

Experience Report Annika Schröder

3rd Term 2015 (09.10.-25.11.2015)

Loaded with nearly 20 kilograms on my back, many memories from home and with an even greater mass of imaginations and expectations, my adventure as a volunteer in Namibia began in a cold German night. The warm breeze of the Namibian spring welcomed me to Windhoek and a lot of new impressions finally caused a kind of excitement which did not come up in Germany due to my shortly before finished Bachelor thesis. However, arrived in this strange country which would be my home for the next three months and my long-awaited break between my Bachelor and Master studies, an infinite number of questions came up to my head.

After two nice days of acclimatization and settling in Windhoek, the organized shuttle brought me straight into the adventure UNCSO to Usakos. Marianne and all the girls with whom I would be working and living together the next six weeks greeted me warmly, so my initial excitement turned out to be completely unfounded. The house of Marianne und her husband Zaki is very large and comfortable, I enjoyed my stay from the beginning.



The first time here, as well as the rest of the time just flew by, so there wasn't time for the first homesickness anymore. In the beginning the center was both interesting and tiring. As I was the only one which was a new member of the group and all the other volunteers were in the project since the beginning of the term, I was relieved because I only needed to enter into the routine processes.

However, I realized that an initial fear has come true. It is sometimes very hard for the children to be open to new caregivers every time. This is what made the work, especially the study time difficult at first. In addition, I noticed that many of the other children with whom I had no daily contact in the center, took their time to unbend and occur in interaction.

But after the initial adjustment period I learned to cherish the time in the center and was pleased with every smile that was given to me and every child who knew my name. The center quickly became daily routine and I was familiar with all the procedures.

Of course, there are also days on which I came home in a really bad mood, angry about certain events or just about the general behavior of the children. However, in many conversations with Marianne who exactly knows each child, his family and their stories, we started to understand the behavior of the kids and began to overlook

some things. I was particularly influenced by the house visits. The different conditions within the families touched me more than the poor living circumstances in the township. It's nice to see that some children have very loving parents who want to give their children a good life, but equally alarming to see that there is also another kind of parents who do not support their children and do not give them a place at home to just be a child. This knowledge and an increasing understanding of each child changed my look at my work as a volunteer. I recognized that it's the little things that we can give to our children in the center. The faces of the little ones are priceless when they have learned something new, an indescribable feeling of joy when you can afford them to something and they can just be what they are - children.

I particularly liked that the children learn at UNCSO a regular routine and get a hot meal every day, which unfortunately cannot always be guaranteed in the families. In addition to problems of a low income which is not enough for sufficient food, traditions often provide to send money to relatives. Especially alcoholism plays a role concerning the parents' behavior towards their children. Also violence is unfortunately a topic in many families which is why it is very important that the children get some closeness and affection of us volunteers.

The everyday planned activities either give them the chance to burn off energy in sports, do something own in arts and crafts, dance, watch a movie or talk to us about issues such as respect or self-esteem.

Almost every weekend we had time for excursions and also for longer trips such as to the Etosha National Park. So, you also have the possibility to get to know parts of the country in addition to the skin-tight experiences in the project. Like you can ask for a free Friday for longer trips, you can also discuss every topic with Marianne and she will endeavor to find a solution or an answer. My stay in Marianne's and Zaki's house was very pleasant und I never felt uncomfortable in any situation.

It is very convenient to live together under one roof. Especially now, just before the big Christmas event, it has been proven that it is very useful to live together and discuss everything immediately.

It is incredible that our time here is almost over and we are now in the final preparations for the big parents-event at the end of the term. An instructive, exhausting but also wonderful time with countless new experiences which we will never forget is now coming to an end.

I collected wonderful and important experiences which nobody can take away from me and which will be with me in my future teaching profession.



Looking back, I am very happy to have made the decision to work as a volunteer here and would like to thank all those who have contributed to this great time, especially Marianne: Baie dankie!