

FINAL REPORT

ABOUT MY VOLUNTARY SERVICE

AT

GARDEN CITY SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR THE
INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED

IN

KUMASI, GHANA

UNDER THE

WELTWÄRTS-PROGRAM;

DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

CORPORATION ASSOCIATION (BEZEV E.V.);

THE EDUCATION OF THE MENTALLY

CHALLENGED (EMC)–GHANA PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 2010 – MAY 2011

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1. Preface

I had been interested in teaching children for a long time. In June 2010 I was able to do an internship at a primary school which works according to the concept of Inclusive Teaching. Some of the pupils in the class have the diagnosis autism or Down syndrome and many among the children find it difficult to remain concentrated for some time. I found the work very interesting and I would have liked to expand my internship. But I was by then attending school myself. For this reason I decided to do more practical work with special needs children as soon as possible.

I started looking for opportunities to do an intensive practical training, when I entered my final year at the Senior High School. I found the governmental Weltwaerts-program and this lead me to the Disability and Development co-operation association (Bezev e.V.). This non-governmental organization arranges the sending of volunteers to projects in developing countries that work for the benefit of the so called disabled people. After my application to Bezev e.V., they invited me for an interview and a few weeks later I was informed about my placement in Ghana at the Garden City Special School in Kumasi.

In Ghana Bezev e.V. collaborates with the Education of the Mentally Challenged (EMC) – Ghana Project. In 2011 I was invited to take part in orientations from both of the organizations. During these exercises about 20 volunteers were prepared about how to face the situation in an unknown country and we learned more about disability in developing countries. I also got to know former volunteers who had been to Ghana. Meeting people who already knew the environment I would live in, enabled me to find out more about my future work place.

After the orientations I was looking forward to start the eight months of voluntary service in Ghana.

2. Arrival

I arrived in Ghana (Accra) on 3rd September, 2010, and was warmly welcomed by Regina, the Secretary to the head of Africa Action. I felt very comfortable because everything had been arranged for me by Mrs. Kwadade, head of Africa Action (AA). Regina took good care of me. She accompanied me to a hostel where I stayed in a nice room and took some snacks both provided by the EMC – Ghana Project.

On the next day I was introduced to Mr. Otaah, unit head of the Intellectually Disabled in the Special Education Division (SpED), where we discussed the Contract Agreement for my voluntary service in Ghana. I stayed in Accra for another night. Therefore I would like to recommend that coming volunteers should be informed in advance that they have to pay for the second night in the hotel.

In the next morning Regina sent me to board a bus to Kumasi. On my arrival at Kumasi STC Bus Station, I was welcomed by Miss Roseline Adjepong, the Headmistress of GCSS. She also introduced Enoch K. Agyapong as my coordinator to me. They drove me to my host family's residence at Ejisu-Krapa, where I was formally introduced. In the following days they took me to visit the school compound and some areas of Kumasi, which was very nice.

3. Voluntary Service at Garden City Special School

3.1 General Information about GCSS

The Garden City Special School (GCSS) for the Intellectually Disabled was founded in 1977. It is therefore one of the oldest among the 11 governmental schools for Intellectually Disabled in Ghana.

It is located in Asokore-Mampong, a suburb of Kumasi, the regional capital of the Ashanti-Region.

It was started as a homecare with four children and is nowadays a boarding school with a population of 186 students, 132 boys and 54 girls. 35 Teaching staff members and 35 non-teaching staff members work at the school.

The facilities of GCSS are the following: 10 classrooms, 1 Office block, 2 workshop blocks, 1 gym, 3 dormitory blocks, 1 dining hall, 1 kitchen, 1 block with staff quarters, 1 clinic.

The students are divided into the 15 groups depending on their age and abilities. After going through the functional academics program for about five years, a student can move to one of the workshops, such as Weaving, Tie and Dye, Life Skills or Leather Works.

At the beginning of every term a teacher will prepare his scheme of work and lesson notes for his group. At the end of every term a teacher will then prepare the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for every student in the group, showing his performance and progress during the regarding period.

Before a student is graduated, he shall take part in the transitional program, which includes working with a service provider in Kumasi. A student will apply his vocational skills learned at school and integrate himself into the community.

There are now ten graduated students who are working in the communities.

Since 20 years there is a partnership established between the EMC – Ghana Project and GCSS.

This co-operation is based on an exchange of knowledge and cultures through the collaboration of the Ghanaian teaching staff with foreign volunteers.

3.2 Period of Orientation and Integration

Before school reopened on 21st September, 2010, I had the chance to learn the local language (Twi) and I was taught by one of the teachers, Mr. Peter Assaw. I learnt greetings and introductory aspects of the local language which was really useful in my daily life.

School reopening coincided with 2010 Population and Housing Census Exercise in which some teachers were enumerators. For this reason some teachers were absent in the first two weeks of the reopening including my coordinator (Enoch). But I used the time to visit several class rooms and see how lessons are taught to the students.

I was introduced to the staff by the Headmistress during the first staff meeting. Getting into touch with staff and students was easier than I expected. Everybody was very open to introduce himself to me and some became true friends to me.



In our school dresses on a special occasion



sports competition in the KNUST- stadium

3.3 Areas of Work

While going round through the classrooms, I observed that the students' attention inside the classroom is quite limited. It came to me that it would be good to take the students out of their classes and teach them in a different environment.

This reminded me of an orientation exercise I had with Susanne Mönnich, a German volunteer who had worked in the school the previous year. We had discussed about her work at the school and I thought it wise to continue with where she left off.

The headmistress Madam Roseline Adjepong had also encouraged the teachers to do a variation in their daily teaching. According to that she supported my idea of going into the area of Physical Education.

3.3.1 Physical Education

I made up my mind to work with Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa, teacher in charge of the gym. Mr. Otu was doubled with work as an assistant headmaster of the school and this kept him very busy. I was not happy with the situation because I wanted to know more about how physical education is taught to special needs children. Besides that he could have helped in translating my conversations with pupils in English Language to the local language.

But gradually the situation improved. Miss Perina Twum was in charge of the gym during the first term and helped me in day to day affairs.

For the second term the headmistress announced that there should be entire classes coming to the gym including also the teaching staff. This was a very important step towards to the sustainability of my work. The teaching staff can now see their children in a different environment and also put their observation down in the

IEP.

The language barrier is no problem anymore and the teachers themselves enjoy using the new items acquired through donations from Germany.

Actually, all classes are in need of physical alternation but the hours assigned for the teaching of physical education are quite restricted within the week.

I decided to concentrate on the work with older students because some of them put on weight, besides that for the second term no money was given to the vocational classes so that any practical work could hardly be done. These are the groups I taught at least once a week: Life Skills, Leather Works and Tie and Dye.

The students in the vocational classes are about eighteen years old and able to do many things. Most of them are motivated to become active in the gym and give me a prompt feedback if they like or dislike the activity I proposed to them. Most of them love when I invent a 'station training' for them. I think of different activities, such as balance exercises, they have to go through and in the end they can continue with the activity they liked most.

To teach the groups I always use the same lesson notes format which consists in Greeting – Taking Weights – General Warm Up – Specific Warm Up – Main Activity (according to lesson notes) – Playing.

I also take students from the primary level to the gym. On the one hand I was happy when many teachers wanted their pupils to come to the gym but on the other hand I do not get to know the individuals very well. It is therefore hard to give them instructions according to their abilities.

But I can say it is always a pleasure for the students to visit the gym because they will naturally start exercising their bodies when e.g. playing with the massaging balls.



Tie and Dye group



Student and teacher finding their balance

3.3.2 Physiotherapy with Gifty

Susanne Mönnich used to handle a 19 year old girl, Gifty; a girl with cerebral palsy and spastically tetraplegy. Due to her condition all fingers are held in a clenched fist position, so that the use of the hands is restricted. I decided to go on with the work.

During 2nd breaks she comes to the gym – I do not have to call her – and I massage her hands to stop the contractions.

Gifty had been fed throughout her life but Susanne found out that she could open her hands after several exercises in massaging. This has helped her to hold a spoon or a fork in her right hand and she can now eat on her own.

I see that Gifty likes the massaging although she feels some pains when I open her hands gradually. But I think it is not enough when I work on her. She has to work on her own. Therefore we play in a bowl of water after I finish the massage. She likes to push a rubber ball around in the water and I showed her that it is possible to bring the ball under water. But there is one condition: You have to open your hand to control the ball and press it under water.

Gifty really wants to do the exercise and she loves to be cheered when she is able to do it. Although she will sometimes loose the patience and be angry with herself. I have observed that, besides the thumb, she can open her fingers when she does not get too excited.

When, after holding it under the water surface, I ask her to give the ball to me, she is able to put the ball into my hand. But then she can hardly open her fingers. Still I am surprised that she can follow most of my instructions.

When I went to a seminar at Jirapa (s.b.), I met an ergo therapist who taught me more about physiotherapy. This was very helpful to me. I was happy to learn more, e.g. about how to handle the joint between arm and hand which is always over stretched. I learned how to gradually straighten it and I also got to know that I have to start working from the elbow, if I want to relax the hand.

I enjoy working on her because I can really dedicate myself to the work. Nobody will come and distract us when we stay at the gym. Because of the intensive work, she is able to improve.



Exercise with Gifty

3.3.3 Speech Therapy with Sammy

This part of my work was assigned to me by Mr. Otu, who always did speech therapy as part of the work at the gym.

But I was not happy when I saw that he had few time to help me with the work. Nevertheless, I tried my best and kept asking Mr. Otu to help me.

I had observed the ten year old Sammy who I did not observe talking during the first term. After the Christmas break he surprisingly answered “Eye” when I had asked him “E te sen?”.

I talked to the class teacher and agreed that the boy has got potential and I took him to the gym to be able to work in a quiet atmosphere.

We started with the blowing of cotton wool to exercise the air control with the lips. Considering the concept of the therapy, this is important for any kind of producing an oral sound.

In the beginning Sammy blew the air out of his nose, but Mr. Otu and I encouraged him to close it with his fingers and try again. Gradually he improved and was able to do it.

We also reinforced him to use his handkerchief, because he has a drooling problem and often he does not take notice of it. After some time he was mostly able to control his saliva with the handkerchief during lessons. I also noticed that he forgets about it, when he leaves the gym. I told his class teacher to have an eye on the issue and I also keep reminding Sammy, wherever I meet him.

Unfortunately, he does not speak any English and he does not have a clear speech either. This is a big problem to me; because I, as his speech therapist, should be able to repeat his expressions in the right way. But often I can hardly guess what he tries to says

I talked to Mr. Otu about the matter and we wanted the teacher to join his student in the gym. The teacher who teaches the first group which has got many students with intermittent needs who are not easy to handle, did not want to leave his class to work with only one of his students.

As I did not find the support I expected to get from a staff member, I decided to drop the idea of working with Sammy daily. I now deal with him once in a week to repeat the blowing of cotton wool and try to focus on the saliva control.

I did not enrich my goal for this area of work. I tried to get knowledge about speech therapy, but there were too many obstacles which demotivated me. I am not sure, the therapy will be continued after I leave the school. Anyway, I think it would be much easier for a Twi-speaking Ghanaian to work with the Twi-speaking students. Unfortunately, the course of special education at the Winneba University of Education, where most of the teachers have learned their profession, does not include a course of speech therapy to a special educator. This course is only offered to persons who are going to work with the hearing impaired. For that reason, teachers at Garden City Special School know few things about how to handle a child with a speech problem.

During a meeting with my Mentor and the headmistress, I realized that the issue is too big for me.

In conclusion I can say that the work made me being interested in speech development in a child. I will therefore try to acquire more knowledge about speech therapy when going back to Germany.

3.3.4 Project Work and Other Activities

Thanks to the EMC-Project, I could apply for about 150 Euro from the EMC-Micro Fund to realize a project for students and school.

I had different ideas and I am grateful that my entire proposal was accepted.

In the first place, the gym teacher and I discussed about the work at the gym and we both wanted to get new teaching-learning-material for our area of work. Considering the need for our daily work and the budget, we decided to write the proposal for a swinging.

As soon, as we got the swinging, the students started enjoying exercising with it. It is now part of the students' everyday Physical Education-program.

Additionally, I was able to replace the school's volleyball.

Mr. Otu and I fixed the school's volleyball net on the compound and with the help of the school gardener the grass was cut in a matter to resemble a nice volleyball field. Students and teachers both love playing volleyball and it became part of our weekly Sports and Culture Activities.

During break time, I or one of the two other volunteers who arrived in February usually trains the students so that they can learn different receiving/throwing techniques. Many of the older students know the rules of the game and the younger ones also learn when observing them playing.

It promotes the team spirit among teachers and students and I hope both will remain motivated to continue what we started together.



After volleyball training

Moreover, I had a new idea to promote the students' gross motor skills. Teachers exercise the 'throwing and catching of balls' according to their lesson notes.

Because I got to know that the tie and dye class did not get any money during the second term, I decided to give them work to do. The students invented a beautiful batik design for the six yards of cotton cloth we bought. Afterwards, Auntie Agnes sewed the cloth so that students can now throw rubber balls through it.

And really, students now enjoy doing it in a competitive manner.

I wrote a lesson notes concept for the use of this new equipment at the gym and I will hand it over to Mr. Otu. During the next term he will continue the work.



Working on the material

For my work with Gifty I also requested for a special massaging cream. I bought it with the money from the Micro Fund and apply it every time I exercise with the girl.

Another small project was realized with the help of the two new volunteers.

We taught a dance choreography to students and teachers of GCSS. Thanks to Mr Otu, we were able to use his music recorder to play the music.

We picked some students who used to dance on other occasions and some more who wanted to join the group. The dance we chose is the “La Macarena”-dance, which is very famous in Europe. Due to its repetitive movements the choreography is quite simple. But the velocity of the performance was a problem to many students. Nevertheless, Mr. Out encouraged us to use more time to teach them. And in fact, as we repeated the dancing almost every day for about two weeks, the students improved. Now we have even decided to present the choreography to the parents during the Parents and Teachers-meeting which will conclude the second term. It is a pleasure for me to see the students proud because of their good performance and the applause from the audience.



Dancing “La Macarena”



Balloon dance

3.4 Co-operation with my Mentor and SpED

For the time of my stay Mrs. Kwadade, the head of Africa Action, was my mentor.

We had several meetings in Accra, where she stays, but since Kumasi is not close to the capital, I prefer calling her when there is a need to talk about a topic.

Especially during my mentor's official visit to GCSS, when we sat down together with the headmistress, the assistant head, my coordinator to reflect about my voluntary work, I was really grateful for her frank speech and wise advice. The overview she has about the whole situation helps every side to improve the collaboration.

SpED was also informed about everything regarding my work. As described in the second point of my report, I met Mr. Otaah in the beginning of my stay and we will meet again before the end of my voluntary service.

The Division also helped Africa Action and me to overcome a visa problem. Therefore I want to say thank you again.



Mrs. Kwadade and Mrs. Adjepong visiting the gym

3.5 Seminar at Jirapa

In February I had the opportunity to meet nine volunteers on a seminar in the Upper East Region. To spend a week in a different environment made me feel like being on holidays. I was able to relax my mind and reflect on my work from the distance. It was also interesting to exchange ideas with the other volunteers. I hope future volunteers will have a similar possibility.

3.6 Reflection on my Work

When reflecting on my work, I have think about the things I learned from staff and students at GCSS.

This was my first experience as a fully accepted staff member in a workplace and I liked to get to know about the different areas my colleagues, the teachers, are working in.

The headmistress was always open to explain things to me and she wanted me to take part in all school activities. I am thankful for the use of the English language during the weekly staff meetings; in order to that I could take note of all announcements.

Mr. Otu introduced me to the theory of teaching a child with Intellectual Disabilities and he taught me how to prepare my own lesson notes for my work. When I had any question about the phrasing he would take his time for the revision of the notes.

I also learned a lot from Mrs. Grace Yeboah who conducts the school choir together with the help of a student. She knows how to engage the students into interesting activities and her positive attitude towards the work is often a motivation for my own projects.

But more than from any other I learned from the students. I appreciate their direct response to the teachers' actions and some students surprise me again and again. Especially during worship or cultural activities, they show incredible abilities. It is the individual character of every student which keeps the work interesting and full of joy for me.

Because I did not work in the Special Education sector before coming to Ghana, I know it would have been easier for me to constantly work with the same students and the same teacher in one of the groups.

But working at the gym enabled me to teach many of the students in a way which is different from the classroom teaching. It gave me the opportunity to also explain things to the teachers. I introduced them to the material we work with in the gym and I hold the view that some of them will come to the gym on their own during the next terms.

4. Further Experiences

4.1 Leisure Time

I spent a big part of my free time in the town of Kumasi going to the market, walking through the beautiful university campus or meeting some friends. During holidays I had the opportunity to see other regions of Ghana, but I realized the experiences you make do not depend on the amount of places you have visited; it rather depends on the people you meet in any place. For this reason I tried to keep a close contact to my friends staying in Kumasi.

In any case, I surely spend most of my leisure time with my Ghanaian family.

4.2 My Ghanaian Family

My host family made me feel so comfortable here in Ghana. My family comprises my Mum Grace, Dad Emmanuel and two brothers, James (21 years) and Akwasi (10 years).

They are very open and kind to me. They introduced me to the local food e.g. fufuo as well as other cultural (traditional) activities such as funerals. We usually prepare food together in the afternoon. On Saturdays the house is to be cleaned and the clothes to be washed and on Sundays the whole family goes to church.

I enjoy feeling like a true family member with equal rights and duties. Because my mum and I are both staff members of GCSS, she knows my life well, which I really appreciate. My host brothers also take very good care of me and I often spend the evenings with them.



Washing



Christmas



Funeral Rites

5. General Reflections

There are only a few weeks left until I go back to Germany. It was surely worth to come to Ghana to meet the Ghanaian people and see this beautiful country.

Although I was sometimes annoyed with persons making up their mind about my personality only looking at my skin color, I also met fantastic open-minded friends.

I often had the opportunity to directly talk about cultural differences with people and I do not want to miss these discussions. It was interesting to hear about the traditions of the Ashanti and the way it goes along with the Christian believes. I am amazed by the faith many Ghanaian people show and moreover about their tolerance towards other religious views.

I am grateful for the independence I had in the workplace although it was not always easy to cope with the attitude some teachers show towards their work. Moreover, I sometimes found it difficult to switch between my function as an adult at school and being a child in a Ghanaian family.

But, in conclusion, I am grateful to everybody who made my stay so full of positive experiences.

Furthermore, after the eight months internship at GCSS my wish to become a special educator is matured. Therefore I want to thank everybody who had an influence on this decision of mine.

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Johanna Brose