

Internship Report Helene Schüle

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Where should I start describing a time in which so many new things happened every day that you could write a whole book about it but it also feels like it was yesterday when I first came to Usakos? After more than three months in this small town, surrounded by mountains, mountains and even more mountains the experiences still feel unreal: Working with the kids, visiting the township, building houses – all this became a daily routine although it is anything but commonplace. Within this project I got the opportunity to immerse in a both fascinating and multifaceted culture, to get to know impressive people and to spend an unforgettable time together with the children and the other volunteers.



Before I came to Usakos, there were about a thousand questions in my mind. How will the time be, far away from everything I know? Will I get along with the other volunteers? How will the life be together with Marianne, will I feel comfortable in her house? How will the kids react to me? After a few days I could already answer most of the questions with “surprisingly positive”. From the beginning, Marianne welcomed us with open arms and showed us the huge effort she puts into the project and that it really is her life. The more time passed the better our relation became and evenings spent together, interesting talks and activities, such as driving to her farm together, lead to the chance to get to know more about her life and her motivation for her work in the Center, which is quite impressive! Especially at the beginning she was very busy so she couldn’t join us to the Center all the time. Because we didn’t really know what to do and how to deal with the kids there were some very chaotic days. But we learned to manage situations on our own and to take responsibility. In general, Marianne supported us very much, gave us good advices and stopped us when we were about to plan things that couldn’t work.

Working in the Center was demanding, exciting, exhausting, funny and every day full of variety and facets. I still remember the first day of the Center, where we stood in front of fifty kids looking at us with their brown, attentive eyes. First I worried that they may act shy and restrained towards us. But after some minutes the first kids were climbing on my lap, asked to be picked up or took my hand, which made my worries disappear immediately.

The kids transmit so much positive energy and contagious soulfulness, which is very impressive, especially considered their living circumstances. The Housevisits started in the fourth week of the term and were a great opportunity to find out more about the family situation of most of the kids. Unemployment, the abuse of alcohol or the death of parents or other family members are only some of the problems the kids have to suffer under. This was very hard to see and I asked myself more than once why these kids have to be confronted with so difficult fates and so much unfairness.

That’s why I was very glad and thankful when we got the opportunity to become active and with the generous donations of our friends and family we were able to improve the living circumstances of some kids by building new rooms for them including a new bed, so from

now own they don't have to share a room or even a bed with other people. The feeling to contribute to the improvement of their situation is very impressive and I am sure that the house building will be one of the most concise experiences.

But also the many small things made the time here in Usakos so special. The warm welcome from the Grade Two kids that finished school earlier, Shaun jumping on one leg to the toilet every day, Hope, who seems to be on one hand so dainty and fragile and on the other hand so arise and way too old for her small age. The cheeky smile of Cherley, when she was the last one on the toilet every day just to spend some undisturbed moments together. All these small characteristics make me smile every time I think about it and lead to loving and missing the kids in a way I could have not imagined before.



The chance to support kids from a special Grade, in my case Grade 7, with their homework and improve their skills by creating worksheets for them was very interesting and a great opportunity to get to know their character better. Of course it was not always easy to prevail towards eight more or less pubescent kids and sometimes I just wanted to get distance to and a break from the situation. But as soon as Yvette came hugging me, Steven showed me very proud his result for the math worksheet or I heard the familiar "Hilina, please help me!" from the other end of the table, all the anger disappeared.

I don't know where I should start listing the things I will miss. I will miss the daily drive to the Center full of anticipation and enthusiasm, wondering what will happen during the day. I will miss the prayer before eating in which you could get a small insight in how much the belief means for the kids. I will miss the excursions on the weekend and in the holidays in which we could get some distance and getting new energy for the next week. I will miss the sunsets in front of Marianne's house and the breathtaking view. I will miss the friendly people on the streets and the easy way of dealing with each other. I will miss the evenings on the long tables, discussing the day and always realizing that you will not be alone with your struggles and that this group of volunteers is way more than only a partnership of convenience. And of course I will miss the kids – more than I could ever have imagined. Every of these 50 children has got its own, impressing and strong character and I am so glad that I could get to know them and spend time with them. I wouldn't change the time here in this small town for anything and I am more than glad that I made this experience. I can only encourage everybody who is planning to apply for this internship – it is definitely worth it!

After all, the only thing left to say is Thank You. Thanks to Marianne and Sakkie, who welcomed us very friendly, shared their house with us and always supported us with all our questions. Thanks to the other volunteers: We climbed on mountains together, overcame challenges, created and recreated week plans, met interesting people and experienced special situations. And of course: Thanks to the kids! Thanks for the unforgettable moments, for the cordial laughs, the motivating words and the positive energy. You gave me so much more than I will ever be able to give back to you and taught me more than I could have ever taught you. I wish all the best to every single one of you – you deserve it!