

Report about practical training at  
**Community Inclusive Special School**

**Kpando – Abanu / Ghana**



— 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007 – 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007

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## PREPARATIONS

My first working experience with mentally and physically challenged children was in my voluntary social year in a special school in Germany. I really enjoyed my time there so much that I decided to become an occupational therapist. My idea since the beginning was to combine the work with challenged children and a new experience in Africa.

I searched for projects that co-operate with special schools in African Countries. Fortunately, I got in contact with the EMC – Ghana – Project. I joined meetings of the EMC – Ghana – Project and talked to former volunteers. The authorities of the EMC – Ghana - Project and the Special Education Division had decided to send me to “Community Inclusive Special School “ in Kpando. The school was interested to have a new volunteer. Mainly two former volunteers from CISS prepared me for my stay in Kpando. One of these volunteers built a school farm and he told me to continue his project. I had no experience in farm work but I agreed to learn the basics of farming and support the farming project to continue. Besides the farming project, I wanted to start a pre – vocational training workshop.

The school was also interested in pre – vocational – training. In co – operation with the headmaster of CISS, King Isaac Agbele. I decided to work in the sewing workshop and the woodwork workshop.

Finally, I arrived in Ghana on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2007, together with Melanie, another volunteer of EMC – Ghana – Project who has been sent to Garden City Special School in Kumasi.

## My First Days in Ghana

I was really happy that Melanie and I came together with the same flight to Ghana. So I arrived not alone in this completely new country, which is totally different from every country I knew before. We were picked up from the airport by our headmasters of Kpando and Kumasi Special Schools. They welcomed us nicely. Directly from the Airport, we drove to the Ghana Education Service Office to meet Mrs. Kenedy, the Director of Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service. We spent the first night in the GNAT teachers hostel in Accra. Melanie and me, we were overwhelmed of the new impressions and we were happy to spend the first night in Ghana together to share this new impressions.

The next day Mr. Agbele and me were picked up by Alex a German from the DED to Kpando. The family of Mr. Agbele, my intended host family were already waiting for me to welcome the very friendly.

In the beginning, everything was totally new for me but the family gave me a good support to find my way around. Mr. and Mrs Agbele introduced me into the public transport, the market and the Ghanaian way of shopping and to all the ways of Ghanaian lifestyle.

They also introduced me to many people I should know and I worked with later. That was really helpful for me to settle in. Still I needed much time to get used to everything here in Ghana. I had to learn everything new from the beginning. The way to showering, the way of washing, the way of eating, the way of greeting people, only to mention a few things. Here in Ghana I got an idea from what the word socialization really means.

# COMMUNITY INCLUSIVE SPECIAL SCHOOL



Community Inclusive Special School (CISS) is located in Kpando – Abanu in the Volta – Region. The school was funded in 1993 by parents of children with mental disabilities. CISS had been absorbed into the public system by the Ghana Education Service in 2000. The School is the first of its kind in Ghana, practising the inclusive system of education. Under this system, disabled and non – disabled students are educated in the same school setting. The parents don't have to pay school fees. Unfortunately, the quantity of the non – disabled students reduces more and more every year. Now most of the students are disabled and the non – disabled are exceptional. At the moment, the population of the school stands at 25 students between the ages of 6 and 25 years. The children are grouped according to their capabilities into 3 groups. CISS is far away from most houses the children live in. For some of the children and teachers it is far to walk. The school has a bus, which does not operate since two years. But fortunately the EMC – Ghana – Project has release funds to repair the bus soon. The children and the teachers will soon be picked to and from school. Surely more children who are not able to walk the long way to school can also join the school in future.

Seven class members are working at CISS, the headmaster and 6 teachers. Most of the teachers are regular teachers and some teachers are educated for the special needs of the disabled students. The school building is made up of 4 classrooms, the headmaster's office, a staff member room and a store. The school has also large land, which is used for a school farm. This farm was build by the former volunteer Moritz Reckling for a pre – vocational training workshop for the students.

# PRE – VOCATIONAL – TRAINING – WORKSHOP

In my preparation before the practical training I had ideas to make additional pre-vocational – training –workshops to the existing farming workshop. The headmaster was also interested to start new pre – vocational – training workshops in woodwork and sewing. So I decided to support the certain teacher in the particular lesson. The headmaster agreed. The additional pre-vocational-training –workshop also helps the students to develop their skills and their abilities and give them a perspective for the future. A serious and well - organised training will help the mentally challenged students to provide themselves and live an independent life.

Before I came to Ghana, I didn't know the way teachers work and which kind of work is possible and appropriate. So I brought some ideas to Ghana, but first I wanted to know the school situation and the ideas of the responsible teachers before I decided for a procedure.

## 1. Term: January – March 2007

The first 2 weeks of my practical training at CISS I just joined the lesson and watched the work of the teachers. So I got a small insight into the Ghanaian way of teaching. The responsible teachers for the pre – vocational – training – workshops hadn't start their lessons at this time, but they had a didactic plan for the procedure. When I came we started together. First we taught them the theory of woodwork and sewing. I tried to teach them mostly via games. I wanted the students to learn the names of the tools, the materials and their use easily. The teachers supported me and helped me with the language barriers. They translated the English to Ewe for the children and the Ewe to English for me. Unfortunately, only few students understand the English language. So the communication with them was difficult for me. In Ghana I learned how important the speech and the language is for the dealing with the students and their education. The way of education in Ghana is very different from the German way. It was quite difficult for me to assess situations right and interact adequate, because of the language barriers and the students also don't react to German ways of sanction. Another problem was the assessment of the difficulties of the children. I didn't know if they didn't understand me because of their low-intelligence or because of the language barrier.

After the theory in the pre – vocational – training workshops we started to work practical. In the woodwork lesson, I started with a group of 7 students to make small games from wood. Every single student made his own game and experienced the dealing with different tools. In the sewing lesson it was the same. I wanted another group of 5 students with the different tools and materials. I wanted to increase their skills and abilities and their selfesteem. To explain the gradual procedure to the students was difficult again. Because of the language barrier I had to use the body language more than the speech and I also made paintings on the black board for them to understand me better. The students I worked with had very different levels of disabilities and the skills and abilities varied much. So sometimes it was difficult for me to do justice to every single student. In the beginning I tried to work with the timetable to give the students and regularity. But with the time I got to know that things are running different in Ghana and teachers don't work with the timetable. So I had also adapt.

## 2. Term: May – July 2007

At the beginning of the second term the pre – vocational – training workshops became irregular. The Musical and Cultural Festival and the Special Olympics were approaching and the season for the farming project began. So we had a lot to prepare. The teachers trained the students in sports and music. They practiced singing and drumming of traditional songs and the traditional dance Bobobo (BOBOBO)

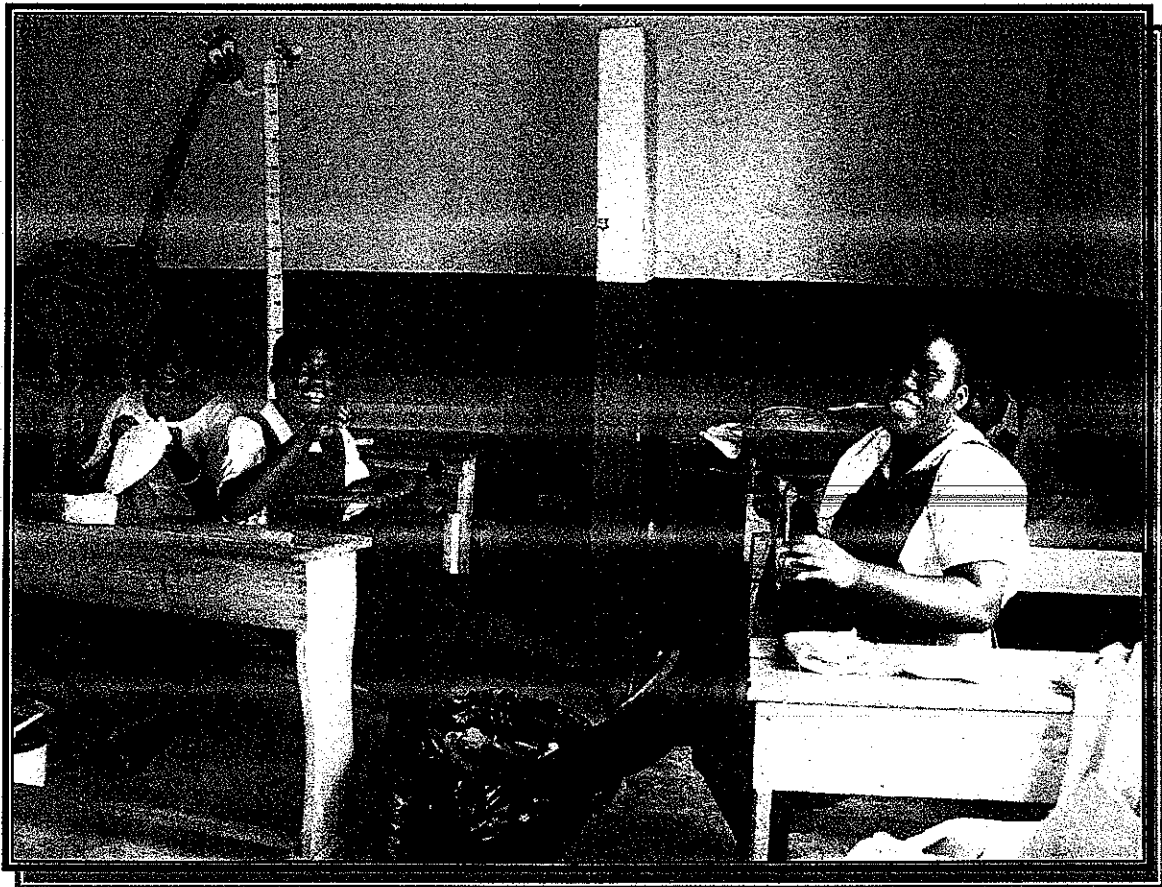
For the farming project it was time to prepare the land. First we built new nursery beds. A tractor was hired to plough the land. The teachers decided to enlarge the farm. Now the farm is twice as big as before. I didn't like the idea for of such a big farm so much. It is a lot of more work for teachers and students and there was hardly enough time for any other lesson. The farm loses because of that its educational character. The students failed a lot of lessons in the classroom, because there's plenty work to do on the farm every day. Teachers and students worked together. They sowed seeds of different types of vegetables like tomatoes, garden egg and pepper in the nursery beds and transplanted them later to the land. The largest part of the farm is covered with maize. They also have okro. The rain didn't fall as much as expected in this rainy season. The students therefore had to continue watering regularly and this took also a lot of time. Teachers and students started to build a fence around the whole farm and school area. It will take some more weeks to finish this project.

Before I came to Ghana I had no experience in farm work. But the teachers know how to work and they introduced me into a lot of basics in farm work. So I was able to support them. I always tried to point out to the teachers to involve the children in every kind of farm work, also the more difficult and important work, which the teachers used to do on their own. Most of the time it was a good co – operation between teachers students.



In the beginning of the woodwork workshop and the sewing – workshop it was a good co – operation between the teachers and me. But with the time I got less support from here and until I made the workshops by my own. The teachers and me had very different ideas how to transfer the pre – vocational – training – workshops. I think it was because of the different cultural background we have. And it was difficult to combine the different ways of work.

I wanted every student to make his own experiences, his own mistakes and his success with his own work. The Ghanaians have different priorities. For them the procedure in a work is not as important as the result. They don't have plenty materials and so every result just be useful. After I found it out, the headmaster gave the ideas to make signs from wood with inscription for the nursery beds of the farm. I liked his useful idea and started to transfer this work together with the students. For the sewing workshop it was more difficult to find a solution for this problem, because we hadn't plenty materials. I used to select pieces of cloth from tailors and dressmakers they didn't need anymore. So we couldn't make dresses from this small pieces. That's why I decided to keep on sewing small cuddle toys. This work was more easier for the handicap students and they could experience a result in their work very quickly. I used to teach them the procedure step by step and structured. I could see development of every student from the beginning to the end.



From time to time I had free time between the lessons. I used this time to occupy the younger students. I did games with them to support their intellectual skills and their perception. Some of the games were already in school, some were donated by different

volunteers and some I made by my own. Unfortunately, some of the materials and games in school were still in a bad condition.

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It was difficult for me to handle the problem with the language barrier. It was difficult for the dealing with the students and for the integration in the staff. I couldn't take part of most of the conversations and discussions, because most of the time they were speaking Ewe. Even when I asked for translation I often couldn't grasp the whole matter. And with the time I got tired to ask every time for translation, because I felt like disturbing them in their conversations. That's the reason I felt excluded sometimes. I think it would be better for the next volunteers to have a course to learn the basics of the local languages in Ghana before their practical training begins. It would make their communication between staff and students a little bit easier.

It was also difficult for me always to take the initiative and go up to the teachers to confront them with the problems I had with the co – operation. I didn't feel fine with it. I asked them many times for their support and ideas but with the time I got tired of this.

To solve this problem it would be better to commit in advance regular meetings with the headmaster. So sides, headmaster and volunteers have committed meetings to exchange their problems and make corrections to improve the co – operation in the staff and their common work. So the volunteers doesn't has to take always the initiative. This is what I lost to commit in the beginning of my practical training.

The Community Inclusive Special School is a very small school and the staff work very close to the headmaster. They discuss everything together also the financial matters. I also got involved to it. Sometimes I had the feeling there are expectations in me to invest my private money in school. It was difficult to handle the situation, because before I came to Ghana, the EMC – Project told me that I have nothing to do with financial matters. I think this was not really sort out for the school.

During my practical training it was very important for me to have an exchange with Melanie, the other volunteer from Kumasi. We were in the same situation and could exchange our experience and problems at school. But this exchange was not always easy, because the distance between Kumasi and Kpando is far. We tried to meet every 3 – 4 weeks in Accra. Maybe for the next volunteers it would be better to send them in the same region or to towns, which are closer to another. That would make meetings and exchanges between volunteers much more easier.

When I came to Ghana I had a lot of ideas for the work with the children. Unfortunately, I couldn't nearly make everything I wanted to in the beginning. With the time I learned that things move very slowly in Ghana. You can't compare it to the way things move in Germany. It took a lot of time until I got used to it. That's the way things move in Ghana and I had also to adopt to the situation. I learned a lot of patience during my stay in Ghana.

My time in Ghana was a great experience. I had good days and bad days and things were not always easy. But I enjoyed the work with the children at CISS a lot. I was happy also to learn some basics in Agriculture.

If the school staff manages the big farm well, they can have lunch for the students from their own vegetables. and they can sell a lot of their plenty vegetables. from this income they can buy the teaching materials and materials for the pre – vocational – training – workshops they need.

Finally, I hoped in the interest of the children that the woodwork and sewing workshops will be continued. I really hoped for the children they will benefit from it!