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Cecilia Eggleston – 7th November to 18th December 2016

All Out Africa, working with Neighbourhood Care Point teachers and NCP Co-ordinator

Pre departure preparation

The information that was sent was very thorough and helpful in terms of preparing me for life in Swaziland and the role of the NCPs. Meeting with Dianne Ashman (*people and places' volunteer programme advisor*) face to face was particularly helpful, as I was able to ask detailed questions about the work and the culture in Swaziland. Many of these arose from the conversation that we were having at the time and I might not have thought about otherwise – for example, how to address the teachers in a respectful manner and what clothes would be appropriate to wear in the classroom.

Experience and Work

The placement outline sent by people and places was accurate. My initial expectation was that I would work with two NCP particular teachers and then work on the curriculum. I spent two weeks at Ekuzukekeni NCP, working with and observing Teacher Zodwa. When I explained to Eunice, the NCP Co-ordinator, what I intended to do to help Zodwa improve her teaching, she thought it would benefit all the teachers and so we agreed to offer some training towards the end of my placement. This also became the focal point for engaging the teachers in developing their curriculum.

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With Teacher Zodwa. Rehearsing a song with the children at Ekuzukekeni NCP before the graduation ceremony – I attended 6 of these at the different NCPs supported by All Out Africa

I have emailed a file containing the key documents that I developed with Eunice and the teachers. We wrote lesson plans for the first four themes of the new school year, developed a lesson planning template and forms to complete as part of the “official books” that all preschools are required to have.

Note: these documents will also be available to volunteers, where relevant, during their preparation for their own placements

I also introduced some songs to the teachers and typed up ones that they shared with each other during the four mornings of training.

The work with Eunice did not go well initially. The detailed timetable provided by All Out Africa showed that I would be accompanied to the NCPs by Eunice every morning and work with her most afternoons. It very quickly became apparent that this was not going to happen, but I was not initially informed that this was the case. When I did get time with Eunice, she was not focussed on the work and it was hard for me to understand what the organisation actually wanted. Matters came to a head at the end of the second week. I had agreed with Eunice that I would spend all day Friday in the office with her, working on the curriculum. I asked her to do some preparatory work on one of the themes so that we could work on it together. On the Friday morning, Eunice told me that she was sick and was going off to the doctors, so wouldn't be back. She had not done the work that I had asked her to do and seemed not to understand even what I was talking about. I was frustrated and angry. I really felt like quitting. One of the other staff members, Tanele, offered to spend some time talking with me about her experience of working with NCP teachers. This was very helpful. We agreed to put the work on the curriculum on hold and I would stay out of the office for a week. Tanele and Tsengisa both handled a difficult situation well and listened to my frustrations.

On the Monday, Eunice came to apologise and I explained that it felt very disrespectful and a waste of my time if she was not prepared to make time to do our work and to focus on the task in hand. I reminded her that all of us volunteers pay a lot of money to come and do this work. Yuko, the senior staff person on the office, in the absence of Sarah, also came to see me, which I really appreciated. She told Eunice that she could use the meeting room for our work, so that Eunice would be less distracted. After all this, Eunice did really focus and we planned the training for the teachers together. She had not led any training before, so I helped her to focus on her own areas of expertise, got her to practice being at the front of the training room and “claiming her space” and other techniques which help when facilitating training with adults.

Note: this sequence of events exemplifies how vital it is to establish good communications between volunteers and project principals in order to focus on positive results – a success story !



The training went really well. Eunice focussed on good practice in preschool education and gave the teachers practical experience, for example, how to make playdough, how to read a story. I had taken out seven copies of the book "Handa's Surprise", which was in the original curriculum produced by Dianne, and Eunice read this to the teachers, as she would a group of children.

Eunice has only been in post for a few months, so I think it was a chance for the teachers to get to know her better and to see what support she can offer them.

I focussed on helping the teachers to understand why All Out Africa wanted to develop a curriculum and then worked with them to get their ideas for teaching the first four themes. It was a very proud moment to give them the files containing the first part of the curriculum, with all their names written on the front page as contributors. At the end of the training, the teachers were all presented with certificates, and a range of resources to go home with. I also taught them some songs and typed up songs that they suggested and included them in the resources they took away with them.

The teachers receiving their training certificates from Kim, the owner of All Out Africa.

(L to R: Mbali, Zandi, Eunice, Mgazi, Kim, Iris, me, Zodwa, Nkosingphile)



Besides the work with the NCP teachers, I spent two afternoons a week at two homework clubs for primary school children. We did reading, spelling and some maths with the children. One of the other volunteers in a previous group was a homework club teacher in the Netherlands and was a bit frustrated about how the clubs were being run. I suggested she share her ideas with Tsengisa, who runs the clubs. He responded positively to her ideas and also included me in basic planning of the remaining sessions. (Another volunteer, Joyce, and I with some of the children from the Mlindazwe homework club)



The highlight of my volunteering experience happened in the week that I was out of the office.

I spent two morning bricklaying with Michael, who does the building and maintenance work for All Out Africa. He was building a kitchen at one of the NCPs where I was based. A long held desire to do some solid construction work was one of the things that started this whole volunteering adventure, so I was delighted to be able to do this. After the frustrations of the previous two weeks, it was particularly gratifying to be able to see immediate progress and to know that there are two layers of bricks in the Mlindazwe NCP that have my fingerprints on them!

Recommendations for the input of future volunteers – a particular area of your work which could be continued by others and how would you suggest this could be done?

I am not a pre-school teacher. My particular skills were in facilitating the teachers to offer their ideas to develop the curriculum and to be able to put their ideas, and those of Eunice, into a usable framework. I enjoy drafting documents that are “user friendly”.

Any volunteers with preschool teaching experience would greatly enhance the curriculum and give the teachers more ideas for how to engage, encourage and where necessary, discipline children in a positive way. The NCPs take children from 3 to 8, so there is a wide range of abilities in every group. Helping the teachers to manage this diversity would also be a great benefit.

There is also a need for basic resources to be produced for every NCP. Any volunteer who has a flair for art could do these – posters showing different parts of the body, local animals (Swazi cows don’t look like European cows), individual numbers and letters on laminated card, and so on.

Successes and disappointments of placement

The biggest disappointment was having to assert myself to get the work done. I really did want to have a stress free time.

The biggest success was that all the teachers attended the training and really engaged with it.

It was so enchanting to see them play with playdough for the first time.

I was also very proud to present them with the first part of the curriculum. I have always worked to “build up people”, to tell them that they are great and that they can do stuff that they don’t think that they can. This work was a fine example of that for me.

Note: though initial frustrations and disappointment were certainly overcome, as is clear in the resultant success of this placement in establishing ‘buy-in’ to ideas among the local staff.

What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

Bricklaying. The rest of the placement is stuff that I have done all my working life, one way or another. Doing the bricklaying was fulfilling a dream. And I was not painfully stiff afterwards either, which was a bonus!

Would you recommend volunteering to other people or not? please tell us why.

Yes definitely. For the mature volunteer, it is a chance to take stock, to try something different. Even to *be* someone different for a while. This was certainly the case for me and what I wanted from the placement – to be seen as a person in my own right, instead of a role, which everyone projects their own ideas onto.

How did you spend your leisure time?

Evenings can be a bit of a challenge without your own transport, or if the power goes off. It got dark by 6pm when I first arrived and it isn't safe to travel on the kumbis (local minibuses) at night. The only cinema in Swaziland is 5 minutes drive from Lidwala Lodge, at The Gables shopping centre, and Wednesday night is half price. I went there several times with other volunteers. There are also some restaurants there for a change of menu.

There is a local nature reserve, which you can get to by taxi. I visited a couple of times and saw zebra, many types of antelope, crocodiles and many species of birds. The gardens at Mandela's B&B are small but beautiful. I spent my Saturday mornings walking through them at snail's pace, observing all the local wildlife.

Lidwala and Mandela's both have outdoor pools. You can do laps in the Mandela one, which was bliss after a hot and sticky day. At Lidwala, there is a TV room and films to choose from. We also played cards, chatted and read. At Mandela's, the bar has a TV and I ate my evening meal in there sometimes, whilst watching a football match.

I went on the ziplining weekend which was excellent. I struggled to control my speed on the ziplines, so one of the guides ended up zipping with me. Scenery etc was fabulous. The trip also included a guided tour round an old mine and a visit to a glass factory. In the last week, I treated myself to a day at the Swazi Royal Spa Hotel, complete with massage. Definitely a treat worth having!

Trips organised as part of the placement included a walking tour of the museum and the local village of Lobamba, which was certainly a good way of grounding us in the Swazi experience and a visit to Swazi Candles and other businesses, great for present buying.

When I was organising my trip, I was very focussed on the volunteering aspect, rather than the sightseeing part of the experience. I rather regret that and wish I had booked to go to Kruger National Park or explore more of Swaziland.

How was your accommodation?

I split my time between the Lidwala Lodge and Mandela's B&B. In both places I had an ensuite double room, modern and comfortable, with a ceiling or other fan provided. At the B&B, I also had a kettle and tea



etc in my room. I bought a cheap kettle and mug to use in my room at Lidwala, as the room was a short walk through the grounds to the main kitchen and I didn't want to have to walk in my jammies to get my first cuppa of the day.

At Lidwala, all three meals are included in the price. The food is plentiful, but basic. There are other guests staying as well as the AOA volunteers, so the kitchen sometimes gets crowded and not always pristine – although the staff did keep on top of this. It began to feel a bit too “studenty” for me.

At Malandela's, a very good breakfast is included in the price, but then you are left with the challenge of what to eat for lunch and tea, when you don't have access to a fridge. The restaurant at Malandela's is excellent and there is a simple bar menu. I bought fruit, crackers, cheese and cup-a-soups to eat in my room or to use for lunches. There are two well stocked supermarkets at the Gables, as well as a local market about 10minutes walk from Malandela's. I paid for an evening meal at Lidwala a couple of times, before going to the cinema with the others, when I stayed at Malandela's. The B&B is situated in a different region from Lidwala and the Gables, so the taxi fare shot up, making nights out expensive when I was staying there. (Kumbi fare is 12E max, taxi fare E120 plus tip).

It suited me to spend my time between the two places, Malandela's was more “grown up” and felt more relaxed. Lidwala's was much more convenient for the volunteering and made it easier to spend time with the other volunteers.

Anything else you want us to know

All Out Africa have employed several new staff in key positions in the past eighteen months, including Eunice and Tsengisa. I think that that the organisation is going to really grow and develop over the next year and this will offer increasingly positive experiences for volunteers.

For example, if the teachers enjoy using the curriculum, it will help them to use the NCP volunteers more effectively by telling them what to do, instead of leaving the volunteers to decide what to do with the children – quite a daunting prospect! Some of the volunteering relies on the weather being good. If the weather is bad, having a list of resources that the volunteers can work on, means that they are doing something positive that will help, rather than just filling time.

I hope that I can go back and finish the work on the NCP curriculum, but if I don't, I still feel as though my experience has been very worthwhile.

Note: and Cecilia did indeed return for a second placement with the NCP's – her second report will accompany this one.

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Thank you.