

# Life in writing

My name is Yibanam. I am 20 years old and I come from a small township called Samora Machel in South Africa. I am currently volunteering in Germany at a kindergarten called *Kinder- und Jugendzentrum*.

I chose to volunteer at this centre because of its mission, values, and the positive impact it has on the community. What the organisation stands for strongly aligns with my own vision, values, and goals, which is what drew me here.

I am writing this report to share my experience as a young volunteer from South Africa who is living and volunteering abroad in Germany.

## Volunteering Program and My Role

I come from an organisation called *Life Choices*, where I was first involved as a beneficiary during my high school years from 2021 to 2022. After completing the programme, I became part of the alumni network. In April 2024, I was offered an opportunity to work as an intern facilitator through the YES4Youth programme.

Through commitment and dedication, I later became a *Leaders Quest* coach in 2025. That same year, I was accepted into the international volunteering programme in Germany through a partnership between Life Choices and FIF.

In South Africa, the leaders responsible for sending volunteers to Germany are Queen Gum and Mignon Hardie. In Germany, the programme is led by Guntram, the head of the programme, and Balbina, the programme coordinator.

As a volunteer, my role includes assisting with the preparation of breakfast and lunch, fetching children from school, and helping them with their homework. I am also involved in creative and recreational activities such as dance, painting, drawing, soccer, and choir. Since I have a background in dance, I often support dance-related activities. In addition, I assist with the preparation and organisation of events hosted by the kindergarten.

## Arrival and First Impressions

After two years of applying, I could hardly believe that I was finally going to Germany. Before our departure, we participated in several preparation trainings in South Africa from March to August. These sessions included workshops and therapy sessions, which helped prepare us emotionally and mentally for the journey ahead.

On the day of departure, I felt deeply emotional. I was leaving behind everything familiar and stepping into a completely new country. Arriving in Germany was a proud and unforgettable

moment for me. I was immediately struck by the beautiful natural scenery and the warmth of the people.

During our first days, we stayed at a youth hostel where we attended a welcoming seminar. This was where I met other volunteers from Peru, as well as the facilitators and coordinators of the programme. The seminar provided valuable information about FIF and its partner organisations. We also engaged in important discussions on topics such as racism, power structures, and empowerment, which helped set the tone for our volunteering journey.

## **Adapting to Daily Life in Germany**

Adjusting to daily life in Germany came with many new and interesting experiences. One of the first things that surprised me was the long summer days, with the sun setting around 9 p.m. This was both exciting and unfamiliar to me.

I also noticed cultural differences in everyday life, such as the wide variety of bread that people enjoy. Public transport became part of my daily routine, especially travelling by tram, which runs alongside cars on the main roads. In Freiburg, where I live, some people use bicycles as their main form of transport. This inspired me to learn how to cycle, something I did not have the opportunity to do back home, not because I was not allowed, just that I was not that exposed to it that much.

## **Language and Communication**

One of the main challenges I faced upon arrival was the language barrier. Communicating in public spaces was difficult at first, as not everyone speaks English. Fortunately, we had attended basic language classes before coming to Germany, which helped us learn how to start simple conversations.

In addition, the organisation offered us an intensive two-week German language course before we began working at our volunteering centres and months after we started working, up until now in December. Over time, I became more comfortable in my environment, and my language skills gradually improved. Through my time being here I've been staying with a host family, which has now turned to my family because they understand me, treat me with respect as well as allowing me to be me while trying to make their house my home. They always include me in their plans which make me feel seen and valued as part of their family. I appreciate them, I'm also learning from them.

## **Connection, Growth, and Reflection**

A few weeks ago, I attended another seminar in Bonn, near Cologne. This experience allowed me to connect with other volunteers from different organisations. We shared our stories, supported one another emotionally, and built deep connections. Being there felt like being at

home. This journey has helped me appreciate myself and the effort it took to get here. Through challenges, perseverance, and trusting in God's timing, I have grown both personally and emotionally. Although I still have difficult days, I remain grounded by dancing, listening to music, journaling and staying connected with my fellow volunteers, friends, and family. I believe this experience marks the first chapter of my story. I am still learning, still growing, and very much a work in progress. I'm also so grateful for this opportunity.

Yibanam