

Danielle Burman - Emafini School & Emmanuel - Volunteer Report

July-September 2010

Note from *people and places*: Danielle was matched with a placement in Emafini School, but as a result of industrial action by public sector workers in August, the schools closed. Knowing that strike action was likely, alternative placements for Danielle and co-volunteers had been previously discussed with the local team and projects, making it possible for volunteers to transfer to other project.

I arrived in South Africa Port Elizabeth on Monday 26th July and my placement at Emafini Primary School started on Wednesday 28th July, where I stayed until the strike, then moved to Emmanuel Advice Care Centre, which is where I stayed for the duration of my time.

Now that I have experienced my volunteer placement, I can honestly say that no matter how much preparation you do before hand you can never fully be prepared for what you will encounter throughout your experience. I did all my research, I asked the questions, I read the newsletters and I spoke with other experienced volunteers, which was very important and extremely helpful. I made sure I was equipped with teaching material, books, workshops, songs, games etc which at points became my life line as I had to improvise a lot.

I think following your instinct and asking the questions no matter how stupid you think they are is important to do in your time running up to leaving for your placement, especially for myself as I am only 21. I had never been involved with anything like this before and I felt very apprehensive about the whole thing and definitely had moments of self doubt, which Kate was more than helpful with when I hit these points. After speaking with other volunteers it's perfectly normal, we all hit that point at some stage.

Meeting Paul and the calabash team was when everything really hit home, everything fell into place and I felt very much in safe hands. Paul was very to the point with everything, he was honest and he didn't mislead in anyway shape or form, which is what I really liked about him and he quickly made me realise what to expect and it allowed me to be able to place my visions and expectations.

I did unfortunately have a bit of a bumpy ride at the start of my volunteer placement, which looking back now I am glad that I went through as it led me to Emmanuel. My placement outline for Emafini Primary School was that I was to assist teachers in class during the day, run Drama classes after school, help with the book competition and create a play to be performed. The strike for me couldn't have come at a better time as Paul and myself had already discussed me possibly being pulled out of Emafini, which I didn't want as I didn't want

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to cause any problems or issues, so the strike was somewhat of a life line. I definitely take some responsibility to the outcome of the situation as I do feel that I allowed them to judge my capability as a 21 year old volunteer and many of times I sat back when I could have been pushing much more.

Note from people and places: when Danielle's placement began, school staff were very much pre-occupied with the threatened strikes and the potential impacts – impacts for themselves as well as for volunteers. This was fully understood and appreciated by our local partners, who were able to manage the situation for volunteers and make alternative arrangements for their placement input.

Being at Emmanuel was the biggest turn around for me and it truly was the most amazing experience I could have ever asked for, "Everything really does happen for a reason".

At Lynn Earley's leaving ceremony I was really intrigued by a young group of performers who performed a play they had created themselves and a dance. So I was very determined to work with this group who I later found out to be the OVC'S. I set up my Drama group with them which was a program that run every day for 2 hours (if I was lucky), I did acting workshops with them, which enabled me to build their confidence within themselves but also within me, it helped to build strong relationships and a circle of trust, it opened their eyes to the possibilities acting/dance can offer and it allowed us to have a lot fun and laughter. I also worked on helping them choreograph their own dance and I created a Physical Theatre piece that looked at the separations within their society, an observation of mine was that all the segregations within not only the youth but the country was still very strong in their lives and a hot topic in conversation, so it seemed inevitable to make this our subject for the play.

Note from people and places: our local partners told us that the show was a great success – very well attended by children, families, community carers – and the local Social Worker came too!

I also spent my time in the crèche where I helped in every way I could, Nelly and Purmaizer are very good at what they do so my main aim was to install some structure as the daily routine was very broken and gave the children plenty of space and time to misbehave, so I drew up a daily routine that I put together with Purmaizer. I also was very concerned with the way the discipline was being dealt with and I decided to put a star of the week reward chart into place, I drew up a chart bought lots of star stickers and introduced it to Purmaizer and Nelly.

We did it so that every Friday afternoon Purmaizer would reward a couple of children for good work or behaviour and we did it as almost a ceremony so they felt special and proud of what they had achieved. I also taught the children some songs that they later performed at the performance the carers and myself had set up for my Drama group to perform for crèche children.

I think that great thought has gone into each project that has volunteer placements and everyone involved is committed one hundred percent, which is what makes this set up work

and is a huge strength of both *people and places* and calabash, the relationship between both organisations is essential and both parties have got it right, which is so important to the individual volunteer and much appreciated. At all times I felt in safe hands and I was never left in the dark about anything, which again is very important.

For future volunteers, I would love for the rewarding system I put in place for the crèche to be pushed and possibly added to with any other idea's that are money saving and not time consuming as these are very important when wanting results and co-operation. I also would like other ways of disciplining the children to be explored, maybe trying other ideas with Purmaizer, being the naughty chair/corner etc and bringing more positivity into the crèche so the children can be a part of an environment that allows them to feel safe and confident. With my Drama Group I would just like them to be seen acting /dancing/singing and pushed to work on creating different performances to be performed in town halls, so they can raise some fundraising for Emmanuel and for themselves as we all spoke about when I was there. I think it would be important and needed for someone to oversee that the words are being put into practice and that Estolene is helping with finding different locations for them to perform at and that the vision of the project that they had even before I was there is being put into place.

Note from people and places: future volunteer placements will indeed follow-up on Danielle's work and achievements. This 'passing of the baton' is a crucial element in achieving long-term gains for the project – something we all take very seriously!

I feel my successes would be overcoming my own weaknesses and learning to relax and take every day as it came and realising that not having structure or control over a situation isn't always a problem and most of the time this is when the positives happen. I feel I brought something very different to a volunteer placement and a completely different energy and way of working, which enabled the group who I worked with to play, create and have fun and it allowed them to express themselves and trust themselves as well as other people.

I was extremely lucky to have met three wonderful other volunteers Lynn, Michael and Noeleen, who became very good friends and who I spent a lot of my leisure time with, doing a lot of sightseeing and also soaking in the culture we were living in. Mikie who I was staying with also did a lot with me, whether it was going shopping or carting me off to Johannesburg for a funeral, she always kept me company.

My accommodation could have not been better, I was truly blessed to have been put with Mikie as she was the most lovable character you could ever meet, she had a huge personality and always made us laugh. She looked after me very well and made me feel extremely welcome in her home. The house was always clean and tidy as Mikie takes great pride in her home and the food was immense, I do not think I had the same meal twice!! I would definitely

choose a home stay again and I would always stay in a township as that's where you learn the most, culturally.

Being a volunteer is the most life changing experience I have ever been a part of and it's something I never thought would be possible but I have done it.

I would do it again and I will always recommend it as I couldn't imagine a more fulfilling, well worth, beautiful experience to be a part of and it's something that will be with me for the rest of my life.

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