



Mum was in shock, but she drove us to my other aunty's house to meet up with her, her fiancé and Nan – we hadn't been together for years. The next day, I couldn't handle the idea of being at home, so I spent time with my friends. Mum wanted me to see a grief counsellor, but I wasn't ready.

“I battled depression for six months after Sharon's death ...”

For the next few months, my life went downhill. I started struggling at school and ended up leaving. I battled depression for six months after Sharon's death – I felt that if I'd spoken to her earlier, the whole situation would have been different. Eventually everyone made me realise there was nothing I, or anyone else, could have done.

Before it happened, I never used to think about my family, but these days they're the most important part of my life. I've also got a great job, a caring boyfriend and the best mates ever.

Now, if I ever meet someone who's depressed, I'll have a much better understanding of mental illness. This experience has changed my life and made me appreciate my family and friends so much more.

Worried you or someone you know may be depressed? Head to readout.com.au or helpnobliv.org.au for more info, or call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or SANE Helpline on 1800 13 SANE (7263).

I VOLUNTEERED IN WEST AFRICA

When Jade, 19, travelled to Ghana in December 2007, she was ready for one hell of an adventure. After a two-month stay, she now calls Ghana her "home away from home".

I'd wanted to travel overseas since early high school, so by Year 12 I couldn't wait. My two-month trip to Ghana with Projects Abroad was a graduation, Christmas and birthday present from my parents, where I'd volunteer at an orphanage and then in a hospital. I was so pumped!

On the 25-hour flight to Ghana, I sat next to a diplomat. When we landed, he turned to me and said, "Welcome to a Third World country". The first thing I noticed stepping off the plane was how hot it was – the temperature was in the high 30s and the humidity was suffocating. People were selling things on the street, while others carried bags and parcels on their head.

I lived with my host family and other volunteers from Australia and England for two months. They were so hospitable, but during my first week, the water wasn't running properly so you couldn't have a shower or flush the toilet!

In my first month in Ghana, I travelled to and from the orphanage each day in an old mini van. In the summer holidays, the other volunteers and I took the children on excursions to the pool, beach or national park.



After school resumed, we held study nights a few times a week. We had to remind the orphanage employees that the kids needed to study.

Often they just wanted them to do chores like sweeping, cleaning dishes, laundry and gardening.

My medical placement in the second month was really confronting. I spent time in the paediatric, surgical and medical wards, as well as the newborn intensive care, accident and emergency units.

The morgue near the hospital was horrendous. There were naked bodies piled on the floor in 35-degree heat because their families couldn't afford to have them refrigerated.

Volunteering made me realise how lucky I am. I'd definitely love to volunteer overseas again – and it would be hard to go past Ghana!

Want to volunteer overseas like Jade? Check out projects-abroad.com.au for all the details.

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Jade loved hanging out with the kids at the orphanage.