

Final Report by Nathalie Lukas

Wa School for the Deaf (EMH-Unit)(Education of the mentally handicapped), September 2008 to April 2009

1. Preface

After finishing grammar school in June 2008 I wanted to do a FSJ (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr; social year) before starting my studies in psychology. I wanted to work with disabled children because my interests are huge in this field. I read about the new program "weltwärts" of the BMZ (Bundesministerium fuer wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung; ministry for economic cooperation and development). I never thought about going abroad to do voluntary service even though it has been a dream of mine but raising the necessary amount of money was not possible. But thanks "weltwärts" I got the possibility and I am really thankful for that. On the "weltwärts" website I got in contact with bezev (Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit e.V.; Disability and development cooperation). Bezev is one of many organizations that are accepted by the BMZ for sending volunteers abroad. Bezev covered the field of my interests, which is why I applied at their organization for my voluntary service. Bezev cooperates with the EMC-Ghana-Project (Education of the mentally challenged). This is the project I worked with.

2. Time before coming to Ghana, the workshops

As well as my personal preparation for my stay in Ghana I had to attend two big workshops organized by bezev and one workshop organized by the EMC-Ghana-Project. These workshops were really helpful. We did not just learn many things about development work and developing countries in general. We also got to know our organization/project and the people we were going to work with better. I think that this is one really important part because they form the team I have to consult when I have problems/wishes/suggestions abroad. It made things easier for me to discuss issues on bad phone lines because I had previously met the people I was talking to. It was also good to meet the other volunteers with who I could share my feelings.

The workshops I attended were well organized. During the two big workshops we learned many things about developing countries and work in general. We also had time to present our projects to the other volunteers who would work on different projects. The role-plays about difficult situations we could be confronted with during our service helped me to be aware of my own behavior. It was also good that we talked about problems that may come into existence

and how these could be solved.

The workshop with the EMC-Ghana-Project was more specific. We were just four volunteers who were sent to Ghana to the EMH-schools there. We got to know each other better and we got information about the country, the EMH-schools and the work of former volunteers. During that workshop they decided that they wanted to send me to the EMH-unit in Wa. The last volunteer served there eight years ago. Then the contact to the school stopped, but luckily they got reconnected with the school, which made it possible for me to go there. Since the last volunteer has been there eight years ago I could not get recent information about the school and the town. In addition to that the school and the town have not got a website yet. That is why I had no idea of what to expect when I got there. But that was okay for me; I found it more exciting to come to a new place, discover everything on my own and rebuild the relationship between the EMH-unit and the EMC-Ghana-Project.

All in all, I felt well prepared by bezev and the EMC-Ghana-Project... as well as you can be prepared because when you arrive things will be different than you expect anyway. But they did very well and I want to thank them for the workshops and for everything they did for me.

3. Mentoring and cooperation

Before and during my service I had the feeling that my organization and project took good care of me. Even though I wished that we had more contact during my stay I never had the feeling that they will not care. In addition to that, it is sometimes hard to get into contact here in Wa. Often the phone lines are not working, the lights are off or the network is not working. These are some of the challenges volunteers have to get through. But bezev and the EMC-Ghana-Project did well. Whenever I had problems or questions I got answers and help really fast. From time to time we had phone calls but most of the communication was done by e-mail. They have not only support me in the theoretical preparation and with my work, but they also took good care of me. I want to thank them for that.

The four of us volunteers had a common mentor Mrs. Kwadade here in Ghana. Besides doing a good job as my mentor, I like her personally very much and she impresses me. She took good care of us. She was available every time I needed her. She took time for me. The meetings we attended at her house gave me lots of new energy for my work here. She gave me the feeling that I was welcome and that things will work out. She is amazing in motivating people and is honest and straightforward, which made working with her easy and uncomplicated. She had good answers for my questions. I want to thank her for all of her support.

My mentor (Mr.Bayor) in Wa also did a good job. He picked me up at

the bus station when I arrived in Wa. He showed me important places in Wa and we did my first shopping together. He also took me to a church service one time and I spent the afternoon together with him and some of his friends. He has been to Germany before for four years to get educated as a physiotherapist. Because he spent time in Germany before he knows how difficult especially the first weeks alone in a different country with a different culture are. I have the feeling that he made my stay in some parts easier. I enjoyed when he talked about his time in Germany. Regrettably he never talked in German with me. When he was around almost everybody talked English (a language I can understand) and not Wali (that is the language which is spoken in Wa and hard to learn). When somebody was talking in Wali he translated the words for me. I want to thank him for that.

Regrettably he was not often at the unit. He mostly just showed up in the morning. But every time there was an issue that had to be discussed or I had questions he had time for me. We never had a fixed date for a meeting to discuss my work. We thought that brief meetings in the morning which are not regular would also be fine. And when there are bigger issues to discuss we can ask for a meeting. So I asked for a midterm meeting with him and all of the staff members to discuss my work so far, for suggestions to improve my work and expectations for the next term. After waiting weeks the meeting didn't still come into existence we decided that just Mr. Bayor and me would meet to discuss these issues. The meeting was good and productive. Looking back I wished that we had had regular meetings to evaluate my service. I think it would have improved the work if we had regularly discussed the work, problems and wishes. But on the other hand again I think that the brief meetings sometimes in the mornings were also okay. Regrettably I have not gotten answers to all my questions. I asked for example what his expectations of me are and if he had wishes which I can support or realize during my time here. He mentioned that he would like to do the chicken farm and the physiotherapy room. I tried both projects but both failed. Later he never told me about his expectation he had and how he finds my work. But still he did a good job as a mentor. When I was sick he brought me to the hospital or to the laboratory. He took time for me. I want to thank him for that. But sometimes I also had the feeling that I was annoying him, I had the feeling that a volunteer is for him sometimes a burden, but nevertheless he answered questions and listened to me.

4. Accommodation and feeding

When I arrived in Wa the headmistress of Wa Deaf, Mrs. Yelifari, and my mentor and headmaster of the EMH-unit, Mr. Bayor welcomed me. They were friendly and polite. Regrettably they had to tell me that the house of my host family was under renovation at the moment so that I have to live the first two or three months in a

classroom. In the building where the classroom is, there is also a shower, a toilet and running water. They organized a bed, a table and a chair for me. Mrs. Yelifari borrowed me plates for the time without a host family. But I did not feel comfortable alone in the classroom. Even Sarah Buss the volunteer from The U.S.A. who is working at Wa Deaf has been also placed at this building for the time of renovation (because her place is also under renovation) I decided not to stay there, because she went home for a visit for one month. That would have meant that I would have a neighbor for one month and then spend the other month (if the renovation would have been finished in the two to three months like promised) there alone. I told that to Mrs. Yelifari the next morning and a few hours later I moved to my new home, the dining room of my pupils. The renovation work never got finished so I lived there the whole eight months. Living next to me are the 20 boarding pupils of the EMH-unit and the housemother with her daughters. There is no shower and no running water but I felt much more comfortable here with so many people around, then alone in the classroom. I don't like to stay alone. Even though relations with the housemother were not good, I loved staying here. But I think that this is not the best place for a future volunteer to stay. Because the contact and the relationship to the boarding pupils have grown really close. So I think that saying good-bye will be hard, because I have not only spent the school time with them but also my entire days. We brushed our teeth together and played together. I enjoyed my time with them. On the other hand it is practical to live in the school. I was never late, did not have to worry about how to get to school. I didn't have to bring teaching material to school because they were just there in my room. I lived alone in the dining room and for my time of stay the pupils ate at the courtyard.

I built up a good relation to Mr. Abdallah Abdulai. He is one of the teachers of the EMH-unit. He became a friend. I spent lots of time with him and his family. His wife showed me how to cook Ghanaian dishes, when I had problems I could come to them anytime. When I did not feel well I could call them, and they took care of me. I want to thank them for that. One teacher of Wa Deaf Mr. Dabila Mahama also took good care of me. He invited me for evenings to enjoy Ghanaian dishes together with him and his family. Moreover there is a Peace Corps volunteer (Sarah Buss) at Wa Deaf. She was also around every time when I needed her. To have her around helped me a lot.

Indeed I think that a host family is the best solution for a volunteer, for discussing problems at school with them and to have a place (outside of work) to relax. But I was lucky and met these people who gave me the feeling of being home here. I want to thank them for that.

My feeding was all right. I did not want to buy myself a small kitchen

for my eight months service here; also my cooking skills are not the best. I ate with the pupils sometimes, often bought myself food on the street, and sometimes I was invited to eat Ghanaian dishes. The first month has been difficult because the Ghanaian food seemed so strange and different to me, but now I love and enjoy it very much. I just had to get used to it. I will miss it when I am back in Germany.

5. Experiences in my leisure time

The whole stay in Ghana was amazing even it has been full of challenges. I am glad that I got the possibility to do voluntary service here in Ghana. In Wa I felt at home, I got to know the people here and they got to know me. I met great people, I also met people I don't like at all but you meet people everywhere that you like and you don't like. I really like that most of the people are just friendly and open. I got free rides to town so often, because for the most of them it is just normal that you share your things when you have something to share (a free seat on a motorbike, food, sleeping place etc.). Sharing is one thing I really will miss, being invited and inviting others. Another thing I will miss is the time. It seems that everybody here had endless time and that is something really healthy and good. You don't have to rush from appointment to appointment, just thinking about money you have to make, things you have to do. I think that this Western way of life is not automatically better just because we are living in developed countries. It seems that Ghanaians in general are happier than Germans because they make spending time with family and friends a higher priority than being busy, productive and pursuing the accumulation of material things.

I enjoyed that I could just stop by a friend's place without asking if it was okay that I show up that evening because it is clear that they have time for their friends. It is good to put the focus on your family and friends and not just on work because working should not be your entire life.

I also enjoyed the small talks on the street and that you just greet everybody. You don't do this in Germany. You can just be interested in each other without knowing each other. The Ghanaians are open and you can easily get into long conversations. Of course, it is sometimes annoying that they are so talkative especially when you are in a hurry, but that is okay. I should appreciate that. Soon I am back in stressful Germany.

Another thing that I will miss are the children. When I arrived I was shocked that so many children were living here. Also every woman has a baby on her back, children are roaming around, they are everywhere, it is lovely. They are just part of the society. You don't have to worry if it is the right time in your life for getting a baby, you don't really have to worry about your working place or other things that might become difficult when you get a baby because

they are just part of the society. This behavior is amazing, we can learn out of it.

What makes me sad is that most of the Ghanaians still think that money grows on trees in our countries, that poverty doesn't exist at all. Some just want to be friends with you because you are white and they think that you must be rich of course and they hope then that they could profit out of this friendship. It made me angry when I met people who really stick to their opinion and didn't want to hear something else. For example, that unemployment also exists in Germany, that not everybody has health insurance, that people are living on the street. Of course they are right that our social standard is in a way higher then theirs because we can apply for help. But I think that on the other hand their living standard is higher when you need help you are supported by your family and neighbors. The society takes care when the government doesn't. The whole social behavior has impressed me. I will miss that. It is normal that you take care of each other. You don't close your eyes and say that this does not concern you. Here everything concerns you because you are part of the society. When children are fighting and you see that you interrupt, when you see something strange going on you ask what is happening, when the neighbor's two-year-old child is running around and you are cooking you invite him/her for food and maybe bring it home later. Children are responsible here so fast. Children who are four- years old are walking to school (or kindergarten) alone, which is unimaginable in Germany.

Another thing I have experienced is the weather. Life is harder here just because of the weather. You are hungry and thirsty all the time; the sun steals lots of energy from you. You look for shadow and water the whole day. I think that things would work out better and faster if the weather would be friendlier. I know that the weather for Europeans is harder then for the Ghanaians because they are used to it, but Ghanaians also complain a lot about it.

One last thing I want to mention is the position of women here in Ghana. Women have the same rights as men in Ghana according to the law, but the reality is different. Women do everything here. They do the household, care about the children and the husband, and of course care about the neighborhood, go to work, get educated, cook, wash the clothes (by hand of course). They don't complain, according to them it is their task to suffer and make the husband satisfied. They told me when an African woman is not working and suffering their blood will freeze, God will not be satisfied and they will die. I hope that this gender thing will change in the future because the women deserve a better fate. But still these women impress me how they manage everything and are still looking elegant and are friendly, welcoming and just great.

According to my personal experiences I made in Ghana I want to

add that I hope that I can keep a bit of the patience that I learned to have here. It is good to be okay with the fact that things are not working out exactly at the moment. As long as they will work out once in a while it is okay that things sometimes need time.

6. The EMH-unit

The EMH-unit has existed since 2000 and is placed at the campus of Wa Deaf. The headmistress of Wa Deaf is Mrs. Yelifari and the headmaster of the EMH-unit is Mr. Bayor. The school has two teachers, two assistants and 62 pupils, 20 of these are boarding pupils. The unit has four classrooms, one office, one dining room, two bedrooms (one for the girls and one for the boys), a bathroom with toilets and a room for the housemother and her family. People from the Netherlands have paid for their own school. They have already bought the land and will start building soon. The EMH-unit is the only institution in the entire Upper West for persons with mental disabilities. Many more children should and want to attend this school but there is limited space. I look forward to the future when there will be enough space for everyone.

When I arrived the teaching staff and the pupils gave me a friendly welcome. The teachers introduced me to the pupils. The first weeks I just observed the school, how the teachers are working. I asked for a meeting with the headmaster to discuss my stay here and my future tasks. I had to wait a few weeks until this meeting came into existence. At this meeting we (Mrs. Yelifari, Mr. Bayor and me) read through the contract. After the meeting I asked Mr. Bayor what he had in mind for what my work should entail. He said that it is up to me what I want to do and that he would be satisfied with any decision I made. I decided that I don't want to stay in one class for the whole time and work together with the class teacher. Because the unit is so small I wanted to use the chance to get to know and to work with all the pupils and teachers. Mr. Bayor was fine with this decision. And I wanted to base my work here (the small projects with the different classes) on arts. Because I like it very much and there were many art supplies leftover from other volunteers. I cleaned up and organized an old storage cupboard. I organized all the things from former volunteers. I showed the teachers the storage cupboard and explained to them all the materials inside. They told me, that they would have used the things before but nobody explained to them how. After labeling everything and making sure that all the teachers know how to use the things I hope that they will finally use them, I think so. They seemed really interested and thanked me many times.

Before I describe a typical day at the EMH-unit I want to mention some projects, some which have worked out and some that have failed. Projects that have worked out:

6.1. Projects

Daanasou was a new boarding pupil at the EMH-unit since last school year. He was not able to get dressed and to eat probably without losing most of his food. First I helped him learn how to eat. He wanted to eat with a spoon. It was difficult to convince the housemothers that he should also get a spoon like the other pupils and not just drink out of a cup. According to them he was not able to eat with a spoon. But after a while he got better and better. Now he can eat with a spoon and doesn't lose much food. He still is not able to close the buttons of his shirts. Sometimes he is able to, but then on other days I have the feeling that his spasms are worse then on other days and then he cannot do it. But all in all I am really proud of him and his development.

In the cupboard I made an art corner where the pupils can take the things out to use and return them later. I am impressed how fast they learned that they are responsible for the things they use and they have to clean up later. The last weeks I made art weeks. The teachers wanted me to help them to make their classrooms nicer. So I decided that I would paint with the pupils. After this we pasted the pictures on the walls. All in all we made 121 pictures. The pupils loved water-colour painting. I also explained to the teachers how to use them. I hope that they will continue to use them. The beginning of the art weeks was difficult. The pupils are used to frontal lessons, to repeat. But I wanted them to be creative, that they express themselves, that they are allowed to chose the colours and do whatever they want. But after a while they understood these things and had great fun.

Felicia had the wish to learn how to read. So I made some cards and a small book to teach her. First she was not used to things taking time because in the classroom she is the best and understands things that are taught there very quickly. But after a while she got used to this. We never made it to read through the whole book I did for her, but the cards and some pages of the book she can read now.

I tried to show the teachers different teaching methods. I laminated alphabet colourful cards; the kids enjoyed it when we used them. It was something else then writing the letters of the alphabet on the blackboard. Another volunteer gave me a parachute for the unit. She brought it to Ghana and thought that I could use it. She was right. I explained to the teachers what this is and what you can do with it/ how to use it. When we played with it the children had lots of fun. We tried to teach with the parachute colours and numbers. It had worked out. I was impressed how fast the pupils and teachers have adopted the new learning/playing situation. Moreover playing with the parachute improves the students' coordination, teamwork and patience.

My mother was able to raise money that she said I could use during

my time here in Ghana. That made it possible for me to get the merry-go-round repaired. The unit already had one and I saw that the children loved it. They also played with the damaged one, so I thought that it is a great investment. Last week it was repaired, now the children play on it the whole day. That makes me happy. With this money I also wanted to make fruit weeks with Abdallah (one of the teachers). But regrettably he has had problems concerning his family in the past, which is why he was not around. We already had worked out the teaching material and wanted to start. But you can never tell what will happen suddenly in the future. I hope that he can solve the problems and does the fruit weeks without me in the third term. I leave the teaching material and the money here. I am sure, that he will make some amazing weeks with his class.

Now I am looking really forward to my last weeks here in Ghana. Next week there will be Easter and then I host a goodbye party for the pupils. Claudia and Michael (the volunteers of the EMC-Ghana-Project at Kpando) made a batik workshop with their pupils. Thankfully because of the money my mother collected I was able to order sixty-five T-Shirts from Claudia and Michael as a present for the pupils. I thought it is a nice idea that pupils from one EMH-school produce something for pupils from another EMH-school. The T-Shirts are looking great. I am sure the children will love them. At the party the children will get the T-Shirts, a mineral and a meat-pie. We will dance. I think it will be great fun, even I will be very sad, because a good-bye party means that I am going. That makes me sad.

Regrettably there were also projects that have not worked out. I wanted to introduce a chicken farm next to the gardening and farming training that already exists as a vocational training. For this you need help from a person from the agriculture sector here in Ghana. We consulted him. He came to look at the building that already exists. The building was sponsored by Tamale in the past. But after the visit he never returned to do the work. He had many excuses that he gave us, like he had to go to a funeral; our school is not really part of his area and so on. He wanted to hand in the estimate we needed to start at the beginning of November. Now it the beginning of April and he has still not given us the estimate. The other project that has not worked out is the physiotherapy room what makes me really sad. I bought all the things in Germany; we had the room (Mrs. Yelifari allowed us to use my room, after we couldn't find a room at the campus of Wa Deaf). We were allowed to start after the final 40th anniversary celebration at the end of March, but the project never came into existence. I am really sad about that. I asked Mr. Bayor after we realized that the chicken farm project would not work out, what other projects he could imagine. I thought that a physiotherapy room would be a great idea, because he got the education for that in Germany but doesn't use his knowledge here. There are many children at the unit who need

physiotherapy support. I don't know if it was a lack of motivation or what was the reason for the failing. But I leave all the things here and I hope that one day Mr. Bayor can realize the project. He promised me that when he doesn't see a way to realize it he will bring the materials to the physiotherapy at the Regional Hospital so that the things are not wasted. But I hope and wish that the project will be realized at the unit one day.

Moreover I applied at the German embassy for a small-scale-project. The unit has no running water yet. This is a big problem. Most of the time is used for fetching water. They have to fetch water for drinking, washing, farming, cleaning. Just for the everyday life. Most of the pupils have physical disabilities in addition to mental disabilities. But still they have to fetch water. I applied for running water at the embassy and I hope that we will get the money because water is the basis of every life. With the saved time the teaching could be improved a lot.

I went with Peter (he is one of our pupils) to the hospital to ask for a wheelchair. He lives far away from school and walking is difficult for him. In June 2009 people from the USA come back to Wa. They have been here before and gave the inhabitants wheelchairs for free. They just had to go to the hospital on the right day. Peter missed that day. But the people from the USA come back. Peter needs a special wheelchair but with the help of the physiotherapist of the Regional Hospital it will be possible for Peter to get this wheelchair. She promised me that she will arrange everything because by that time I will be gone. Mr. Bayor promised me that he will go with Peter to the hospital for the wheelchair. It makes me happy that Peter and I got so much support so that he finally will get a wheelchair.

6.2. My typical day at the EMH-unit

Now I want to describe one typical day at the EMH-unit. After I got up I help to get the pupils dressed. Then I get ready and go to the morning assembly. At this assembly just the deaf pupils take part, but the EMH-Staff members have to attend that assembly because there is information given out that concerns everybody at the campus of Wa Deaf. Moreover everybody has to sign in the attendance book their arrival and departure time. I don't know why the pupils of the EMH-unit don't take part. After the assembly I go back to the unit. After awhile the teachers arrive at the unit. They go to the school farm with the pupils for gardening and farm training. Often the pupils water the farm on their own without anybody look after them. But they manage the farm really well. My farming skills are not good and the farm is run by the pupils on their own, that is why I decided that I would not take part in this training and use the time for pupils with special needs. In the morning I often did tongue training with Dauda. He would be able to speak

when he could control his tongue. I have the feeling that his speaking has improved during my time here even though we stopped the training in the last weeks because he wanted to be on the farm. I also often trained with Shevera and Felicia. They have bad spasms. We trained with balls to improve their finger and feet mobility. I am really impressed how self-sufficient they are. People in Germany with spasms similar to what they have would get lots of support. For me it shows that sometimes in Germany they take too much care of people with disabilities or better they underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities. They can do much more when they have to. If you don't believe that, you just have to look at the pupils here. What they can do is impressive.

After the farming and my training the pupils eat breakfast. The first months I helped Daanasou with the eating but he is now able to eat by his own without pouring lots of the food on his shirt and the ground. Before the pupils eat they pray. The prayer is lead by the second housemother, who comes during the daytime, or often by the pupils. After the breakfast the pupils do their dishes. After the dishes are done the academic work starts. The teachers go to their classrooms and teach. First I had to get used to the way they are teaching, but I tried to assist and support them as good as I can. In one class there are up to 15 pupils. That is too many. So I tried to support the pupils who had the most problems following the lessons. Moreover I tried to give new ideas to the teachers how to change the lessons, which seemed to be the same every year. I wanted to improve their skills. I had no problems finding support for my ideas but when it came to the realization and the working part it was often only me who did the work. But sometimes the teachers joined my work and found out that that could be fun. When we started sharing the work we had a good time in the classroom together even though the beginning was not easy. We created new teaching material like number cards and I brought some things like alphabet cards, which I explained how we could use them to teach the alphabet. Sometimes I removed single pupils out of the classroom to do work with them individually outside. Some for example have problems holding a pencil, while the others where painting I taught the other pupils how to hold a pencil so that after a time these pupils were also able to paint.

After the classroom work there was break until the lunch came. This time I spent with Felicia. She is quite intelligent and in the classroom not challenged enough. So I did things with her she wishes to learn like learn how to read. I thought she deserves this because she is one of the pupils who have bad spasms. She can never be part of the farming/gardening training or dancing and sport events or the marching on Independence Day.

After that I often played with the pupils. We often played Dominos, or played with modeling clay. They loved it.

Then the pupils are eating lunch. After this they do the dishes and the school day ends. This is how it was often during the first school term. During the second school term there was not much classroom work, because after the farming/ gardening training the pupils trained for the Special Olympics in Sekondi where we took part. After that they trained for marching on Independence Day. In addition to that the unit has no running water and the borehole is quite far away. The pupils have to fetch water and especially during the dry season when there is no rain for months the farm needs additional water. After all these activities the pupils were exhausted. The teachers have then not taught the pupils who could not take part in the activities.

On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays there is teatime. The entire staff from Wa Deaf and the EMH-unit takes part. We drink tea and eat bread and learn some words in sign language. These tea times are there to improve teachers' sign language skills and for socializing. On Wednesdays there is a church service in the morning where the pupils of Wa Deaf and the EMH-unit take part. Regrettably the church service is in English and translated into sign language for the deaf students but it is not translated into Wali, so most of the pupils from the EMH-unit cannot understand what they are talking about.

6.3. Events

Even when some days were really difficult at the unit especially when the teachers did not come and I was alone with all the children I enjoyed my time there a lot and I will miss my school life here. The pupils are amazing and I am impressed how they manage everything. It is also great to see their development. What I also want to mention are the three big events we were allowed to take part in. The first event was the cultural festival in Nkoranza. This is a festival for all EMH-schools in Ghana where the pupils show a cultural display. Our pupils sang and danced. We were allowed to bring 12 pupils to Nkoranza. The numbers of pupils depended on the accommodation facilities the host school could provide. The pupils were really excited to go on a bus so far away from Wa. They enjoyed their time there. Regrettably we were just allowed to spend three of four days there because we all had to attend the first of the two 40th Anniversary Celebration of Wa Deaf. But we could go and this is what counts. Our school has no school bus, but our sister school Wa Blind has one. They have borrowed us their bus. I am very thankful for that. Even we had to leave earlier than the other schools we were able to take part in all the activities of the program. Except of the party in the evening which we could not attend, but we got the mineral in the afternoon.

The second event was the Special Olympics in Sekondi. Again, Wa Blind borrowed us the school bus. Our pupils ran in races and relay

games. They did well and had lots of fun. This time we were allowed to bring 20 pupils. Most of our pupils just observed the games but that was fine, seeing the sea was amazing for them. During the Special Olympics the 40th Anniversary of EMH in Ghana was also celebrated.

The third event was Independence Day. Our students marched. They did well. I was really proud of them. But I realized that there should be a lot more public awareness on mental disabilities because many of the visitors at Jubilee Park, where 39 schools from Wa marched, did not take our pupils seriously.

Another thing I want to mention are the parties that Wa Deaf and the NGO Child Care organized for all the pupils. There was a party for the end of the first school term and a Christmas party. Our pupils really enjoyed them. They love parties.

At the end I want to mention that I am very glad that people from Netherlands have paid for a school just for students with mental disabilities. With a school devoted exclusively to these children things will progress much faster, because it seemed that work at the school happened slowly because every idea or plan must be first taken to Mrs. Yelifari who already has enough work to do for Wa Deaf. Now she also has to do work for the EMH-unit. When there will be the new school (they say that they will move there this year, but I think that they will move there in 2 to 3 years because things need time here in Ghana) things will work out faster because then they are autonomous, can make decisions on their own. Another positive fact is that the new school will be larger than the current one. Then more children can attend the school because at the moment many children are waiting to attend our school but because of the lack of space they cannot. There will be enough accommodation for new boarding pupils. This is also really necessary because some of the pupils live far away and walk every day many hours to school or maybe by then the school will have their own school bus to pick the pupils up. Their own school bus would also make many things easier especially when they are going to events. All these things will be possible after the move because then the government has to take care of a school and not just a unit.

7. What could happen in the future

7.1. Question about a new volunteer

If I would be asked if I would send a new volunteer to the EMH-unit in Wa I would definitely say: "Yes, of course." I enjoyed my time here very much and I am sad that I have to leave. Even though there have been difficult days, the EMH-unit in Wa is a place where it is possible to realize projects, where you get support, where you can feel at home. I had the feeling that I was welcome, that the teachers enjoyed my stay and that they also gained from it. Even

when at times I annoyed them by encouraging them to teach. The school is a good school for doing voluntary work and also the town is a good place to stay. That is why I support the idea to continue sending volunteers to Wa EMH-unit.

7.2. Issues that could/ should be improved

There are some issues that should be improved on the German side and some on the Ghanaian side. The organization of the German site was problematic when it came to being clear about the costs of volunteering. It should be clear from the beginning what is paid by the government and what is not paid. The volunteer should be informed how the costs of the stay come into existence. Everything should be open for all the sites. Another things that could be improved on the German side is that during the specific workshop there should be more talk about the work in general abroad and the work of former volunteers so that the work can be improved. Also problems at each project abroad should be discussed with the new volunteers ahead of time so that they know what to expect and they can start brainstorming ways to approach or solve some of these problems before going abroad. This would save lots of time and would also improve the work of the volunteers.

On the Ghanaian side, I wish that the communication would improve within Ghana but also between Ghana and Germany. Everybody should be reachable at all times, the best way is by email because the phone lines are not that good. For a long time my project had trouble getting into contact with Wa. Which is why I found out that I was going to Ghana one month before I left. This is too short. My preparations were not as good as they would have been if I had been informed earlier. It is important to have time to arrange personal things and of course things concerning your work in the country.

8. I say good-bye

Looking back on the past eight months I must say that they have been gorgeous even when there were hard times. I enjoyed my time here. I will miss my pupils, Ghanaians and the Ghanaian Way of life. I just will miss my time here.

I learned a lot about myself during my time here; I learned a lot in general, about the world, and about life. According to me everybody should go at one point in his or her life to a place far away from home, to get to know the world a little bit better. My time here gave me a lot and I hope that I was also able to give a lot. I will now enjoy my last weeks. And then say good-bye, to start a new part of my life.