

# **FINAL REPORT**

**ABOUT MY VOLUNTARY SERVICE**

**FROM 3<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009 TO 1<sup>ST</sup> JULY, 2010**

**UNDER**

**THE WELTWÄRTS-PROGRAM,**

**DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION E.V. (BEZEV)**

**AND THE EDUCATION OF THE MENTALLY  
CHALLENGED (EMC)–GHANA PROJECT,**

**AT**

**GARDEN CITY SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR THE  
MENTALLY HANDICAPPED**

**IN**

**KUMASI, GHANA**

Written by: Susanne Mönnich ([susanne-moennich@web.de](mailto:susanne-moennich@web.de))

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# **FINAL REPORT**

## **1. Preface**

I grew up with a mentally retarded brother. Influenced by his special characteristics, my interest into disability grew more and more when I was getting older. After completing my Senior High Education in July 2008, I decided to do a one year social service at a school for the mentally disabled in order to gain more experience with disabled people outside my family situation. During this service I wanted to do another voluntary service in another country before entering into the University for Special Education program. By researching on the internet I found the new volunteers program Weltwärts of the German government and the German NGO Disability and Development Cooperation (Bezev). Bezev sends volunteers to countries in Africa, Asia and South America, where they work with disabled people in different kinds of projects. After sending my appointment letter Bezev invited me for an interview. Here I expressed the wish to go to an English speaking country and to work in a school for mentally handicapped. Bezev in partnership with another NGO; Education for the Mentally Challenged (EMC) Ghana Project in Ghana, I was sent to Ghana. The EMC Ghana Project supports special schools all over Ghana by sending volunteers to the schools hence my appointment to work with Education for the Mentally Challenged in Ghana.

Before I finally came to Ghana I had to attend several workshops to be prepared for my stay and work in a very different culture. Two workshops were held by Bezev. All the volunteers who were to be sent by Bezev to different countries in Africa, Asia und South America came together for six days. We learnt a lot about living and coping with different cultures, the situation of people with disabilities in the developing countries and the anticipated problems to be encountered during our period of stay. Another seminar I attended was held by the EMC Ghana Project Group. Here we discussed issues with the former volunteers who had worked in Ghana before. This workshop was very helpful, because I got a lot of information from the former volunteers about Ghana, my future work and many other issues. It was formally known to me that I would be working at Garden City Special School (GCSS) in Kumasi. After these workshops and so many other preparations that I was well convinced to start my 10 month volunteering service at Garden City Special School in Kumasi, Ghana.

## **2. First Days in Ghana**

I arrived in Ghana on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009. Becky, the secretary to my mentor Mrs. Kwadade in Accra, picked me up from Accra Airport and sent me to Kokomemle Guesthouse, where I spent my first night.

On the next day we went to several places including the German embassy to have my name registered. After that we went to Special Education (SPED) Division to introduce myself to the directorate. They welcomed me to Ghana and we exchanged our ideas and expectations

towards my volunteering service. At the office of SPED I also met Franziska, another volunteer from Germany. I was glad to see a familiar face I had met in Germany before coming down and we talked a lot about my first impressions. From there we went to Mrs. Kwadade's house where she gave us a very warm reception and she offered me my first Ghanaian dish. Mrs. Kwadade and I discussed my purpose of working in Ghana.

After that it was time for me to leave Accra for Kumasi. In Kumasi the then Headmaster of Garden City Special School Mr. Yamoah came to pick me up from the STC Station and drove me to my new home at Ejisu-Krapa, where my host family welcomed me.

Since school reopened on 15th September, 2010 I had a lot of time to get use to my new environment. My family explained so many things to me such as the public traffic or aspects of the Ghanaian culture. My mother took me to town, showed me the market and some other important places. I was very grateful about that, because in the beginning even small things like buying shampoo or getting money from the bank were big challenges for me. I also realized that it was very hard for me to express myself in English, because in Germany I do not speak English that often. I was also surprised at hearing adults and children calling me 'Obruni' meaning 'White Lady'. In Germany you do not get this kind of special attention and it is even impolite to call somebody after physical appearance like the skin colour.

Within my first weeks I sometimes felt alone and could not share all my feelings and impressions with the Ghanaian people around me. In those moments I would have preferred to be together in the same town with another volunteer of the same culture to share these sorrows with. In absence of any volunteer I would call my family and friends in Germany to share experiences. It was after sometime I got to know some volunteers.

### **3. Life at Garden City Special School (GCSS)**

#### **3.1 General Information about Garden City Special School (GCSS)**

Garden City Special School (GCSS) for the Mentally Handicapped was founded in 1977 by the Society of Friends of Mentally Retarded Children (SFMRC) at Dicheonso in Kumasi. It was started as a homecare with 4 children. In 1985, when the student population increased to about 80, the government took over the school and continued staffing it with specialized teachers. In 1987, the school was moved to Adiebeba and in 1996, the school was relocated at the present place in Asokore Mampong, a small suburb of Kumasi.

GCSS is one of the 24 governmental Special schools in Ghana, out of which 11 Special schools are for the mentally handicapped.

The facilities of GCSS are made of three dormitories for boarding students, a kitchen, a dinning hall, a clinic, an administration block, two blocks for the staff members as well as four classroom blocks, which contain the 10 classrooms, the 5 vocational classes and the gym.

Currently the school has a population of 165 students made up of 120 boys, and 45 girls. Out of the student population, 142 made up of 105 boys and 37 girls are boarders, while 23 students made up of 15 boys and 8 girls are day students.

There is a total of 24 teaching personnel made up of 16 Special Educators from the University of Education, Winneba and University of Cape Coast and 8 teaching assistants. There are other non-teaching staff numbering 29. In April 2010 Ms. Roseline Frempong took over the headship of GCSS with Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa as the acting assistant headmaster.

The school starts from Monday to Friday regularly at 8.30 am and classes end at 1 pm. Classes time is structured in three teaching periods and two break times. Every morning the teacher on duty leads the students through the Assembly, which lasts about 30 minutes. From there the students move to their respective classes. There are some special activities during the week: on Monday mornings a regular staff meeting takes place, for teaching as well as for the non-teaching staff. Every Wednesday morning the students and the teaching staff go to the dining hall for worship. And Fridays are meant for physical education for the students. Every week a new program is set up by the sports committee such as athletics, football, cultural drumming and dancing, games, entertainment.

The students are divided into the 15 classes depending on their age and skills. For about six years the students are supposed to go through functional academic programs which consists of daily living skills, Gross and Fine motor skills, verbal / non-verbal communication skills, interpersonal skills, sex education, health care, reading, writing and arithmetic. From there if the student is matured enough he can move to one of the workshops, the pre-vocational side, which includes training such as household / home management and living skills, weaving, tailoring, leather works, woodwork/carpentry, doormat making, batik, tie and dye making. The teachers prepare Individual Educational Program (IEP) for all students based on their capabilities and interests. Teachers teach according to the IEP put in place for the students and assess their performance periodically.

### **3.2 Integration in the School Community**

When I came to GCSS the whole staff offered me a warm welcome. An important philosophy of GCSS is the motto “We are a family” – including everybody who is learning and working at the school. Right from the beginning I felt very comfortable at school and besides my host family the school society was like a family to me. I always found somebody to share some ideas, thoughts, sorrows or problems. They were ready to help me anytime I encountered problems and they welcomed my suggestions and ideas. I really appreciated that and enjoyed coming to work.



Whenever there were meetings and some other cultural events (like funeral or an anniversary) the staff-members wanted me to participate.

Many staff members, especially the teachers were interested in my 'cultural background' and so we exchanged a lot points about our different cultures. The teachers wanted to know how Special Education is organised in Germany with questions like "How do we manage disabled children over there?", "How is a special school working over there?" and so on. By virtue of their questions I also asked them many questions about disability in Ghana, the school, teaching methods and others which were often interesting.

My coordinator in the school was Mr. Osei Yaw Akoto and was an important personality for me. We did not have regular meetings, but whenever there was time for a short talk, he asked me how I was, how my work was going on and gave me the needed assistance. When I had to extend my visa we went together to the Immigration Office and he helped me a lot. Fortunately I did not have any serious problem concerning my work or my host family. Small issues or questions concerning my work I discussed with Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa, the instructor I worked together with. Besides Mr. Osei and Mr. Otu the former headmaster Mr. George Yamoah Manu was a competent and understanding contact person for me and also the new headmistress Ms. Roseline Frempomaa Adjepong was taking good care of me, helped and guided me in many situations and even visited me from time to time in my home. Furthermore, Mr. Peter Assaw gave me small introductions about the Ghanaian culture and the local language Asante Twi on some occasions, which was very interesting and helpful.

### **3.3 Areas of Work**

The former headmaster Mr. George Yamoah Manu left the decision on my working area at school to me. He suggested that I should observe the particular groups and workshops they undertake for several weeks to see how the teachers are working. But in the first weeks it was hard for me to get an insight into daily school-life situations, since not all of the students were present after the long holiday, so classes were not regularly and intensive. Because of this I was for a long time very irresolute about my future working area.

After observing several classes and groups I decided together with my coordinator Mr. Osei Yaw Akoto to assist a teacher, Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa in the areas of physical education and speech therapy, which the then headmaster and assistant approved of it. I joined him on the grounds that I really liked his lessons during my observation and I wanted to learn more about these interesting areas. I was also reading the reports of the former volunteers from Germany at GCSS and most of them were working in the gym. I thought it is good to continue some of their concepts so that especially the area of therapy becomes a continuous



offer and permanent feature for the students. Furthermore, I also realised that physical alternation is very important for the students. Many of them have overweight or are physically handicapped and during classes there is not much physical activity for the students, especially for those in the workshops. Due to this condition some of their problems will get even worse. In addition there are also some students who have other individual problems, like speech problems or drooling and the teachers in the classroom could not find ample time to give special attention

to the children's conditions. Mr. Otu is working with these students in the gym or on the playground, by taking them out of the particular classes and helping them in small groups. After the Easter vacations also Michael Abel, another volunteer from Germany joined our work in the gym.

In the following I will describe the different groups we undertook.

### 3.3.1 Physical Education

When I started working in the gym there was a group with approximately 8 students, male and female, and most of them had problems with their mobility because of their overweight. After some time other students wanted to join the sport group, so we decided to divide the group in two: boys and girls, in each group are 6 to 8 students. We were working according to the lesson notes Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa is wrote weekly. Every week had a different topic and we tried to take each group once or twice a week to the gym. The exercises we undertook was to improve their mobility and reduce or maintain their weights.

A typical lesson was structured as follows: In the beginning of each lesson we took the weight of the students. After that we did a general warm up (like stretching, running, games) and a specific warm up, according to the activity we wanted to teach. Then we started with the main activity, like running over fixed distances, racings, jumping over obstacles, sit-ups, skipping, climbing on the playground or different games. After this we did a short relaxing and closing activity, before they went back to their classrooms.



### 3.3.2 Speech Therapy

When I started with the speech therapy there was just one boy, Toffik, who has problems with drooling and speech, because his mouth-muscles flexibility is restricted. But I soon realized that there are many more students with speech problems. After some time I asked another student, Phillip to join the speech therapy with Toffik.



We tried to take Toffik and Phillip twice a week to the gym. The concept of the lesson was already set up by Mr. Otu. I think a former volunteer from Germany introduced it to the school. After some time I did several variations and add other methods to it.

A lesson was structured as follows: We started the lesson by playing a game. We drew with chalk two lines on a bench and numbers from 0 to 5, for the achieved points. The students, sitting on each sides of the bench, had to blow a small cotton wool behind the line, without falling down on the ground. This exercise should help the students to control the blowing of air, so that when they are trying to speak they can use the required air. It also relaxes the mouth muscles for a better articulation.

After this activity we continued with something else according to the lesson notes and aims for the particular week. We exercised the proper gripping of a straw with the lips in order to blow air



through it. But just Phillip was able to do it and he enjoyed producing bubbles in water by blowing air through the straw. Both of them also liked the soap bubbles, and I allowed them to play with it when we had finished our activity.



We also did exercise involving the movement of the tongue, because both of them cannot control it properly. As a result of this they have problems with drooling and the speech is not clear. For the activity we used some cardboards depicting the correct tongue movement and a big mirror. We showed the cards to the students and facing the mirror all of us tried to do the correct movement.

After this activity we assisted the students to pick and pronounce some letters of the alphabet and simple words, like “Ball”, “Cup”, “Pen”, “Shoe”. I recognized that even when they try to say a word several times it will not come so clearly to be understood properly. I also observed that Toffik and Phillip, who are also close friends, do not communicate verbally, instead they are using an improvised sign language. I had the idea to teach them some basic “professional” signs (like “Mother”, “Father”, “School” ...) to improve the communication with each other and their social environment. But I realized it will not help them in their daily life unless I involve as many persons as possible, like the parents, teachers, students. And due to the fact that both of them are day students and the parents do not show up in school regularly, it was not possible for me to enrich that goal. Phillip is also having problems with his fine motor skills because of his cerebral palsy, so that the signs we tried to make were not clearly.

Both of them are already 18 years old. Whilst I was working with them I doubted if their speech will ever improve with the exercises we are doing. It is always better to start a therapy at a very early stage of age. So I tried to introduce some younger students who have obviously speech problems to the concept of the speech therapy, but I could not form a new group, because my schedule was very tight. I hope that in future also the younger students will be considered for the speech therapy or that the teachers will do some exercises in this area in the classrooms.

### 3.3.3 Physiotherapy with Gifty

Another important part of my work at GCSS was the physiotherapy with Gifty. She is 17 years old and is physically and mentally disabled. She has cerebral palsy, spastically tetraplegy. She can walk, but her movements are very unsafe and shaky. Both of her hands are clenched to a fist, so the use of her hands or fingers is restricted and she has many fine motoric problems like handling a pen. She also needs a lot of support in her daily life, like bathing, toileting and eating.

Karin, a former volunteer from Germany, was also working with her. Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa showed me how Karin used to massage her hands in a bowl filled with water. When I was able to do it on my own I took Gifty everyday to the gym, to massage her hands and to do some other small exercises. After the massage her hands were much more flexible and relaxed. Sometimes I put some softballs (e.g. balloon filled with sand) in her hand and left them inside for the rest of the day to change the fixed position of her fingers.

After I worked on Gifty for several weeks, I discussed her problems with Mr. Otu. Both of us observed that Gifty is always fed by the other students, since it was very hard for her to handle a spoon. To improve Gifty's independence in her daily life, she should be able to eat on her own with a spoon.



In the beginning of the second term we started the project. Before eating I massaged her hands. After that I assisted her in eating the food: I arranged everything on a plate (e.g. cutting the food into small pieces) so that she can eat it without problems and I guided her to take the spoon in her fist properly. I think she tried to eat with a spoon on a few occasions before, but her movements were very unsafe in the beginning and she was never able to eat everything by her own. But I was surprised: she found her own method to bring the spoon to her mouth by supporting her hand with her leg and she improved from day to day. I was very happy and the time we invested in this project was not wasted at all. Now Gifty is able to eat on

her own with little guidance and help and she is really enjoying it.

### **3.3.4 Work with a Multiple Handicapped Girl**

In addition to these areas I was working with Bernice, a girl, who is multiply handicapped. She is visually and hearing impaired and she is not showing a high grade of communication. Sometimes it is hard for the teacher to involve her in the regular lessons. So I decided to develop in cooperation with the class teacher materials, with which she can work and learn with (e.g. musical instruments, insert boards). I tried to find time in the morning to show her the new material. Sometimes I also took her out of the classrooms and we explored the school environment together, but in general she can orientate herself very well. We also went into the gym on some occasions and she enjoyed playing with a big massaging ball or we did other activities, like sorting of objects, picking of balls or using insert board games.

### **3.3.5 Other Projects**

During my work at GCSS ideas for some other projects came into my mind.

The first one, which could not succeed was the idea of a therapy room in one of the rooms attached to the gym. The EMC Ghana Project is providing a micro credit fund of about 150 Euros for small projects the volunteers want to undertake. I discussed my idea with Mr. Otu, but both of the rooms are already occupied and functioned as storerooms. Even though we could not form a proper therapy room, our ideas were to use the money from the EMC Project to buy some Learning and Teaching Materials for the gym. Because of lack of materials teaching in the areas of physical education and physiotherapy was not always easy. Many materials are very old and some of them already spoiled. Furthermore, there is for example just one skipping rope, one soft exercising mat or two big massaging balls. We discussed our ideas with Ms. Roseline and she supported it. But unfortunately we could not apply for the

money so far. The time we wanted to realize the project my time at GCSS was almost up, so Moritz Reckling, the coordinator of EMC Ghana Project, suggested to leave it for the coming volunteer. And also Michael, another German volunteer at GCSS said he can work on it. Another project which succeeded and is now in process is the establishment of a partnership between Garden City Special School and a special school in Germany, "Schule am Lindenbühl". The idea came into my mind when I was working in Germany at a special school for mentally disabled. When I came to GCSS I discussed the idea with the former headmaster and teachers and together we worked out a concept on the ground of our ideas and expectations. All of us wanted the students to learn from the cultural exchange by writing letters, paintings and sending pictures. The teachers were also asking for Learning Teaching Materials the special school in Germany may not need and could send to GCSS. We were also thinking of an exchange between the teachers by discussing the situation of disabled people in a different culture, teaching methods and problem solving strategies. I wrote an application letter to the German special school where I was formally working. It took a very long time till this school finally decided not to start a partnership, since they are already in cooperation with another project in Ruanda. But fortunately another special school in Germany, through the contact of Mr. Klaus Jahn, showed interest in establishing a partnership. Since then I was in contact with Mrs. Isabella Fischer, a teacher at this school. We wrote E-Mails and exchanged our ideas. The school has about three to four times a year the opportunity to sell self made handcrafts. The money they earn by selling these products will be donated to GCSS. Mrs. Fischer will also organize other activities for German disabled and non-disabled children and teenagers to talk with them about life and culture in Africa. The whole project is still developing and I hope that the staff of GCSS and also the future volunteers will support it by requiring the establishment at GCSS.

### **3.4 Reflection of my Work**

When I reflect on my work at GCSS I am very satisfied with the areas I chose to work. I enjoyed working with the students at Garden City Special School. Even though the communication was sometimes a problem, they were always willing to work with me, were open to my methods and we had a lot of cheerful moments together. They are really dear to my heart.

The cooperation with Mr. Joshua Otu Abankwa was very good. He explained and taught me a lot about therapy, physical education and disabilities in general. Whenever I had questions on some topics he will provide me with several books for further researches. He also guided and supervised me through the particular working areas so that in the end I was able to lead the groups on my own. He even included me in developing ideas for the scheme of work for the particular groups. Since April 2010 he is the acting assistant headmaster, he could not find ample time for the work in the gym. But whenever I needed his help he would show up. I am very grateful to him about his patience and his support.

Sometimes, when I had free time, I visited the other classes and groups to observe teaching situations, to learn the different crafts in the workshops or to see how the students are coping. I really enjoyed these visits and observations and I am grateful to all the teachers for always welcoming me and answering my questions.

But I also had to face many challenges during my time of work at Garden City Special School. Unfortunately I could not learn the local language to be so fluent in it. As a consequence working with the students was sometimes hard because of the language barrier since most of the students do not understand English or just some basic phrases. Besides that it also caused a lot of situations in which I felt left out, for example when I was sitting together with other staff member in a room and the conversation was held in Twi. Or at general staff meetings, which were held in the local language. But the new headmistress Ms. Roseline Frempong Adjepong has been holding the staff meetings in English, so I hope in future there will not be this kind of problem. Because it was a very uncomfortable situation and it did not help me in anyway to improve my Twi skills. I recommend for the coming volunteers to start the Twi lessons right from the beginning in an intensive course, maybe for 1 to 2 weeks, because it is very important to speak or to understand the local language to some extent.

Sometimes I also had the impression that there is something like a ditch between the teaching in the classrooms and the work in the gym. We always tried to encourage the teachers to observe how we are working with the students of their classes in the gym, but except a few teachers they never showed up. I think it is very important for the teachers to know what we are doing, so that they can give some more suggestions or to continue the work in the classroom. In my opinion for some students it is also even more important to focus on their severe problems, like a physical disability, their limited daily living skills or their speech problems than teaching them arithmetic or the writing of the ABC.

But besides these I never had any problems at GCSS, neither with the teaching nor with the non-teaching staff, and I was in good terms with all of them. Whenever I needed their support to some small projects they helped me a lot.



## **4. Experiences besides school life**

### **4.1 Cooperation with My Mentor Mrs. Kwadade and Special Education Division (SPED)**

During my volunteering service Mrs. Dinah Kwadade was my mentor and supervisor outside school. When I came to Ghana we had a first meeting, but after that she travelled for a couple of month. Fortunately I never had any serious problem, but in February when she came back and we had a meeting in Accra I realized that regular meetings with her would have been really helpful. She is a very warm and frank speaking person and I am thankful for her support. Our meeting with also the EMC coordinator Moritz Reckling, who came for a visit to Ghana, motivated me a lot and it helped me to reflect the passed months. I hope that the following volunteers will get the opportunity to have regular meetings with Mrs. Kwadade.

I am also very grateful to Special Education Division. On my second day in Ghana they invited me to their office and offered me a warm welcome. When I had problems to get a visa extension the directorate of SPED gave me the needed support. About two weeks ago Mrs. Kwadade, Mr. Ottah and Mrs. Rosemond came to Garden City Special School to have a final discussion with me on my stay in Ghana and my work at school. Especially during this meeting I had the feeling that they take my opinions and recommendations serious and that they try to improve our placement and program as much as possible.

### **4.2 My Ghanaian Family**

For the time of my stay I had the great opportunity to live with a Ghanaian family, the family of the school nurse of Garden City Special School. I lived together with my mother Grace Obeng, my host father Emmanuel, my three host brothers Junior (20), James (20), Akwasi (9) and my host sister Nana (23) in a very comfortable house, where I had my own room with a big bed, a cupboard, a fan and even an own fridge. The house is located in Ejisu-Krapa, a small village about twenty kilometres outside Kumasi. Since two former volunteers from Germany, Katharina and Sarah, also stayed with the family for a couple of month, they were used to many issues and challenges that can face our way. All of them were very friendly and open minded and right from the beginning I felt like being a part of the family. I learned a lot about family structures in Ghana, the Ghanaian culture, how to prepare local dishes, how to speak the local language and so many other things. We did many daily activities together, like cooking or other household chores, going to the market, laundry on Saturdays, going to church on Sundays, watching TV, visiting friends and we had a lot of fun together. Living in a Ghanaian family also helped me to understand issues I was confronted with in my



daily life better and to adapt myself to new environment and the new culture. In my opinion it is very important to have a place where you feel welcome and at home. And it is great to have people around you who care for you when you are such a long time away from home. I am very grateful to the whole family for their loving support in so many situations. Especially my mother was taking good care of me. When I got sick she and all the others helped me. Or they always ensured that I get enough to eat and I will miss the delicious food.



I also enjoyed staying at Krapa since in contrast to Kumasi it is a small and quite place and I liked visiting the neighbours or greeting and chatting with the people I got to know after some time over there. Even though the place is quite far from school I never regret staying with this nice family and I can recommend the accommodation also for the coming volunteers.

### 4.3 Leisure Time

After school, on the weekends or during vacations I also made a lot of experience and got a lot of new impressions. After school I used to go to town to go to the internet or to buy some needed items, I met my friends, I joined my mother to the market or some other places. Or I went home straight after work to relax for some time and then to help my mother preparing the food for the evening. In the evenings I spend a lot of time with my host siblings. We talked, watched movies and had fun together. Or I visited my neighbours or I was just relaxing in my room, reading and listening to music.

My weekends were always somehow busy. I had to wash, I visited friends, went to town or went to some other occasions like funerals. Also during the weekends, but especially during vacations, I visited the other volunteers from bezev (Marlene, Franziska and Lena) in their families and projects or we travelled together to some places. Through the contact with Marlene, a deaf volunteer, we were also able to learn some useful basics in the German sign language, which was very interesting.



I really enjoyed our meetings and we discussed a lot about certain issues, problems and our feelings living in such a different culture. We also had a mid-term seminar together with other German volunteers from the intercultural organization AFS. We went together to the Volta Region of Ghana. Over there besides doing some daytrips to interesting places we had discussions on our work and experiences in Ghana and on several topics such as religion, gender roles, cultures.



By travelling through the country I learned for example about the Ghanaian colonial history by visiting the Elmina Castle, I could see elephants, monkeys and crocodiles in their natural environment at the Mole National Park and experienced Aboakyer, a traditional festival in Winneba. Whenever I went somewhere, I never felt unsafe or in danger. If for example I was searching for a certain car at

the station there was always somebody to help me. I experienced Ghana as a very free and safe country, where the people are friendly and open to foreigners. Even though there were also many situations where people tried to cheat me higher amounts of money because I am a foreigner and not so familiar with all the prices, I never experienced any bad or serious treatment apart from that. On some days I was very annoyed by all the adults and children calling me “Obruni” – I think I can never ever get use to that behaviour.

I was very interested to get to know more about the situation of disabled people in the Ghanaian society. One day I met a man, who is working with disabled children in Offinso, a district near Kumasi. He is visiting about 15 mentally and physically children in their various homes and giving them some treatment like physiotherapy or feeding. I joined him on two occasions to visit the children and I was really impressed and touched by their situations: most of the children were kept inside the room and the parents cannot give them the needed support caused by lack of finance, knowledge and empathy for their children’s special need. Many parents feel very ashamed of their disabled child and experience a disgrace to their families. This happens because most of the people in Ghana do not know the causes for mentally retardation or other kinds of disability. They might think that a disability is a result of committing sin by one of the parents, local beliefs often talk of punishment by the gods for misbehaving or they are of the opinion that a hearing/visually/mentally/physically impaired child is not able to function in daily life. Some even fear the disabled. I also experienced this way of thinking in a lot of discussions with Ghanaian people. When I told them about my work, many of them could not believe that these students are able to learn and work.

## **5. General Reflection / Closing Remarks**

Looking back at the past ten months so many moments, thoughts and memories stream through my mind. Staying away from home for such a long time, being confronted with different cultures and different ways of thinking and living under different living conditions concerning the weather, the food, the environment was of course not always easy. I missed my family, my friends, German food, German Christmas, the snow, driving the car and so many other things. There were many challenges I had to face but I think I really grew on it and it matured me.

All in all I can say that it was a unique and precious experience I do not want to miss. I learnt many things about me and my own culture and I got a totally new view on so many things. My work at Garden City Special School also ensured me that I want to become a teacher for the mentally handicapped.

I am very happy to have met so many good people on my way such as my family, the staff and the great student at Garden City Special School, the other volunteers and other friends. Saying “bye-bye yoo” to all of them is not easy, but I am also looking forward to see my family and friends in Germany and to enter university in September. I really hope to come back to Ghana within the following years.