

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

Katherine Byrne – Good Work Foundation (GWF) in Hazyview, South Africa - Oct 15th to Nov 9th 2018

- pre departure preparation

Generally everything went very smoothly. As you would probably expect it was somewhat easier once I could speak directly with the GWF team (mainly Angie pre arrival) and I suspect that it's easier for the p&p team when volunteers can do that but I understand the need to be kept in the loop and control communication so everything is agreed.

- orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

I felt fine with how everything went at the start of the placement but I would say that I was rather left to my own devices and so went and found things to do and asked to be put into classes – apparently usually they have an induction schedule for volunteers at GWF but staff changes and also the absence of the senior team for the first couple of days I was there meant that said schedule slipped through the cracks. I was fine with it but I can imagine that others may not be. Preparation wise I didn't really have to do much before I left, and it was useful to read through the reports from previous volunteers and also see some of the material they had designed. I would say it's a very good thing to have a couple of days at the start just observing what's happening and how GWF works. It would be very easy to go in all guns blazing but for me, having time to watch what was going on and talk to a lot of the staff, meant I had a much better idea of the context that I needed to work in once everything got underway.

Note from *people and places*: a thorough orientation and observation on arrival is most definitely the norm. As Katherine points out and understood, there were circumstances which made that difficult this time.

- your experience and work – including what resources you may have left behind and with whom – please attach copies of any written resources you may have left behind, and let us know of any others

My time was spent working on the Bridging Year (BYA) programme, this is a year long course that takes school leavers in the local area and looks to prepare them for entering the workplace by making them computer literate (few have seen let alone worked with a computer before starting the course), improving their English and providing them with skills they'll need in any further job or study. Of the month I spent with GWF it basically broke down as follows:

- First two weeks were spent getting to grips with the current course, working out what was going well and what wasn't and then, with the aid of an exceptional lady called Kathy who is a psychologist who works with GWF part-time, we re-designed the entire year long curriculum. Yes –

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that is as big as it sounds. There was an almighty spreadsheet that everything was scoped out on along with hours needed, content required and how each lesson would contribute to the overall career journey of the student. Project management skills gone mad!

- Second two weeks were dedicated to the English language content of the course which required a total overhaul as it was rather outdated and often out of context (for example reading exercises on the history of the USA not being terribly relevant in rural South Africa)

Alongside working on the BYA end of things I was also able to assist one of the team members, Mercyful, who was interviewing students for their suitability to attend the South African College of Tourism which was great, I sat in some of the student's classes and mentoring sessions to understand how everything was run and I also travelled around the satellite centres (Lillydale, Justicia and Huntingdon) to meet the staff there and get their feedback. Finally I worked to move some of the pen-and-paper processes of GWF online by switching student feedback to be provided through an online survey.

I left behind a huge number of documents relating to the lesson planning and English language content – these are on a couple of hard drives with the GWF team.

- in your opinion, are there any significant changes needed in the information we sent to you during your preparation for this placement?

No significant changes. I would mention to people upfront that they are moving to an isolated area and they may strongly want to consider hiring a car (along with some estimate costs of this – you need a car with suspension that can cope with tracks, not a Fiat Uno!). The car hire can be quite an expense and should likely be factored in to anyone's budget ahead of time. Without a car I would imagine you are reliant on lifts from people, and at the weekend that could get tricky.

Note from people and places: this is definitely something we now discuss with all future Hazyview volunteers – and see Katherine's comment below re 'leisure time',

Otherwise just worth knowing that Hazyview itself is well equipped in terms of a supermarket, doctors (in case you need it – I didn't) and at least a handful of good restaurants so there's definitely facilities available.

- your 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?

As mentioned my focus was on the Bridging Year and I know that there's English lesson plans for the second half of 2019 that still need doing (I was only able to get through one half of the year which was a fair challenge in the couple of weeks I had). So it would be fabulous if someone could pick that up and finish it. One thing I know the team was really keen on was learning in an African, ideally South African, context so making sure any lesson is a topic that the students can relate to. As an example I wrote an English reading comprehension exercise using an article I found online about Nelson Mandela, I also tried to ensure that if I was using any TED talks in lessons that the speakers were local / African as opposed to from another country (can be tricky if their English is heavily accented).

Overall I would also say to any future volunteers that you can definitely offer more than you may think. Other than a short stint as a TEFL teacher back in the day I have no formal experience in education but I was able to use my other skills to design a curriculum, plan lesson content and move the programme forward. I certainly didn't go into it thinking I could do that!

- successes and disappointments of your placement

The successes felt wonderfully plentiful! From getting a programme designed for the Bridging Year to working on individual lesson plans, seeing how words of encouragement could motivate individual team members and generally harnessing the huge enthusiasm on site.

Happily I can say there weren't any disappointments. There are certainly challenges, you're working in a very rural area with staff whose skill set can be below what you expect, but the willingness to learn is off the charts and most things can be easily overcome if you track down the right person and have a chat.

Note: which is why are local partners and their staff are such a crucial part of our model!

- what was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

I think it came towards the end of my time with GWF. I had gone out to one of their satellite centres with Mo to train some of the team on the new programme we had designed. It was fantastic to see a room full of people so engaged, interested and excited about what I had worked on, especially when hearing comments about how they wanted to go back do the course again so they could learn some of the new things. It meant a lot to me, knowing that what I had done was going to resonate and ultimately was going to improve the experience of students in the coming year(s).

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

I absolutely would recommend it, I got so much out of the experience and it was a very good reminder to me about what's actually important in life. The GWF team are incredibly welcoming and really want you to enjoy your experience with them.

- how did you spend your leisure time?

Upfront disclaimer: I got a hire car about two days into my stay and would have been completely lost and stuck without one. I strongly advise getting a car sorted out (you can pick it up from the airport in Nelspruit) simply so you can get to and from the centre and so things like pop to the supermarket after work.

Leisure time wise, I pretty much moved into Kruger! I'm rather mad about all things animals and conservation so I did a lot of day trips in Kruger plus an overnight in one of the lodges (Londolozi – painfully expensive but totally worth it, they're partnered with GWF so you can get a discount when booking). I also spent a full day at Elephant Whispers in Hazyview, travelled around the local area (visiting God's Window), went to the Jane Goodall Chimpanzee Sanctuary down in Nelspruit and generally saw animals. If you're not a fan of wildlife this may not be the place for you! Evenings tended to be quite quiet, I was able to go swimming at a local resort which was a great way to decompress and sometimes would go for dinner with some of the team but to be honest was usually pretty shattered and happy just to chill out and sleep.

- how was your accommodation?

The accommodation was very comfortable and there was everything I needed in terms of kitchen equipment, etc. Whilst some previous volunteers reported issues with water supply there were none during my time there. I was in the house by myself which suited me fine, I am used to living alone, however I know some other volunteers found the experience quite isolating. The one thing that I found tricky was living in a small gated compound which meant that going for a walk after work was not really an option (this is less to do with any safety issues with the locals from what I saw, more to do with a lack of pavements, street lighting, people being aware of how to drive and the fact that there's also a load of wildlife wandering around after dark). As someone used to just wandering around the place it felt a little restricting, again a reason why having a car was useful as

I could at least go for a drive if I wanted.

- anything else you want us to know

I loved my time with GWF and I think they will need ongoing support moving forwards. The organisation is experiencing significant growth which it is challenged to keep pace with, especially when it comes to recruiting staff across the new roles. I would encourage any future volunteers who are not going over there to teach to see GWF more as a small/medium sized business which requires business support staff to assist in the growth - this is where the skill gaps really impact. I'd also ask any future volunteers to be aware that they're stepping into a situation where the skill level of some of the GWF employees is lower than might be anticipated but this may not be initially visible due to the team's exceptional enthusiasm – assuming that something is understood and going to be actioned may not work out, always best to check and work through things with the team to ensure they're totally on board with any requests.

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Thank you.