

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 dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

My Gambia Experience – Carol Rochester-Roberts



Carol, Lisong and co volunteer Joanne

I was a volunteer with people and places from 15th October – 1st November 2019, I was volunteering at Mary's Little Lamb Nursery and prep school.

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pre departure preparation

Prior to my leaving England, I received a work plan about 2-3 weeks before I left, this might have been sent to me earlier, but I was in the process of trying to tie up things at work, so I may not have opened the email as soon as it was sent. It was pretty comprehensive, and I questioned whether I would be able to do all the tasks identified. It had been my intention to do something completely different from my day to day work. I was looking to challenge and stretch myself.

orientation and preparation at the start of the placement

I would say that my orientation started from the Airport, when I was met by the hosts Lisong and Adama at the airport. I did have some trepidation about whom I would meet on arrival, as I know airports are busy places, and travelling alone, I did not wish to look obviously as though I did not know who I was meeting! There was absolutely, no reason to worry about this, because as I came through check out in Banjul, the first sign I saw was one with my name on being held buy a small well dressed woman, what a sigh of relief it was Lisong!

I was supported by Lisong and Adama with transport to my apartment.

On a personal level, I would advise volunteers to have purchased a simple mobile phone for use with the Afro-cell sim card, which you can get free. But to ensure your phone is adapted "opened" in this country to be used abroad.

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

Coming from a background of social work the main emphasis of my work plan was in social work arena, whereby the school wanted to have assessments completed on all pupils to begin a database. This was really interesting, being in at the genesis of this project within the school, whereby I worked with Headteacher and Operational Manager to devise the assessment questions that would capture this information. I went out into the community to carry of these assessments with the support of the Operational Manager (who was brilliant in assisting with the language difficulties, and I think this helped the parents and guardians to feel more at home.)On a day to day level, outside of this particular project work, I also got involved with the children in Class 2, whereby I was a " teaching assistant" ! The children were sitting at tables dependant on their assessed learning ability, I sat with the children who were poor achievers, and supported them in reading and understanding the tasks that were on the board for completion. Due to the lack of resources in the school, children wrote with pencils and the use of an eraser (rubber) was very important, so I spent some of my time monitoring where the eraser was, and ensuring turn taking when using this. For me, having no class room experience from England, it was tough observing how even basic resources like rubbers, some children did not have. It was refreshing to see how the children were being taught to share, and there was little or no instance of children refusing to share their rubber with their classmate. On reflection, I can see that this observation really set the pace for how, this is a country for whom community is fundamental to their life style.

The last piece of work, that I completed was to do a presentation for teachers training day, on child protection and behaviour management. I was able to integrate some of the assessment information gathered into this presentation, to attempt to marry up the areas of parenting that the parents had said they wanted support in, alongside how the teachers were dealing with these issues in school. EG – many parents described their boys as being stubborn, which would result in them being smacked, and they identified that they would like to have strategies for dealing with challenging behaviours, and that they were willing to seek support from the school.

The main resources that I bought were two book – Assessment of children and families in Need, and sponsorship ... both of these were bought from amazon – internet prior to my going to The Gambia. Both left in school office.

It was really useful that I had bought my laptop and a flash drive, as these helped with my presentation. I was unable to do handouts due to my lack of resources, and this was a comment made by the teachers in the feedback sheets that they were asked to complete. Teachers were also provided with certificates which may have been useful to have the people and places logo included.

Could/Should/do people and places gets the views of the actual staff, that the volunteers work with?

Note from people and places – Yes we do get feedback from the staff volunteers work with.

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

I felt that the pre placement information was sufficient.

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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?

The school would wish to have assessments completed on all the children in the school, when I left, these had only been completed on one class. There is therefore room for this work to be completed by other volunteers. Based on the information collected, I feel that there is also a real opportunity for a volunteer to do some additional workshops with parents around behaviour management, I am aware that the school have done some workshops for parents in this area.

I feel that the school could be supported to update their child protection policies and procedures.

The consideration for the school to be supported in starting a toy library, where resources such as “connect 4” can be used to support learning at home, particularly where parents have weak literacy and numeracy skills. Items/toys/resources that parents can borrow from school to support their child(ren).

The level of poverty in some families is such that some children are coming to school without breakfast due to economic reasons, it would be really good, if there could be consideration of support towards funding for a “breakfast club” or finances to support children to purchase/have breakfast.

Purchase of PE/School uniform – supporting children to have the correct PE kit.

successes and disappointments of your placement

I feel my success would be working with Lisong and Abdourahman in completing the questionnaires, and getting out to see the parents, and where relevant parents came into the school. I feel that this will help the school to provide a transparent, holistic assessment of their pupils and hence be able to secure sponsorship where specific pupil selection is non bias.

what was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

From a personal and volunteering level, the whole experience of being a volunteer was my highlight. I would value the opportunity to return and continue with some of the work that has been started, and support in areas such as policy writing, completing the assessments and analysis, sponsorship strategy.

Please note – this report is supplied by a former volunteer and the contents are intended solely for your information and personal use.

people and places has permission to publish this information to you as a future volunteer.

Please check with us if you would like to publish it beyond your own circle of friends and family.

Thank you.