

## Interview with German volunteers

Franziska Schrapel (19) and Mirjam Meixner (18) arrived at Lavender Hill from Germany (Braunschweig) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2011. They started working as volunteers for the New World Foundation the next day. I have an interview with them on a very hot afternoon in January 2012.

### **Why did you choose to become a volunteer for New World Foundation?**

Franziska: I have always been interested in other cultures. In school you have to choose what you want to do, I chose languages. After school, before I wanted to study I first wanted to go somewhere, else, to have a new experience. It was also to meet new people and to learn from them, to become more self-confident. Right now I don't have my family around anymore, I'm in a different surrounding, it's interesting to learn from that. I also became a volunteer because I wanted to do something social and give something back to the community. And I wanted to work with children.

Mirjam: For me it was the same reasons. I did not want to go studying straight after school, without a break. I'm interested in Africa, because my father was here some time ago for work. I wanted to do something different from a holiday trip, I wanted to do something social.

Franziska: Our church has a very strong link to Lavender Hill, they are supporting the New World Foundation. Our pastor often visited Lavender Hill and she told us about it. That's how I got interested in the New World Foundation. But in the beginning I was changing my mind very often. I was interested in going to America or Australia. But when friends of us came back after 3 years in Malawi, they had a lot to talk about and they described how it is to stay there, that was when I began to search for projects in Africa.

### **How does your family feel about you working here?**

Franziska: They know we are safe here, they know the New World Foundations is watching us. Even when we heard about the gang shootings in the community I didn't feel scared. That was actually a bit confusing, because maybe I ought to be scared, but they told us what to do and how to behave. It's sometimes hard to imagine that it's really happening. It's more like being a movie. Sometimes the problem is that we hear a lot of things on violence. One day an Educare teacher was telling me about a little girl who was shot in the head. Then I'm telling my parents, and they are saying: "Oh my God, what are you doing there?" But I will say New World Foundation is safe. My parents are glad that I did this, it helps us a lot, we learn a lot of things. I'm the only child, they are always a little bit scared and don't want to let me go.

Mirjam: Sometimes when I tell my mom about shootings she can't believe I'm so calm, but for us it's like normal, you get used to it.

### **What are your responsibilities at New World Foundation?**

Mirjam: On our first day, we looked at the different programmes the organization has. Then we both decided to go and work for the crèche. We look after the children, we sing songs, we help them with colouring and painting. Most of the learning stuff is done by the teachers. We also help out with the Girls Club. Sometimes we help the Aftercare programme also.

### **What do you like most about being a volunteer at NWF?**

Mirjam: I like to help these children to learn something, to see how they develop. Especially now you can really see it, because the new school year just started and in the beginning they don't know anything. They are not used to school. You have to be very calm with them and have a lot of patience. Already in these few days they started to get used to it. What I also really like is that the New World Foundation is such a great community, you always feel like part of a family. If you need something you can speak to anyone. The people are also interested in your background, in your parents.

Franziska: It's very impressive that the children get used to you so quickly, you get the impression that they really need you and that you can give something back to them. The teacher also needs you, sometimes there is so much to do. We have 36 children in one class, you want to help everyone, but you have to learn how to help everyone a little bit.

### **What did you expect to find in Lavender Hill?**

Mirjam: At first I was surprised, I didn't expect there to be so many stone houses. When you see the flats, my first impression was that it's not so bad for a township. You always think it's just those shacks. But then you see that the housing is actually very bad, although from the outside it looks okay. I was impressed that there are so many people and children on the streets, you don't have that in Germany so much. I first thought it was nice, but then I saw that even during the night the children are all still playing outside without any attention from adults.

### **What do you think is the biggest problem in Lavender Hill?**

Mirjam: I think the biggest problem is the violence. The children listen much better when you have a strong voice. Many of them are beaten at home. Sometimes you have the feeling that they will only listen when you give them a smack. But then it will just become a vicious

circle, because you don't want to hit a child but you see that they are coming into school and you see how they are treated at home. Some of them are very active and some of them are just doing their own things, they don't listen at all. You see that at home they don't get a lot of attention, That's a big problem Also the gangsterism is a big problem. For this reason it's good that kids get Educare and Aftercare, someone is looking after them.

Franziska: At the Girls Club, first they were not behaving very well and did not respect each other, but now they do and they are very grateful towards New World Foundation. Last Friday was very impressive because we normally end with a prayer. And after that they all wanted to give one rand, because they said New World Foundation is giving them so much and they felt they were not giving anything back.

### **What was your first impression of NWF?**

Franziska: At the beginning we were at a staff meeting, they were talking about the changes, about how to make the organization more organised. I had the feeling they are developing a lot of things. I was also impressed that they have so many projects and so many ideas of what they can do for the community. In Germany we just heard about the crèche and aftercare.

Mirjam: I also feel this way; it was good to hear that there are so many programmes.

### **What is the most important lesson you have learnt while being a volunteer?**

Mirjam: I learnt that you don't have to be afraid to express yourself. I was always a little bit shy to start to talk for example, because of my English. Now I know that, although I still make a lot of mistakes, it's okay to practice. You just get more self-confident.

Franziska: I learnt also that it's always important that you don't judge, you first have to see what this culture is all about. If you always say your culture is the best it would be very difficult to fit in.

### **Is there something you would like to say to new volunteers in the form of advice?**

Franziska: I would advise them to be open. Just to talk to anyone you want to talk to, ask for things. The people here are very open to that.

### **What are your plans when you get back home?**

Mirjam: At the moment I'm thinking about making this connection of learning by working or to go study. Maybe I will go for a year to India, where my parents are currently staying.

Franziska: I want to start to study. I'm thinking about Medicine, but it could be difficult to get in, because there is a lot of students who want to do that. I would like to be a doctor for children.