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[Editor's Note]

Although we are currently experiencing the peak of our busy season here in the Cape Town office, it seems as if our volunteers are even busier than us at the moment. Aside from fulfilling the basic daily tasks necessitated by their projects, many of the hundred or so volunteers we are currently hosting are taking great initiative in their fields of interest.

From organising field trips for the children who attend the crèche at the building site to renovating sports rooms and initiating new extracurricular activities for local schools, our volunteers are really impressing us with their proactivity.

Although we have only included a few of the biggest initiatives in this newsletter, small and great steps are taken each day by volunteers who are passionate about improving the offerings of their projects.

We are most impressed and hope that the updates that follow will inspire even more people to make their own original contributions to our country.

Lara Potgieter | South Africa Information Manager



Volunteer Initiative | Adopt-a-Family

Our Adopt-A-Family project, which provides a suitable and sustainable home for a family living in Vrygrond, one of the most vulnerable communities in South Africa, was a major hit for the Where Rainbows Meet organisation, and the day that brought everything together was just amazing!

The housewarming and braai brought volunteers from all over the world together to paint the interior of the first house, lay flooring, and move all of the furniture from outside into the new Wendy house!

Thanks to over 25 generous contributors who financed the construction of the home, donations, voluntary labour, and some tough negotiating for electricity and plumbing, we were able to complete a lovely house and helped a family who deserve to live in a place that they are proud to call home. – Rashad Underwood, Business Volunteer



Volunteer Initiative | Floreat Primary School Art Classes

When German teaching volunteer Hannah Nathrath (19) saw the beautiful pictures the students at Floreat Primary School were drawing during their literacy lessons, she simply assumed that there was some form of art instruction at the school. On enquiring, she was surprised to find that the children were not actually exposed to any form of art education.

“I was surprised because I saw this raw talent and just guessed that it was being guided and developed somehow,” she said. “I was saddened to hear that there were no formal structures in place in which they could explore their fantasies and further develop their artistic skills and taste,” she continued.

A pro-active individual, Hannah took matters into her own hands and spoke to Deputy Principal Grant Palanyandi about her idea of introducing an art class at the school.

Mr Palanyandi embraced the idea and Hannah immediately got to work fundraising for the new project. She e-mailed her friends and family back home and managed to raise R3000 for art supplies for the class.

Although it would be ideal to set something up for each student at the school, Hannah and Grant have had to start small, cleaning out and preparing a single art class for ten grade five girls (Mr Palanyandi provided a list of students he believed would really enjoy/benefit from the class).

Hannah’s hope is that future teaching volunteers will take over the art project from her once she is gone, perhaps even developing it in the same way as the literacy program that was initiated by a volunteer last year.



Volunteer Initiative I Care Photo Exhibition

Former care volunteer Emilie Sahl recently hosted an exhibition displaying photos that she had taken at her Care Project in Vrygrond.

“The reality of going back to Africa after leaving 18 years ago always scared me. What would it be like? Am I ready? Will I start finding some answers and will I fit in? I spent 18 years feeling out of place simply for the fact that at 2, I was adopted. My adoptive parents are white and I am black. As simple as it sounds there’s always been a part of me that never found peace. This trip became my mission to regain my sense of self and finally find the peace I felt I had been missing for so long.

I found that peace in the mumbling children as they drifted away into the land of dreams and fantasies. To a place where the violence of the streets can’t harm them, where they can truly be children smiling with eyes full of joy, not carrying the permanent damage of having seeing too much too early.” – Emilie Sahl



Event | Mandela Day

On Thursday 18 July, South Africa celebrated Nelson Mandela's 95th birthday with acts of conscious citizenship.

The staff and volunteers of Projects Abroad in Cape Town commemorated the occasion by spending the day in the informal settlement of Village Heights, where we assisted the City of Cape Town in a major street clean-up and distributed food to the children of the area.

Village Heights is both an area in dire need and the site of our building project, so it was very special for us to spend the day together there, making a small difference to the community for whom our building staff and volunteers work each day.



Project Overview | Journalism

Each volunteer at the Journalism Project is given the opportunity to write one print feature and four online articles for Cape Chameleon (the project's in-house publication) a month. Although volunteers come to the project to develop their English writing skills, they are also able to write a piece or two in their home language.

Even if the English writing skills of volunteers are poor, the patient staff members at the project appreciate a good work ethic and afford each volunteer individual attention, offering feedback on their work and advice for their writing in the future. The project plays host to many French volunteers, with more Germans and a few Italians visiting lately.

Sometimes journalism volunteers arrive fresh out of high school, and sometimes they are already studying journalism and would like to improve their skills or fulfil an international prerequisite for their course. Some volunteers are just interested in journalism or writing.

The project caters for photographers or photography enthusiasts too, and the redesigned version of Cape Chameleon is more image-heavy than ever. Some non-professional volunteers who like taking photos have even secured cover or inside back shots in the magazine.

Journalism volunteers can write/photograph what Assistant Editor Kelly Easton calls 'special features', which appear in the front of the publication and are often lengthy and heavily researched, or Arts and Culture/Sports pieces, which are lighter and include more images. Kelly and Editor Rebecca Saraceno do sometimes assign topics, but they prefer it when volunteers come up with their own.

One thousand copies of the Cape Chameleon magazine are printed each quarter and distributed in book stores, coffee shops, NGOs, schools and at events.

Kelly states the ideal ratio of field to office work as 60/40, explaining that it would be a waste of the volunteers' time to just sit at a computer and write all day as they could do that at home. Field work consists of interviews, research, press club attendance, Voices of the World workshops, 'creative mornings' at the Design Centre at The Old Biscuit Mill and sometimes even tours of large national media corporations such as E-TV and the Sunday Times.

Voices of the World is a subsidiary of the Journalism Project and sees Kelly and a group of volunteers visiting local high schools, educating the students about journalism in South Africa and offering them the opportunity to write for the Voices of the World website, which is also updated from India, Senegal, China and Ghana (<http://www.voices-of-the-world.org/>).

Community Overview | Vrygrond Informal Settlement

Although our care volunteers are secure and cared for at their placements in the informal settlement of Vrygrond, it is important for us all to remember the daily struggles faced by the residents of the community in order to understand the necessity and impact of the work our volunteers do there.

Pastor James E. Lewis, a respected figure in the community, spent some invaluable time with a group of two week special volunteers this month, alerting them to the realities of the plight faced by the people of the area.

According to Pastor James, the main problems in the area include high unemployment rates, drug abuse, gang violence, and fatherless homes.

“These people have nothing,” he lamented. “They will kill you for the money they need to get their drug fix.”

Pastor James’ own son was robbed at gunpoint, and shot through the face when he refused to hand over the cellphone he had worked for months to purchase. As would be assumed, incidents of this nature are rife at night, when the perpetrators actually steal the cables of the street lights and plunge the area into darkness.

Pastor James also brought the severity of the area’s sex trade to light. “I have spoken to 14-year-old girls who hate what they are doing but who feel that they have no choice in the matter,” he shared. The sex trade syndicates target young girls from poor families, luring them away from home with lucrative employment promises. Another form of sexual violence prevalent in the area is rape. Pastor James has counselled many rape victims, including a young girl who was gang raped and is now pregnant with the sixth rapist’s child.

Pastor James views his church as a home of restoration, where the destitute are counselled, protected and schooled in various fundamental life skills. This work is also done with children at the Projects Abroad care projects in the area, where volunteers play an important role in providing the care and tutelage that could prevent the children from growing into delinquent adults who need to seek refuge later in their lives.

The gangs in the area target children of primary school level, giving them things such as drugs and brand name sneakers in return for favours such as climbing through windows to rob houses. The children who were present at Pastor James’ talk could identify virtually each local gang by name.

The volunteers present were attentive and appeared to be deeply moved by the talk. They asked many questions and became even more motivated to help the community in any way they could.

Pastor James concluded the informative session with an appeal to the young volunteers to concentrate on shaping themselves into healthy, happy adults who do not find themselves ensnared in the lairs of drugs, sexual violence and other crime. "Please look after yourselves," he appealed. "Your choices determine your destiny. One mistake can destroy your life."



Photo Spread
A day in the life of a teaching volunteer



