrepreneurship in Ghana elective course at NYU Stern (BSPA-UB 2000).



About the Virtual Reading Program

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Amenuveve Alumni Committee — comprised of recent NYU alumni who had participated in the Stern International Volunteers in Ghana program, and led by Class of 2020 alumni Jordan Wolken and Caitlyn Lubas — innovated despite the challenges of the pandemic-induced remote environment by creating a virtual reading program for the students of Woadze Tsatoe, Ghana.

Watch a summary video from the first Virtual Reading Session



Artisan Business



Vegetable Farm



Women's Health



Education

Program Testimonials

“Due to COVID-19, lockdowns, and travel restrictions, the virtual reading sessions have provided the platform for sponsors to support students to continue learning outside the classroom setting.

During these sessions, sponsors volunteered their time as facilitators, and students had the opportunity to discover new vocabulary, form sentences with new words, improve their reading skills and build self-confidence.”



Robert Tornu
*Partnerships and
Volunteers Director*



Francis Dzabri
*Administration and
Education Coordinator*

“In just 7 months, the virtual reading program has improved:

- 1) Students engage more with alumni (their financial sponsors) through the Scholarship Program
- 2) Students take a new approach and technique to reading and comprehension
- 3) Students engage themselves more with educational materials outside school hours or at home
- 4) The program coordinators have also learned, and been reminded of, some new teaching techniques from NYU Alumni facilitators”

Program Testimonials (cont.)

“Although we had a **Scholarship Program** where students’ secondary school educations were funded, it **wasn’t enough to keep the students motivated to improve and practice their English reading skills**. With the pandemic and the doors that it had opened up for the virtual world, the SIV Alumni Committee started the reading program that connects the students with Alumni Volunteers on a recurring basis.

With the program, the **village’s students are held accountable to practice their reading as well as learn new vocabulary**. As the program progresses, we also **continuously adjust each session from previous learnings**. For example, noticing that students were having a hard time understanding new vocabulary during the live readings, **we now send them new words to study and look up before engaging during the reading session to have live dialogues on the words and phrases**.

Throughout the weeks, we’ve already seen the students **grow in their confidence in reading in front of each other as well as our Alumni volunteers**. We understand this virtual format is quite foreign to the students, while also being a long-term investment - the team is excited to **continuously iterate the program**, ultimately **keeping the students’ needs at the top of mind**.”



Sabrina Chow
*Scholarship Program
Coordinator
NYU 2018 Alum*



Rachel Kowal
*Co-Founder
NYU Stern Clinical
Professor of
Business Law*

“Jordan and Caitlyn have pioneered an innovative virtual reading program that **connects NYU Stern alumni with students on educational scholarships** established by a 7 year relationship between their village and the SIV Social Entrepreneurship Ghana course. The **challenge they addressed was how to maintain continuity and keep students engaged** when COVID-19 closed schools in Ghana for over a year. In addition to creating the program, Jordan and Caitlyn **came up with solutions for achieving the most impact per session**. Having attended every bi-weekly reading session (2 hours each) over the past 7 months, I have seen how eager each student is to read and understand English. I have observed **improved reading and comprehension skills as well as their excitement to interact with us**. The students even surprised us one time – they came to class proudly wearing purple shirts with the logo: "Improve Your Knowledge Through Reading!!!" The SIV Alumni Virtual Reading Club has **provided unexpected rewards and community connections** during the pandemic.”

Iterative Innovation Process

December 2020: First Alumni Virtual Reading Session – Scholarship students in Woadze Tsatoe each read an entire passage, while alumni volunteers listened via Zoom and provided positive reinforcement, but no constructive criticism.

January–April 2021: Monthly Alumni Virtual Reading Sessions – Alumni came to each month’s meeting prepared to ask reading comprehension questions and invited students to use new vocabulary words in sentences to ensure students were not simply reading out loud without comprehension of the passage.

April 2021: Biweekly Alumni Virtual Reading Sessions – Program directors solicited new alumni volunteers to host each reading session on a more frequent basis to give students greater opportunity to develop their reading and English language skills.

May 2021: Alumni Virtual Reading Sessions → Reading Club! – Students of Woadze Tsatoe surprised the volunteers by showing up to the reading session with custom-made NYU-purple shirts proudly showing their membership to the “reading club” – demonstrating the students’ commitment to reading and the sense of community and pride in the reading program’s engagement with the alumni volunteers.

June 2021–Present: Continuous Improvement – Each session, alumni volunteers provide feedback about how the program can continue to innovate and improve. For example, alumni now create their own comprehension questions rather than using pre-made reading questions from local textbooks, the alumni committee is working to raise funds for better digital equipment and microphones for increased ability to hear and evaluate the students’ reading skills, and the sessions improve in terms of time management and operational efficiency week over week.

Photos of the Students in the SIV Alumni Virtual Reading Club

