

Reflection letter

As I come to the end of my ten months in Germany, I have spent a lot of time reflecting on this journey. Looking back, I realize how much I have learned, not only about Germany but also about myself. This experience has challenged me in many ways and has helped me grow personally, professionally, and emotionally. It has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

Coming to Germany was one of the biggest decisions I have ever made. Leaving my family, friends, and everything familiar behind was not easy. I arrived in a completely new environment with a different language, culture, climate, and way of life. At first, adjusting to these changes was challenging. Learning German was one of the most difficult parts of my experience. There were moments when I felt overwhelmed, but I kept reminding myself why I had chosen this journey. With time, patience, and support from those around me, I became more comfortable communicating and navigating daily life.

Living in Konstanz played a huge role in helping me settle into Germany. I was fortunate to live in student housing where I met people from different countries and backgrounds. The friendships I built made me feel welcome and gave me a sense of belonging. Sharing experiences with other volunteers and students taught me to appreciate different perspectives and helped me become more open-minded.

My placement at the kindergarten has been the highlight of my volunteer service. From the beginning, the teachers, children, and parents welcomed me with kindness and respect. They made me feel like part of the team and trusted me with responsibilities that helped me grow. Working with children has taught me patience, creativity, responsibility, and the importance of building positive relationships. Every day brought new opportunities to learn and improve myself.

One of the most valuable parts of this experience has been cultural exchange. I had the opportunity to share my South African background and my Xhosa culture with the children, teachers, and parents. Whether through conversations, activities, songs, or traditions, I enjoyed introducing people to where I come from. At the same time, I learned so much about German culture, customs, and everyday life. This exchange helped me understand that learning goes both ways. I was not only here to receive knowledge but also to contribute to my own experiences.

I was fortunate enough not to experience any discrimination or racism during my stay in Germany. Throughout my volunteer service, I felt respected, welcomed, and included by

the people around me. The teachers, children, parents, and members of the community treated me with kindness and openness, which allowed me to settle into my new environment with confidence. This positive experience helped me build meaningful relationships, focus on my role as a volunteer, and fully embrace the cultural exchange that made this journey so rewarding.

This experience has also helped me grow as a person. I have become more independent, adaptable, and confident in my ability to face unfamiliar situations. Living far away from home taught me how to solve problems on my own, build new relationships, and step outside my comfort zone. There were difficult moments, especially when I missed my family and adjusted to a new environment, but those moments helped me become stronger and more resilient.

As my volunteer service comes to an end, I have mixed emotions. I am excited to return home and reconnect with my family and community. At the same time, saying goodbye is one of the hardest parts of this journey. Germany has become more than a place where I volunteered. It has become a place where I created lifelong memories, built genuine friendships, and discovered new strengths within myself. Leaving behind the children, my colleagues, and the people who have become part of my daily life is not easy.

I return home with new skills, greater confidence, and a deeper understanding of different cultures. I also return with a greater appreciation for the importance of kindness, inclusion, and human connection. These are lessons I will carry with me throughout my life, and I hope to share them with my community in South Africa.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to FIF VAMOS, my volunteer center, my colleagues, the children, the parents, my mentors, and everyone who supported me throughout this incredible journey. Thank you for believing in me and for giving me an opportunity that has shaped me in ways I never imagined. This experience will always hold a special place in my heart.

Kind regards,

Mziyanda Sonteya