

BISMARCK KOMLA OSIAKWA

A LIFE CHANGING ADVENTURE



Bismark Osiakwa, Greetsiel >>>priv.photo

I accepted to be a volunteer in the Norddeutsche Mission program primarily because I believed in their vision and mission and that of their supporting organizations, which is to execute and support developmental, social, religious and educational programs and also to foster global exchange and intercultural learning between people from different cultures.

Aside the opportunity to travel and be a part of a broader network of people who share similar interests; being a volunteer in this program afforded me the opportunity to improve upon my cultural competence. These experiences made me open minded and versatile. I had many expectations about Germany; the most prominent of which was; to have a good command over the German Language by the end of my stay. Others were to learn new skills, sharpen my abilities and be able to work with people from different backgrounds; whether cultural, economic or social under a common setting or confinement.

I can say that some of my expectations were met, although I could not meet all my expectations at the end of my volunteering year. I made the very best of all opportunities that came my way during my stay. I had carved for myself a motivational phrase that goes; ‘it is my year, let

every moment count.’ It was quite challenging at first to adapt to the change in environment, culture and food. Though the differences weren’t entirely unexpected, settling down was tougher with such hurdles to tackle. With the help of my host family and the few others I met who were welcoming, I was integrated quite well into the German society. I always tried to keep a positive outlook on things, I believe that there are limitless possibilities with every opportunity whether good or bad and also that, it is possible to deliver the best in any given task. Though there were times when I was tensed and uncertain, especially as my interactions were mainly with people who were older than I am, I have really come to appreciate such experiences. For starters, I have developed a culture of reading more and wide, so as to be furnished with concrete facts that enhanced my conversations.

I was attached to the Evangelisch Reformiert Congregation of

Bremerhaven which has about One Thousand Two Hundred (1200) members. In addition to the Pastor, four (4) staff members work in the Congregation and it is with these people that I worked the most with during my Volunteering year. In addition to Worship services and Pastoral care, the congregation is also involved with refugee work and weekly Cafés. I have enjoyed working with the people I met at these meetings. The community also offered a wide range of regular Project Based Educational events; these events were both target specific and cross target and it was exciting to be part of such joint efforts between the church and the community at driving positive

It has been an amazing learning cycle and for the purpose of this report, I will group my experiences under three broad sections; *PERSONAL GROWTH AND VALUES*, *PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT*, and *CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND WORLDVIEW*.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND VALUES

change. In addition, the congregation was involved and committed to various church (interdenominational) and civil society networks. When it comes to activities structured for children and the youth the church was in close alliance and cooperation with the Evangelical City Youth Services of Bremerhaven. I signed on to programs that were birthed from this joint cooperation and the few I have participated in included ‘Landes Jugend Camp’ which was a camping event for the youths from the Ev. Lutheran Church and also Tage im Grune which was an event for children between the ages of 6-12 years.

Africa is known for highly organic societies and Ghana is no different. In Ghana there is always someone to chip in free advice at every step of the way. This leaves little or no time for you to reflect on your values and what means most to you. Quite contrary to what I have been used to over the years, I have learnt to be very independent, reflect on my actions and get to know myself in a more personal way devoid of any external influences. Now, I have a deeper insight into my strengths and

weaknesses, I understand a bit more what drives my desire to take initiatives and what it means to be true to my original self or personality. As a result, I am more confident especially around new people because I trust myself to be true to my original self. I am also now less conservative and more open minded. Having to catch the bus and the train as well as meet schedules and honor appointments and invitations has developed in me an awareness of time and time's value. Being authentic to my true self has also reinforced my personal values of hard work and sacrifice.

PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career wise, I have learnt so much as well. Germany has strict professional ethics. At the work setting, I get to work on my intercultural competencies because I interact with different people from various cultures while in touch with my own culture. My desire for orderliness spills over into the professional etiquettes of Germans. For instance, in Germany, there is little room for surprises and trivialities. Everything is carefully planned out and acted upon; there are little adjustments to original plans. During my volunteering year, I found myself eager to take on roles that I

was not accustomed to all in a bid to learn more. I have learnt to place more premium on fulfillment in my work. I have learnt the importance of building social capital so, I never refuse an opportunity to be of help and the times I have spent doing these have proven to be invaluable.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND WORLDVIEW

The most important development for me in the area of cultural understanding is my ability to speak and understand basic Deutsche. I have had the privilege of travelling to different cities in Germany and I have seen different people and experienced different cultures. As a tourist I have heard different histories and how they have helped to shape present realities, while embarking on these exciting journeys I have become more assertive in discussing world issues, I became continually aware of the other side to the stories. I have put my weekends and holidays into good use, visiting and exploring places in and close to Germany such as, Amsterdam, Rysum, Pilsum, Greetsiel, Uelzen, Dortmund, Cuxhaven, Detmold, Wuppertal, Bremen, Berlin, Nurnberg, Bamberg, Bad Staffelstein, Herford, Bielefeld, Padderbon, Hamburg, Frankfurt,

Darmstadt, just to mention few. These journeys have broadened my worldview and my scope of influence, because I have made new friends who

I learned a lot from. Goodbyes are always sad moments but the experiences are priceless.



A group picture with other Volunteers, Wuppertal.

Seminars organized for the Volunteers were very essential and beneficial to me as it equipped me with so much knowledge and it created also the opportunity for me to meet other volunteers from Indonesia, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Namibia, The Republic of Congo and Rwanda and this helped to learn and know something about these countries in detail.

On to the things I like about Germany and some very memorable experiences, I really had very good time at barbeque parties, concerts and theatres, not forgetting long journeys on the bus as well. I also enjoyed the natural environment and the

serene sceneries. Germany has very nice tourist centers and wide range of parks where I love to take my walks and relax mostly in the evenings under a good weather condition.

It's been a journey I will describe not only nice but tough, fun with lots of lessons for me, but the question is, ***are you ready to take a bold step and embark on this life changing Adventure?***