

After my 6-year teaching degree, I really wanted to gain experience in voluntary work abroad. It was quickly decided that it should also be a project with children and preferably with a connection to the school. I had never been to the continent of Africa before and through the recommendation of a friend I came across UNCSO.



Marianne rented a center building in the name of UNCSO this year. After school the needy children have the possibility to get a warm meal, homework support and extracurricular learning. Since the building was renovated only this year and this is the first term in which the children come to the new center, structures had to be changed and new procedures created. This term Marianne, my friend Jonas and three other young people besides me are the volunteer team. Since this year was also marked by the Corona Pandemic, the children were only allowed to come to the center in their respective groups. So, there were 2 groups with about 25 children each, who took turns every day.

Our tasks consisted of serving the hot meals from Petra (the kitchen and cleaning staff), taking care of the children during homework time and planning and implementing activities for extracurricular learning and free time. Each week had a different heading, and the activities were adapted accordingly. Since the center was still very new and the outdoor area had not yet been touched, we decided the motto "GO GREEN- The recycle of Life". During our time there was a "Greenhouse week" the activities for this week were, collecting plastic bottles, washing and cutting. At the end of the week, they were able to build a greenhouse purely out of plastic bottles. Another week was the "Olympia week" here the children had to master different stations in the activity time. At the end there were prizes for the winners. But before the children are allowed to have fun, there is the study time mentioned above. Here one tries to deal specifically with the children, to solve school problems but also to enable support offers. In an exercise book every volunteer has the chance to glue in worksheets for his children and to keep them busy if they don't have homework.

My task was to supervise the first and second class. Since some of the children don't know English yet or very poorly, we had to come up with our own ways of communicating, so we also used our hands and feet. I focused on reading and taught the children the alphabet when they didn't have homework, made word games possible or practiced and taught reading. It is

incredibly fun to see the children's progress and see them use the new words they have learned. In mathematics, I was able to apply my theoretical knowledge and recognize and eliminate certain student errors in arithmetic. However, since some calculations are done differently in Namibia than in Germany, it was sometimes difficult to understand what the children were calculating.

Each of the 12 weeks of our stay was different and was especially fun when you saw the enthusiasm and joy of the children. The children showed great talent in dancing, singing, playing soccer and in handicrafts.

In addition to the active center time, which is always from 12:00 to 16:00, we have also independently taken over renovations and exterior works. For example, we painted the outside walls and planted shrubs. Also, the kitchen was allowed to shine with self-assembled furniture.

Marianne gives the volunteers a lot of planning freedom and you take charge of the day ahead. However, she intervenes if one has difficulties and advises the group, so that one feels well cared for and not alone. The overall communication is good, you can really come with any problem to Marianne and her husband Saki, and they try their best to solve it. Sometimes you get a bit distracted, because Marianne has a lot to tell, and we listen to her excitingly. Because of her experience, she has high expectations and likes to incorporate the ideas of the volunteers into her own idea. It is very difficult to please her, but at the end of a project she is satisfied and very grateful.

On weekends, we are exempt and are allowed to travel around the country. Since this year the bus for the volunteers was broken, we had to get creative with mobility. Marianne and Saki tried to support us with our travels through friends and contacts so we could go with them to the farm, stay with friends and look at the Spitzkoppe or borrow their car for a trip to Swakopmund. During our time we had two other big trips that we organized ourselves. First, we rented a car and Saki and Marianne's camping equipment and did a 10-day road trip through Namibia with including Etosha National Park. Here the people are in a cage (car) and the animals are allowed to move freely. An incredible experience. The other major trip was to Okavango which we got to experience thanks to our local friends as they took us to their lodge and showed us around the country. Marianne is generous when it comes to getting 1-2 days off as she also wants us to explore the country.

Usakos alone does not have much to offer. There is desert, mountains and a supermarket. We spent our free time during the week reading, embroidering, cooking and sunbathing. The restaurant I would recommend is "Oasis" because you get a great view, delicious biltong (dried meat) and food.

Especially emotional for me were the home visits and the living conditions of the children. These are not to be compared with the living standards from Germany. No running water, no electricity and almost no solid houses, but tin huts, open fireplaces for cooking and great poverty. Nevertheless, the children come to the center every day with a smile and try to do their best with homework and activities. Sometimes one forgets about the conditions of the children at home. With the collected donations we want to organize missing beds and houses, as well as our upcoming Christmas party, in addition to the projects we set up with the children. Each child will receive a gift and a special menu. This is also how we say goodbye to the children as this is the last event for this term.

