

GROWING THROUGH CHANGE

ALUNCEDO'S FINAL REPORT

Warm greetings,

My name is Aluncedo Nogutsha, and I am from Cape Town, South Africa. As I come to the end of my volunteer service in Germany, I have been reflecting on everything this journey has brought me; new experiences, unexpected challenges, meaningful encounters, and valuable lessons that have shaped me both personally and professionally.

When I first accepted this opportunity through Life Choices in partnership with FIF (Fachstelle Internationale Freiwilligendienste) and its programme VAMOS!, I was excited about experiencing a new country, learning a new language, and contributing to a different community. Like many people starting an international volunteer service, I arrived with expectations, curiosity, and a willingness to embrace whatever lay ahead. Looking back now, I realise that the experience became much more than I had imagined.

Stepping Into the Unknown

Moving to Germany meant stepping into an entirely different way of life. Everything—from the language and work culture to everyday routines—required adjustment. During the welcoming seminar with the South African and Peruvian volunteers, I quickly realised that we were all navigating similar emotions. Although we came from different backgrounds, we shared the excitement and uncertainty of beginning a new chapter far from home.

One of the biggest challenges for me was the language. While the German courses provided an important foundation, real-life conversations at work were naturally much faster and less predictable. As someone who enjoys connecting with people, I sometimes found it frustrating that I couldn't always express myself as freely as I wanted. Over time, however, I learned that communication is about much more than perfect grammar. Patience, active listening, observation, and a willingness to keep trying became just as important.

Learning Through Challenge

I began my volunteer service at Fachklinik Münstertal, where I supported the childcare team while parents attended therapeutic and medical appointments. Working in this environment introduced me to the importance of patience, empathy, and responsibility. Every day reminded me that behind each family was a different story, and that even simple interactions with children could make a positive difference.

As the months passed, I also began reflecting on my own learning goals. I realised that while I valued the experience, I was most motivated by work that connected people with nature, environmental education, and sustainability. This wasn't a criticism of my first placement; rather, it was an opportunity to better understand my own strengths and the kind of environment in which I could contribute most meaningfully.

One of the most significant parts of my volunteer year was the process of changing

placements/centre of volunteering. At first, it was not easy. I remember feeling uncertain and questioning myself. I wondered whether I simply needed more time to adapt or whether my concerns were valid. Since I had come to Germany with the intention of making the most of the opportunity, admitting that my first placement was not the right fit felt difficult. I did not want to disappoint anyone or give the impression that I was unwilling to face challenges.

During that period, I experienced a mixture of emotions. There were moments of frustration because I wanted to contribute more meaningfully, but I was also unsure whether a different placement would even be possible. The uncertainty was challenging, I did not know how long the process would take or what the outcome would be. At the same time, I continued carrying out my responsibilities at the clinic while discussions were taking place, which taught me the importance of remaining professional even when things felt unresolved.

As the conversations with my coordinators continued, I gradually realised that asking for a transfer was not about avoiding difficulties. Instead, it was about reflecting honestly on my learning goals and recognising where I could contribute most effectively. I learned that advocating for myself could be done respectfully, through open communication and a willingness to work together toward a solution.

The transition itself required patience, trust, and openness from everyone involved. Looking back, I appreciate that my coordinators took my concerns seriously and supported me throughout the process. Rather than seeing the placement change as a setback, I now see it as one of the most valuable learning experiences of my volunteer year. It showed me that growth sometimes comes from being honest with yourself, embracing uncertainty, and remaining open to change.

When the opportunity to move to Ökostation Freiburg became possible, I saw it not simply as a change of workplace, but as a continuation of my volunteer year with a clearer understanding of my own interests and strengths. The experience reminded me that growth is not always about staying in the same place despite difficulties; sometimes it is about recognising where you can learn, contribute, and develop most effectively while remaining respectful of everyone involved.

Finding a New Environment

Joining Ökostation Freiburg marked a new chapter in my volunteer year. The work offered a wide variety of experiences, from environmental education and practical outdoor activities to supporting community events and learning about sustainability in everyday practice.

What I appreciate most about Ökostation is the opportunity to experience many different aspects of the organisation rather than focusing on a single routine. Every week brings something new to learn, whether it is working outdoors, preparing educational activities, or helping with projects that encourage people to engage with nature.

The working environment has also helped me continue developing my confidence. Since several colleagues speak English, communication became more accessible when necessary,

while still giving me many opportunities to practise my German in everyday situations. This balance has allowed me to participate more actively and to continue improving without feeling overwhelmed.

What Germany Has Taught Me

Looking back, I realise that this year has taught me far more than I expected. It has taught me to be adaptable when things do not go according to plan. It has taught me to communicate honestly while remaining respectful. It has taught me that asking for support is not a weakness, but part of learning. Most importantly, it has taught me that growth is not always about enduring a situation; it is also about recognising when change can create better opportunities for learning and contribution.

Living in Germany has also deepened my appreciation for home. Being away from South Africa has made me value familiar traditions, relationships, and everyday moments even more. At the same time, Germany has given me experiences, friendships, and perspectives that I will carry with me long after my volunteer service ends.

Looking Ahead

As this chapter comes to an end, I leave with much more than memories. I leave with a big gratitude, greater confidence, new skills, a broader perspective, and a clearer understanding of the kind of work that inspires me.

This volunteer year has reminded me that growth rarely follows a straight path. Sometimes the most valuable experiences come from uncertainty, reflection, and having the courage to embrace change.

I am deeply grateful to Life Choices, FIF and its VAMOS! programme, my host organisations, my coordinators, colleagues, fellow volunteers, and everyone who contributed to this journey. Each person, conversation, and experience has played a role in shaping my year in Germany.

Thank you for following my journey and for making this experience possible.

Warm regards,
Aluncedo