

Six months... It is already half a year ago that I arrived in the small town of Usakos, together with six other volunteers, time is running.

If I now, that I just have a few days left, look back to my first expressions and the first meeting with Marianne, it, on the one hand, feels like it is ages ago that I had my first day in the center. On the other hand I can remember it as if it was just yesterday.

If I look back now, I am thinking of a time full of laughter, joy, happiness but also doubts where I could handle the different situations. However, I made valuable experiences with outstanding people I have met.

I am especially thinking of the kids I got the chance to meet and with whom I worked and spent time together. In my mind I will remember all the wonderful moments of the last days, weeks and months in which I had the chance to get part of the project.

I am thinking of Lukas' bright and catching smile, Hopes' wet fingers between mine, Natasha's small weight on my lap, Lolokie you should not start arguing with, Andreas' moaning, Chamindas' habit to always let the sun shine even on the cloudiest days and Richarge always makes me smile but also all the other children's gestures which made me realize that its the small things which makes life big.

To come to this new understanding of life and also every joyful moment caused by the children was worth the decision to start this uncertain way when beginning the project

Of course there were days on which I would have rather stayed in bed to forget about the different world I was situated in. It was especially hard for me to accept that the life of the children is determined by poverty, inequality, hard blows of fate and injustice after the house visits. But as the time was passing by I realized that I cannot change the circumstances of the children and that it would not help the children or me to keep on

thinking about what could happen and how they could live without all the trouble. I actually realized that I can conduce with small gestures and things to a nice time far from their worries at home. For example I could help a few kids to gain small achievements at school and give them affection, attention and respect in a way they are not used to.

Furthermore, we were able to buy plates of iron sheets, beds and mattresses from the generous donation money of our families and friends so that the roofs and walls from the shacks of the children could be repaired. The kids who slept on the floor before can stay in their own bed during the night now. It was also possible for us to prepare carepakets for the families of the children which contained stable food like flour, rice, pasta as well as sanitary products like soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste for the children.

The cooperation with Marianne helped me a lot to understand the view of the kids, the country and the African culture better.

I was quite comfortable in living together with the other volunteers at Marianne and Sakkies house. I could experience her not only as the strong and strict "mother of the center" who believes not only in academic promotion but also in discipline and order but as a caring mother of three own children.

We as volunteers could always come to Marianne when we had questions concerning every topic,



we were worrying about something or if we did not feel good or even sick. She always had some household remedies to help us with things like skin and hair problems.

Even if our different ways of thinking about right and wrong sometimes caused a discussion, we were almost every time able to agree on a middle course or if not had to admit that we were guests in another country with another culture.

I liked my daily everyday life with the collective meals, studytime and activity time. Due to the fact that every volunteer had her own study time group with a few kids of the same age it was easier for us to care about each child and to adapt to all the different states of knowledge. Although I knew that the educational level of the school here could not be compared to the school system in Germany, I was still shocked about the knowledge of my second and later third grade. It was not easy to identify the level of each kid in the first days because we just had the reports from the term before but no opportunity to talk to the teachers.

One wish for the future terms from my side would be a better communication between volunteers and teachers, something like a monthly meeting to discuss what this certain kid needs for help. This would definitely promote the individual academic future of each child.

I had a lot of fun when we build up the swings and slide in front of the center for the kids to play on. It was something special to look at the kids like this. It was like they could just be a child far from their problems at home, their faces were bright with excitement while they were waiting with joyful anticipation and a kind of childish fear for them to fly higher and higher on the swings. It looked like as if they were in their own small world up in the sky and far from the ground with all the trouble and enjoyed their freedom up in the sky.

Surprisingly, it were not only the small ones who enjoyed this activity but also the big ones. I have never seen them as caring, considerate and frisky as I have seen them on this day. It was such a pleasure for me to see them like this.

I also had a lot of fun on our sports and arts as well as craft days even if it was almost impossible to motivate all the kids for the same activity.

Because the center was closed over the weekend we had the chance to explore the beautiful land of Namibia. On account of having a nice time we were able to get us a balance and contrast to our engaging center work. We have seen the wild animals of Etosha, climbed up the dunes of Sossusvlei, visited the San, enjoyed the chilled air of Swakopmund and enjoyed the variety of the wonderful landscape. Especially the endless expanse of the nature and the open minded and friendly national people impressed me a lot.

As I realized that I did not want to go back to Germany after my three months in Namibia I decided to stay longer to also spend a few weeks of the first term in 2016, just as long it was possible. On account of Marianne's and Ingrid's sympathy and their willingness to keep me in the project for another term, I am very happy to tell you that I was able to come back after seven weeks of holidays.

I spent the first four weeks of my holidays in South Africa together with Fiona, another volunteer. After our whole group spent some days together in Cape Town we had to say goodbye to each other but I am sure that it was not a goodbye forever. Fiona and me were traveling from Durban back to Cape Town again. We were hiking through mountains, riding across the countryside, swam with seals, enjoyed the sun and the beauty of the lovely country. Back to Cape Town we separated for three weeks which we spent together with visitors from Germany.

My doubts and fears that the kids would not welcome me with the familiarity which we built up

last term was luckily unfounded. The kids welcomed Fiona and me again with bright eyes and open arms.

After all I can finally say that the decision to come to UNCSO after graduating from school was the best one I could have made. The alternation of work and free time, the teamwork with the other volunteers and of course the daily time with the kids were a perfect combination for me. So if you are thinking of doing this volunteer job and you are also interested in working with children, exploring a wonderful country with interesting cultures and you are a teamworkperson as I am, you should not hesitate any longer to send in your application. You can be sure of having a time of new experiences, new expressions and wonderful but not always easy but wonderful loving kids who will bring things out of you from which you not even dreamed of.

A huge thank you goes to Marianne, the other volunteers and to the children. Thank you for a time of wonderful and unforgettable moments and thank you for all the priceless experiences which I was able to make. I will miss you! Yours Leona

