

## Why we do this work

Shanton's dream of helping to empower women was shaped from a very young age. His mother was a victim of domestic violence and fled the family home, and left Ghana, leaving four very young children behind. His father was a trader and spent most of his time living in a neighbouring country. He came home about once each year. His sisters were sent to live with family members and never had the opportunity to attend school, and both were married very young. Shanton and his brother were left to fend for themselves. He was just 12 years old. From that day onwards, he had to find his own food, money for school fees, clothing and all of his basic needs. Life was a daily struggle for survival.

If there had been somewhere that his mother could have gone and taken the children, life would have been quite different for all of them. Sadly she didn't return until Shanton was 22.

Shanton has always been a passionate advocate for equal rights for women. He has been a voice for the voiceless since a young man, and has fought bravely and spoken out loudly against child marriage, domestic violence and education for women.

I (Rae-Anne) moved to spend a year in Ghana with Shanton in 2010. That year changed me forever, pushed me way beyond my comfort zone and made me look at life in a very different way. I was stunned to see the lack of opportunities for girls and women. Early marriage was expected and if the girls were fortunate to have been able to attend school, or have a job (an uncommon occurrence) once they were married, they were expected to be in the home, tending to their husbands and producing as many children as "god" provided them with.

I was shocked when I found out that a woman is expected to endure cheating, verbal abuse and physical abuse. If a woman complains about her circumstances the reply is "Do you have food? Do you have a place to sleep? Then what are you complaining about?". If a woman flees the marital home due to violence, she is forced back to the marriage by her own family. A man is a man and a woman doesn't have the right to question, speak up or demand respect.

The idea of building this shelter has been a dream of ours for a very long time. This year, we are so thrilled to see our labour of love come to life.

We are grateful beyond words for our amazing volunteers and contributors and we look forward to this being the first of many such places for women in Ghana.