

I am really proud of myself for taking this opportunity. I think travelling to an unknown country is brave and I feel brave for doing it. I decided to trust myself and take a chance at fate.

When I arrived in Germany. I was scared and doubtful. Scared of the novelty, the people and whether or not I will be able to integrate properly into Germany and live the 'German' way.

Before I came to Germany I was told that Germans are punctual, efficient, precise, direct and a little bit rude. This scared me, especially coming from a society that is the complete opposite - South Africa. In South Africa, I run on 'African time' which is a term relating to feeling time, feeling the vibe, understanding the occasion and then showing up accordingly - usually a bit late. With pleasantries, niceties, subtle nods and headshakes being the intricate fabric of every social interaction. If I remember to greet the cashier at my local grocery shop my chances of being informed of a discount or 'Angebot' is certain. I feared my kindness won't get me anywhere in Germany, especially as a person who struggles to speak the language. I got most things wrong, there is no 'German' way. Kindness is universal. Surprisingly, most Germans know and understand English.

I volunteered at 'Haus der Begegnung' in Freiburg, Landwasser. 'Haus der Begegnung' translates to 'House of Encounters' - sounds weird, because I was like, what encounters? With whom? Why? That was my first impression of the centre's name when I tried putting the name in a translator app when I got my volunteer brief. Now I've realised that the name is actually reflective of the centre. The centre is a multi generational treasure with a particular focus I think, on a form of communal social work. It serves as a 'third space' running multiple programmes and events for kids, teens, youth and seniors. Their programmes include hosting; cooking groups, crafting groups, sporting groups, information sessions, parties, language lessons etc.

I work 5 days/40 hours a week. I do different things in the house including; Hausmeister work (cleaning outside), shopping, watering plants, making event placards, setting up chairs and tables for events, tidying up chairs and tables, food prep, setting up the play area etc. I do different things on different days but I assist mainly in 'Kinder-bereich' simply put; with the kids on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The work day would include me setting up the play mats, setting up the football posts, turning the arcade machine on, getting water and refilling food items that will be sold in the Spieltheke. After school, which is when we open our doors for the kids I will mainly head up the Spieltheke. Heading up the Spieltheke includes selling food items, letting out toys to the kids, serving water and keeping inventory on the play items (board games, balls, toys etc).

My favourite work time is Thursday mornings. On Thursdays I assist with 'Frauen-Cafe' which is basically breakfast service for a group of women. The women who attend the program are mainly immigrants. I start the day by preparing coffee and helping prepare the breakfast. When the women finally arrive they can sit down and enjoy breakfast. The program is a combination of crafting, cooking, information sessions talking and sharing experiences and opportunities. The women who attend the program are mostly middle aged women and I find the generational gap interesting. It helps me learn and compare experiences. Most importantly that I have a sense of community. Being the only person of colour, the only black person in a space can be exhausting. Mainly because no one can relate to your experiences. This makes it hard to build lasting connections because of

differences in world views and perspectives. Frauen Café reminds me that I am not alone and people with similar experiences to mine exist. This is because the participants are also women of colour from countries of the Global South and I find it easier to relate to them.

Volunteer work is isolating and lonely. Working every day of the work week is tiring for me. It leaves no time and space for learning the language, travelling and following through with hobbies. It is also hard to build and navigate social spaces because of the language barrier. I say this because I work in a physically demanding job and most of the time, I come back from work late and tired, meaning I only have time to cook and rest. German Winter is brutal especially to someone who comes from a country situated in the tropics. I have never seen snow, enjoyed snow, walked in snow and hated snow before coming to Germany. It is very hard to adjust to the weather when you are used to warmth. I have lived in Cape Town my whole life and Cape Town has harsh winters which are usually cold and wet but I have never had to wear 3 pants to survive the cold. The days are shorter and there's mostly no sun. It is very important to take your Vitamin D tablets.

Luckily, FIF helps with language integration courses and sometimes, attending volunteer seminars does feel like travelling. I am grateful that most of my colleagues can understand English because my language progress has been a bit slow. My colleagues have been amazing and patient. Patient when I can't understand, when I don't know and when I am learning how to do things. The kindness to listen to my ideas, to translate in English when I don't understand, to help me learn German and to let me make mistakes. My colleagues come from different backgrounds with different ways of living and being. Yet despite their differences make a conducive and exciting work environment. They have helped me to understand that Germany is not a monolith and that different people react differently to different things.