

Miche Williams

One Year of Volunteering turned into the best moments of my life so far

I arrived in August of 2024 to begin my my volunteer year in Germany and it has been nothing short of transformative. When I first arrived I was met with the unknown a new country, new people, and the onset of winter. A season that tested me both physically and emotionally. I found myself navigating the darkest and coldest months, often wrapped in a heavy sense of isolation. Yet, it was precisely this challenge that set the foundation for meaningful growth. Thankfully there were amazing new experiences to delve into such as the christmas markets, snow and festival lights.

Spring marks a time for new beginnings, and I'm deeply grateful for them. Germany was once mine, and now, nearing the journey's end, "transformation" hardly captures how I feel. Both the seasons and my inner world have shifted. The anxiety I once felt about traveling alone has significantly lessened. I now feel a genuine sense of belonging something I thought was not going to happen. I had these thoughts because I felt disconnected because of not understanding the German language or culture that much. However now Germany, in many ways, has become home but equally a foreign place. South Africa feels like a hug because the community is so strong and we greet each other as we pass by, we smile and talk loudly, sing in the streets. This happens because joy is a rebellion to the decades of trauma we went through. In Germany that is not necessarily an event for me, so it could become isolating if you do not seek community. There are also many moments where you have to lift yourself up. There were moments on the tram when I would experience microaggressions as a black person, or going into stores to order food and being the last person to receive mine, despite being the first to order. I would receive weird looks and whispers, but I had to encourage myself which was and still is hard.

As someone who has always had the privilege of having amazing friend groups, I came here hoping for the same. In the beginning I had no idea how that would happen. I barely spoke German and as I said walking up to strangers in the beginning was not likely to happen because it felt as if people were more reserved. I downloaded an app called Bumble BFF and met some of my closest friends on the app. My circle started growing from there, these people have encouraged me, supported me and loved me. I carry their stories with me. I often find myself in a room and everyone is from everywhere in the world, Korea, Romania, New Zealand etc. somehow we all understand each other on such a deep meaningful level, that it makes your heart glee with intense joy. So I am thankful that my journey has felt this fulfilling because of these people, who I have the privilege of calling my friends.

I am currently doing a project for my volunteer centre. A film about the vision and mission of Eine Welt Forum. The project will be about the impact of the organisation and what they hope to achieve and have achieved as an organisation. The project started because I did a short video for one of the fundraisers,

and during the video I asked about the main mission of the organisation and it was quite difficult to explain. I thought a film about Eine Welt Forum could spark conversation about their vital role in supporting organizations working toward a sustainable and globally just future through education and public engagement on South-North political issues. It will make it easier to understand the work and it will be such an amazing feeling to one day look back and say I was apart of that. While volunteering here

Currently, I find myself reflecting on back about to South Africa. I am terrified to start again, but germany was a new start and it turned out wonderfully. I will take with me some important lessons I have learned since living here. One, enjoy life, Eupeans enjoy life and embrace moments. I have spent so much time going to Seepark and reading or going for walks, which I barley did, but I also live in South abd has a woman I cannot do so alone. Two you can always start over and don't be afraid to leanr. I have always been a perfetionist, but coming here and feeling lost was reminder that I am still leanring and it is oaky to ask for help. Not knowing the language and navigating a new place puts in such a vulnerable place but people will help if you ask that's why I am so thankful to my chaperons, strangers, colleauges and teachers who helped me.

Volunteering abroad has reaffirmed my belief in the importance of travel not as an escape, but as a vital part of education and self-discovery.