

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](mailto:kate@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## **Amanda Williams**

### **Placement dates and project**

October 2016 to December 2016 full time – extended to end of March 2017 part time - following the extension of my stay in St Lucia

St Lucia – Centre for Adolescent Renewal & Education – C.A.R.E

The project I expected to complete, Supporting the setup of a Dressmaking Education Course, was not ready when I arrived in St Lucia. I was therefore involved in 3 key other volunteering activities (note from 'people and places' – which is possible through volunteers working closely, not only with the project, but also with our local partners.)

### **Pre-departure preparation**

Good support and communication with P & P prior to departure although several delays were experienced close to departure dates due to lack of/slow communication from St Lucia during school holidays.

Whilst essential details were finalised, accommodation/police checks/insurance etc I still left the UK unclear on the exact goals and expectations of the project I was leaving the UK to support, whilst I understood the need to remain flexible.

I wanted to take with me any resources that would be useful or appreciated in St Lucia. This suggestion was not met well by P & P, suggesting I should support the local economy whilst in St Lucia. I persisted and received information from the local sponsor on the desperate need for football boots and sewing machine bobbins. I was able to take these with me, although, as the information was received so late I could have done more.

### **Orientation and preparation at the start of the placement**

Yinka, a representative of The Sacred Sports Foundation, (note - SSF – our local partners in Saint Lucia) met me at my apartment within 30 minutes of my arrival in Rodney Bay. Whilst this was reassuring, the immediate 'tour' of the area wasn't good timing as I was very tired. It would have been better to leave it until the following day. Yinka also gave me a local mobile phone and Sacred Sports Information Pack.

Yinka met me the following day and took me on the bus to Osdan so I understood my route to C.A.R.E. Yinka took me home via Castries and showed me the arcade and market areas, pointing out areas that were not recommended to wander due to safety.

My first week at C.A.R.E was spent mainly observing the different classes and understanding more about what they do as information hadn't been provided up front and online information was poor. Whilst the Trainers were very friendly and welcoming I felt like a 'fish out of water' with no idea of what I was doing there or what I would do – and little direction or suggestions being provided.

Miss Augustus, Osdan C.A.R.E Co-Ordinator, suggested on my 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day that I could perhaps develop some materials, based on my business leadership experience, to share with the C.A.R.E students to assist their future success.

Dr Mason, C.A.R.E Director, suggested I could assist with preparing a sustainability recommendation for the C.A.R.E. skills groups when I met with her on around my 4<sup>th</sup> day on site. She also provided more information regarding the Background, Mission and Goals of C.A.R.E.

I met with Nova Alexander, Director of Sacred Sports (and sister in law of Yinka) for lunch and discussion about a week after my arrival. Nova and Yinka were both very supportive and helpful, not only on my arrival but throughout my entire stay in St Lucia. Whilst I wasn't working directly with them they stayed in constant contact to check on my wellbeing and comfort

### **What did we do well?**

P & P did an excellent job supporting my ambitions to find a suitable overseas volunteering project.

I felt as though P & P understood my goals and what I wanted to achieve in advance of finding my placement. They ensure a good understanding by asking for 'My Story' and a telephone interview in advance of further investigations.

The service provided was knowledgeable, professional and supportive – assisting with recommendations, providing good information via the website and previous volunteer experiences – full clarity of costs and good advice regarding insurance.

During my time in St Lucia I was not happy staying at the accommodation that had been selected. P & P liaised with Nova Alexander to ensure I felt safe, comfortable and relocated me quickly.

### **What could we do better? – and PLEASE don't hold back: surely there's something we can improve on ...**

Both C.A.R.E and Sacred Sports have resource needs. Some of which can be found on the island although prices can be prohibitive. Rather than rejecting the suggestion of volunteers taking tangible donations with them why not ask this question now of the country partners you work with? It can then be proactively shared and suggested to future volunteers. For example: Sacred Sports need good quality second hand or new football boots and trainers for children and youths. C.A.R.E need equipment for their sewing machines. British Airways no longer allow free carriage of goods for donation however this free of charge service is offered by Virgin Atlantic. Please don't dismiss this valuable opportunity.

Providing more information upfront to volunteers to improve their cultural awareness regarding the country they are visiting. I will share further details of what I learnt about and in St Lucia, on the ground, at the end of this report.

(note – thank you – we shall certainly work with our local partners to improve our up front local info, & also recommend that volunteers discuss any specific project needs with our local partners when they are in direct contact with each other)

**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**

### Phase 1 – October to December 2016

Full time at C.A.R.E Odsan. Hours Monday to Friday 8.30am to 2.30pm. Taking into account the travelling time by bus to and from work this was 6.30am to 4.00pm. During this time I wrote and delivered 'My Business, My Passion' which was a series of 5 x 1hr weekly workshops designed as an introduction to business management for the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at C.A.R.E Odsan. Topics included:

- Why bother? – Exploring the benefits/risks of owning your own business
- Your vision & setting goals – Establishing your future and how you can achieve it
- Customer Service and competition – Understanding good business practises
- Marketing, measuring & selling for profit – How to make money
- Finalising your plan – Documenting your ideas for the future

I designed the workshops to be interactive - for the students to share experiences and worked on building their confidence, ideas and plans.

I developed outline powerpoint slides to guide us through the topics, examples and discussions and kept writing to a minimum for the students (as several cannot read or write) Homework was set each week but based on the students developing ideas or having observational tasks for discussion at the next workshop.

During this time I kept a register of attendees. I ran repeats of the workshops to ensure all students had the opportunity to complete all elements of content

Workshops were held after lunch and it was occasionally difficult to motivate students to participate. It's not uncommon for formal 'lesson time' to end at 2pm (even though school ends at 2.30pm) so important to finish around that time.

Some workshops were cancelled and postponed due to other school outings or activities. It's important to align your schedule with the Co-ordinator and forward plan the dates/times in collaboration

Resources are limited and/or not available. Students don't always have paper or pens for notes. A projector was rarely available. Bring your own whiteboard markers and power adaptors. Stay flexible and prepared for plans/classrooms/attendees/topic changing at short notice

It's hot in the school and acoustics are difficult due to the noise of other lessons or electronic fans. Wear mosquito repellent and always carry water.

Outside of the hours of preparing and delivering the course I assisted as needed with Year 1 students. Listening in each day to the 'Report Out' by students which relates to news or their weekend activities gives a valuable insight into the culture and helps to get to know the students. I informally helped one or two students with their reading. I attended some school football games, a couple of field trips and participated in cultural celebration activities held during Jounen Kweyol and Christmas.

## Phase 2 – January to March

Part time hours, mainly Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons with some occasional amendments

C.A.R.E were selected for a specific project to provide skills training to young people and youths. This involved a 6 month intensive, full time skills training education for 45 selected and sponsored individuals.

I developed the 'My Business, My Passion' content into a 20 hour course called 'The Entrepreneur'. I delivered the content, with the support of two C.A.R.E. Trainers, during 5 x 4 hour workshops to 45 trainees.

### The Entrepreneur - Vision

*We attendees on The Entrepreneur course  
have documented our business approach,  
goals & ideas*

*We have the confidence and courage to  
pursue our vision and dreams*

*We understand and apply business  
concepts to our practical skills to  
professionally run our own business*

Topics included:

- Guest Speakers – Law/Finance/Business Owners
- Skills & Behaviours
- Presentation Skills
- Vision & Goal Setting
- Marketing/PR
- Customer Service
- Measuring & Tracking Success
- Sales Skills
- Elevator Pitch
- Conflict Resolution – Sacred Sports Foundation

I specifically focussed on building attendees confidence, practical and applicable knowledge and presentation skills – at the end of the course 6 of the attendees presented their newly formed business plans to a panel of distinguished and influential people in a 'Dragons Den' type setting

## Other Activities

At the request of Dr Mason I researched, prepared and presented a recommendation for the future sustainability of C.A.R.E. through a 5 point approach to commercialising the skills training.

At the request of Dr Mason I prepared and delivered a 3 hour training course for all C.A.R.E. (5 sites) Co-ordinators and Trainers on the topic of 'Change Leadership'.

*Copies of all written resources have been previously supplied by email to P & P and to Dr Mason, Director of C.A.R.E*

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

Provide some information to assist a volunteer in proactively understanding more about the country culture, behaviours and what to expect in advance of arrival

Information provided on the website is excellent – it gives a good outline of basic information needed. The detail of my project and goals were not supplied. Perhaps ask Sponsors to complete a 'Volunteer Placement' document in advance of arrival? For example ask them to proactively include details of goals, expectations and success measures – in honesty C.A.R.E. had no clearly defined objectives for me prior to my arrival due to the delay of the project.

I was confused, and remained so for a couple of weeks, understanding the relationship, relevance, politics and dynamics of Sacred Sports Foundation, C.A.R.E. & People/Places – some upfront information/explanation would have been helpful

Provide a list of recommended resources to bring for volunteering (goal dependant) – mine would have included for example white board markers, pens, paper or notebooks, USB stick, power adaptor, post it notes, KS1 reading and writing books, etc

Send the sponsor a list of 'wish list' resources that the volunteer will need in order to achieve their goals – mine would have included for example a projector, connection leads, portable speakers, access to paper and photocopying, an organisational chart, a classroom register or list of student names, Flip chart stand and paper – it transpired most or all of these were available but only on request (not to hand)

### **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 materials were developed and delivered in a short timescale. (My Business, My Passion & The Entrepreneur) They can all be constantly updated and improved. Lots of information on each topic is available on the internet so could be easily researched to reflect current trends, information, technology

## Successes and disappointments of your placement

| Successes                                  | Disappointments                             |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Fully utilising my experience and skills   |                                             |
| Tangible outcomes, measurable to others    |                                             |
| The positive impact I know I have made     | Having to leave & return to the UK to work! |
| Personal development – cultural adaptation |                                             |
| A sense of pride and accomplishment        |                                             |
| Meeting so many wonderful people for life  |                                             |

## What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

There were so many amazing moments however on my final day at C.A.R.E. the Co-Ordinator formally thanked me during assembly, in front of all the trainers and trainees. She said some marvellous words about my contribution and the positive impact I had made. The highlight for me was hearing from the students, who voluntarily stood up and spoke about what they had learnt, how I had helped them and what they will remember about me – it was then that I knew that I may have made not just a short term impression but perhaps a longer term opportunity for some of them to understand and see their potential.

Getting to meet and getting to know so many wonderful people both inside and outside of C.A.R.E – I've definitely made 'friends for life'.

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

Absolutely. This was my third experience of volunteering. My previous two were for much shorter time periods. I felt immersed in the experience this time due to the length of stay. It was an opportunity to develop, deliver and support the needs of C.A.R.E. whilst getting to understand more and experience more about St Lucia and the culture. It is however not cheap to do!

## How did you spend your leisure time?

Friday Night Jump Up – Gros Islet. Plenty of fresh fish and street food. Loud music and dancing in the street. Starts around 9ish till around 2ish. Popular with tourists and locals. Free to attend. Buses charge double time after midnight. Plenty of taxis available.

Driving down South – Stop off on the way. The mud baths really do have a rejuvenating and lifting impact on your skin! Several waterfalls nearby to bathe. Nice beach at Laborie.

Shopping – it's limited however there is a nice craft market with numerous stalls in Castries. It's next to a fruit and veg market which is considerably cheaper than the supermarket. Rodney Bay has a shopping mall with duty free clothing, souvenir and shoe shops.

Driving to the East of the Island – absolutely beautiful and deserted beaches and landscapes to explore. Check out \$5 Dollar Beach and Cas En Bar Beach (Kite surfing and horse riding available)

Rodney Bay Bars – KeeBees Sports Bar, all the major games shown on TV. CoCoNuts, the place to be for drinking and dancing. Carols Kitchen, Karaoke on a Thursday. Plus many other bars and a couple of clubs. There is also a casino and lots of restaurants.

Drinking Coffee – Rituals is a Starbucks in disguise

Rodney Bay Beach – chairs are available to rent, be sure to get the local rather than tourist price and pay in EC not US Dollars. Jet skis are available for 30 minute rental. When it's busy people will walk around selling drinks rather than you having to walk to the bar. There are a lot of hustlers, selling fresh coconuts, cakes, roti, drinks, jewellery, shells, palm roses, foot massages and so on.....

With the locals – I met up with a few people and spent time with them. Going to events, into the countryside, turtle watching, river walking, cooking, BBQs etc

Pirate Ship Trips – Great fun, a fixed price with unlimited inclusive drinks and a DJ on board. Fills up early on a Wednesday and Friday evening leaving from the marina.

Marigot Bay – Famous for filming of Pirates of The Caribbean, a beautiful little place – you have to catch a small boat to get to the beach!

## **Odsan C.A.R.E (Centre for Adolescent Renewal and Education) - 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. – 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2015 (6 weeks)**

Main roles: assisting with the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) classes and running communication workshops with the 3 Skills classes.

### **Pre departure preparation**

Kate at People and Places provided me with information about C.A.R.E, and Nova from Sacred Sports liaised with C.A.R.E and Kate regarding which project I could volunteer on (as they have different centres). It was suggested that I could work with the Dennery project with young men from Borderlais Correctional Facility who attend ADP or skills training during the day at the Dennery centre. It was unclear exactly what I would be doing whilst there, i.e. there wasn't a volunteer 'job description' as such, but after reading previous volunteer reports I was able to get a fair idea of the kind of support I could provide. I also thought I could offer some input into some of the ADP subjects based on my own work experience as a trainer, so I made sure I prepared some of my activities I had done around communication skills to take with me. I also noticed from previous volunteer reports that smart clothing would be required, so I made sure I had appropriate clothes for the workplace and for the weather! I also spoke to one of the previous volunteers to get her advice about going which was extremely helpful. Nova from Sacred Sports sent me meeting instructions just before I was due to depart.

I bought a tourist guide to St Lucia and had a good read through of that and spent a while 'googling' different things to do in the area, but I didn't make any plans as it seemed best to do that once over there with advice from the locals.

### **Orientation and preparation at the start of the placement**

When I arrived in St Lucia I was met at the airport by a driver, John, who took me straight to Beachcross Villas where I was met by Elizabeth who made sure my apartment was ready. Yinka then came to the Villas to give me my information pack and mobile phone and check everything was ok. We then went for a nice drive around the local area of Rodney Bay and Gros Islet, and then walked around Rodney Bay and got some essentials from the supermarket. Yinka met me the next morning at Beachcross and we got the bus (Bus route 1A) from Rodney Bay to Castries and had a walk about the town and then got the bus back to Rodney Bay. Yinka collected me again the next morning and dropped me at the British High Commission in Castries to meet Nova, and we both then went to meet Dr Mason in Vigie.

At the meeting Dr Mason told us that there were complications with the project with the men from Borderlais Correctional Facility so that project had not yet started, and therefore I would be based at Odsan C.A.R.E, and could I start the next day (Thursday), which was fine by me!

Got up on Thursday and met Yinka at the bus stop at 7:15am (turns out this time is too late because you hit the traffic into Castries – if travelling to Odsan C.A.R.E you need to be at the bus stop by 7:00am and that means leaving Beachcross at 6:45/6:50 (depending how fast you walk!). In Castries Yinka and I got the 3A bus to Odsan and walked to the C.A.R.E centre. When we arrived we met Ms Augustus, the Coordinator. It became apparent that Ms Augustus had not been informed we were coming today, so we had a brief informal chat about my experience and I said I had brought with me some communication training sessions and activities. As the staff had not known I was coming and were not ready for me Ms Augustus said I could



start on Monday instead. She took me on a quick tour around the classes and introduced me to the trainees. Yinka and I then got the bus back to Castries and then Rodney Bay.

I then had 4 days free as I was now starting on the Monday, so I went into the local tour company, St Lucian Style, and booked myself onto the whale and dolphin watching tour for that Friday – brilliant!

I started at C.A.R.E properly on the Monday and it all went very smoothly and Ms Augustus asked me if I would help with one of the ADP classes in the mornings, and then teach some of the communications skills activities to each of the Skills Classes in the afternoons Mon – Wed, which was great.

### **What did we do well?**

I think the whole experience was very well organised from Kate's (People and Places) end. Good communication at each stage of the process and information was easily relayed back and forth. I had had to arrange this placement in a relatively short amount of time so Kate was great in getting everything together in time for me. Sacred Sports, Nova and Yinka, took care of everything very well once over in St Lucia.

### **What could we do better?**

A couple of days before departure I received an email from Nova with ideas of what to bring, which was far too late in the day for me to change anything as I had already packed (i.e. they suggested tops/dresses with sleeves so arms were covered – all the dresses I had bought were sleeveless, but luckily it all worked out fine when I was over there!)

I think what could be improved is knowing exactly (or at least an example of) what volunteers would be required to do once on the project. I think having the 'life story' of potential volunteers and therefore being able to match the project to the skills of the volunteer is a very sensible way to begin the process, but I think once that has been done, the individual projects should then prepare a role description for the volunteer so that they, and the staff at project, have a much clearer idea of the volunteer's role and responsibilities before getting there. As it happened I was quite happy to be flexible and go with the flow, however I think there is potential for volunteers to get more out of the placement and for C.A.R.E to benefit more if the placements were more structured.

I would also say that in line with the above, I think communication could be improved, as it can get quite complicated with the three organisations involved (People & Places, Sacred Sports and C.A.R.E) and the volunteer.

### **Your experience and work**

During my time at Odsan C.A.R.E I had a wonderful time. Each day was mostly structured the same. I would get the 1A bus at 7:00am from Rodney Bay to Castries, arriving at 7:30am, and then meet Ms Lydia, the cook, and some of the other trainees in Castries by the 3A bus stop where we would wait for Mr Charles and his bus to pick us up and take us straight to C.A.R.E (instead of getting the public bus). Assembly was at 8:30 each morning – I now know the St Lucian national anthem off by heart!

During the mornings I would be with Ms Dijon's ADP class, with 7 trainees aged 13 – 18, 5 boys 2 girls. At 8:45 we would do a news report – either what they had heard on local news or what they had done over

the weekend. At 9:30 we would then have a discussion about a particular issue, for example alcohol, or start a lesson (one of language, parenting, maths, spirituality, self awareness or social studies). Break was 10:15 – 10:30 and then from 10:30 – 12 we would continue with one of the above lessons. Language and maths were mostly done on the white board or with exercise books. The other subjects were mostly taught through group discussion, with copying of notes and information at the end. Lunch was 12 – 1, kindly provided by Ms Lydia who cooked for all the staff and trainees – excellent food!

In the afternoons Monday to Wednesday I did communication training sessions for each of the Skills classes (Carpentry, Electronics and Auto Mechanics). All these classes were all boys, and had between 5 and 14 in each class. On Thursdays the whole centre had 'sports' in the afternoons and on Fridays sometimes had a speaker or half day or 'music and drama'. The day would finish at 2:30 after the trainees had cleaned and tidied their classrooms and the centre, and then Ms Dijon would kindly give me a lift back to Castries, where I then got the bus and was normally be back in Rodney Bay by 3:30pm.

I knew from reading previous volunteer reports that resources in the centre were very limited and many of the trainees had learning difficulties. This was still the case when I was at Odsan. Resources are extremely limited and the resources they do have are very dated and old.

Behaviour and a general lack of concentration is a serious problem, and I think many of the trainees display ADHD behaviours, which makes the learning environment very difficult to manage, even with a small group of 6 or 7. I have worked as a Learning Support Assistant and with young people with learning disabilities before, but I was shocked at the difficulties these young people had. 2 of the trainees aged 13 and 16 in the ADP class did not know the alphabet, and 2 more aged 17 and 16 were slightly better but still couldn't really read at all. They knew the alphabet song from rote learning, but could not write or recognise letters – even their name! I thought it was very important to try and get to grips with them learning letters and more importantly the sounds of each letter to help with reading, so I took them aside in some of the lessons and worked one to one with them. There was another teacher who came to Odsan once a week to work with these weaker ones on learning their letters, sounds and reading skills. When we had some free time in some of the afternoons on Thursday and Fridays, I ran some games and activities with the ADP class, such as Pictionary and hangman, which was good fun but also helped with their learning.

To be honest, every trainee in that ADP class needs to be worked with solely one to one to help them with their particular difficulties and get them to reach a reading ability level of at least age 10. When the ADP class had lessons on language, because most of them did not even know their letters and sounds, it was almost pointless asking them to do comprehension exercises and write sentences or do a spelling test. The lessons which worked well were the lessons based on discussions and using the centre's laptops to watch educational videos on YouTube. These trainees couldn't read properly, but they could tell you all about conception and the birthing process, fallopian tubes, birth canal, female and male sex organs, the whole lot, which I was very impressed by.

Most of these trainees want to learn, and I have to commend C.A.R.E and Ms Dijon for teaching topics that the young people find interesting and relevant and that are also very important for them to be aware of, for example, discussions around alcohol and the health issues associated, homosexuality, parenting skills, repression and anger.

The learning environment is not ideal and presents a lot of challenges. Odsan C.A.R.E is an old converted warehouse made of corrugated iron and has chip board partition walls to make the classrooms and so none of the rooms have ceilings. The result of this is a lot of noise and disruption, for example, the auto mechanics class may be working with machinery on the car in the class which echoes tremendously around the whole building, so you can't hear anything else.



I didn't leave any resources as such, as I did all the communication classes from memory and my own personal notes (i.e. I had made notes of the power point presentations I used to use but couldn't use over there). However, I made a report of the session contents and activities and topics I had covered which I left with Ms Augustus, as well as brief reports on how each of the trainees had engaged. There were also worksheets I had used for some activities with the trainees and they were all given their own copies.

Overall, I think Odsan does a wonderful job with the 45 trainees they have there who themselves present a lot of challenging behaviour and needs, as well as the challenge of having a difficult learning space and very limited resources and funds.

One of the concerns that the staff raised was that the trainees did not seem to care enough about their centre, for example, not turning up to C.A.R.E events or paying money so Ms Lydia could provide food for special events. As my background is in youth participation, I suggested trying to establish some sort of youth council for the centre so trainees could feel a bit more involved, which in turn might mean that would feel more ownership over C.A.R.E. Apparently they used to have a council and I think they are going to consider starting one again. I tried to kick start the idea, as I was asked by Nova to decide what I would like my \$200 donation to C.A.R.E to be spent on. I had a few ideas, but I thought it was important to ask the

trainees what they wanted. So I pulled one trainee from each of the 5 classes to come and talk to me about what they wanted the money to be spent on. They gave some great suggestions and ideas and we had a good discussion around how would they feel more ownership to C.A.R.E – for example some of them were unhappy about having rice for lunch every day, so stopped buying it. But what they didn't realise was that if they stop buying lunch, then there isn't enough money to buy better ingredients, so rice is all that can be bought. I explained that if they all bought lunch, then there would be enough funds for the centre to buy more and better ingredients in the future, and therefore provide the type of lunches they want. When they realised this they said they would share this with all the other trainees, so hopefully this has worked and they are all buying more lunches.

The ideas they had for the \$200 were; fix the boys bathroom sink; footballs/basketballs and sports equipment to actually play sports with; fans for the classroom because they get so hot and this effects concentration; water fountain; dictionaries for each class; computer lessons; smaller cups for the canteen to buy juice. In addition to this I added; laptop speakers, so videos can be heard not just watched; books for teaching phonics; toilet seats; resource for telling the time. I sent this list to Ms Augustus and Nova from Scared Sports and I have left the final decision on what the money should be spent on with them.

Overall I had an absolutely wonderful experience and made many good friends with the staff and trainees.



*Me and the staff team at Odsan*



*Me and some of the skills trainees*



*Me and some of the skills trainees*



*Me and Ms Dijon's ADP class*



*Dr Mason presenting me with a thank you gift*



*with Mrs Modeste and Mrs Hippolyte (Dennery)*

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

As I mentioned above, I think tailoring the placements to volunteers skills works well, but could be improved by sending more specific information about what would be expected of that person in particular

and perhaps discussions between the staff where the placement will take place and the volunteer directly would be most helpful for both parties.

However, my experience was obviously slightly different to others' as I was originally supposed to be working with the Borderlais Correctional Facility trainees at Dennerly, however because that fell through last minute that is why I was placed at Odsan C.A.R.E, and so what I was asked to do by Dr Mason and Ms Augustus was quite last minute in its planning. This couldn't be helped by anyone involved as it was complications at the prison that had caused the delay in the project.

It would have also perhaps have been useful if I had known beforehand what kind of resources were needed i.e. phonics books, dictionaries, which I could have brought over with me.

**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?**

Really, I think volunteer placements at C.A.R.E need to be for a minimum of 6 weeks, if I could go back again I would have tried to do between 2 and 3 months there (if personal funds had allowed). Basically, the longer term the better, for several reasons. It takes time to build up trust with the trainees and develop working relationships with staff. It takes time to adjust to the learning environment and how things work. And most importantly, these trainees need someone to take the time to work with them solidly one to one to really help them overcome their difficulties (I am particularly referring to the trainees who are unable to read). I think the main emphasis for future volunteering, in discussion with C.A.R.E, should be on developing basic skills and reading for ADP trainees/trainees first coming into the programme and getting them to a point where they can read at a reasonable level. I think it is difficult to progress trainees through the programme if the basics are not addressed.

**Successes and disappointments of your placement**

I think overall the placement was very successful. I was initially disappointed that I would not be able to work with the trainees from Borderlais Correctional Facility at Dennerly, but I understand how trying to work with prisons is extremely difficult as I am used to working with them over here. That being said, working at Odsan C.A.R.E was a wonderful experience. I feel I was able to help support trainees in the ADP class and develop good relationships with them, and I feel happy that I was able to contribute my experience as a communication skills trainer and work with the older trainees. I think the staff appreciated my help with the ADP class and that I was able to teach the skills classes on my own which freed up staff's time for them to get other work completed. I am disappointed that I had to leave!

**What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?**

The highlight without a doubt was being at C.A.R.E Odsan. It was hard and challenging at times, but also great fun and I made so many good friends in the



trainees and especially the staff there. I was lucky enough to be in St Lucia during Jounen Kweyol, so there were lots of celebrations around and C.A.R.E had their own celebration in one of the other centres at Anse La Raye which we all went to, which was good fun as all the staff dressed in traditional dress and there was traditional Creole food, music and singing and a fashion show – and the trainees had great fun making bamboo canons (busting bamboo).

*Jounen Kweyol celebration ... busting bamboo ... and traditional dancing at Anse La Raye*

I am a great food lover so another big highlight for me was seeing what Ms Lydia was cooking each day and learning how to make some of the dishes from her– breadfruit and salt fish is my new favourite thing!



*My goodbye card from the ADP Class –*

*that's me looking sad that I am leaving!*

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

Yes 100%. A few comments were made about the age of volunteers that had previously come – I was apparently their youngest volunteer yet! That surprised me a lot. I think this placement is ideal for younger people and I think People and Places should promote this opportunity to younger audiences.

**How did you spend your leisure time?**

Leisure time in St Lucia is wonderful! Every day after work I got back to Beachcross at about 3:30/4pm, so I would quickly get changed and head down 'the ramp' to Reduit Beach (all of 30 seconds walk!) and swim in the sea and sit and read on the beach whilst watching the sunset (it would get dark at about 6pm and this is when mosquitoes will attack worse). It was rainy season so a lot of clouds about which was ideal for me as I burn so easily, but consistently warm all the time at about 28 – 30 degrees Celsius. I was able to do a few typical 'touristy' things. I arranged all my tours through St Lucian Style ('the tour store') which is 5 minutes walk away in Rodney Bay. I did a whale and dolphin watching tour which was brilliant (rum punch at 10am was interesting!). A friend of mine also came to stay for a week (all arranged with Beachcross who charged her an extra US\$250 to stay in my apartment) and so we did the Full Day Trip to Soufriere one Saturday

which was brilliant – get taken on a boat from Castries to Soufriere, then a tour of the rainforest and a dip in the volcanic mud baths, followed by lunch, snorkelling and then plenty rum punch on the boat back. We also did a Segway tour around Rodney Bay – so much fun! One of the best things to do over there is to go to the Jump Up street party at Gros Islet every Friday. It starts around 9pm but really gets going around 10pm and finishes at 2am. You can get the bus there from Rodney Bay and buses do run back but I was fortunate enough to have made friends who were able to drive there and back, so I ended up going 3 times.

It is great fun, great food and great music and a nice mix of locals and tourists. I also went to an Oktoberfest festival in Gros Islet – a few beers to sample and performances from St Lucian and Creole artists from Martinique. I went out to eat at quite a few restaurants. Spinnakers is great for cocktails and good seafood. Most of the restaurants in Rodney Bay have good food and there is a diverse range of cuisines - for a good take away Wingz 'n' Tingz was excellent! I have to recommend Felly Belly which was a juice bar in Rodney Bay – I nearly spent almost all my money in here, so good! When my friend was staying it was her birthday so I treated her to dinner at The Landings – excellent food and service and a very reasonable price! Would recommend doing that at least once as a treat. Car hire is very expensive and although there are buses on main routes they are more limited into the rest of the island, so this limited my ability to travel around the island. I hired a car twice just for a 24 hours (US\$95) to pick up and take my friend to the airport – driving in St Lucia is a very pleasant experience. I wanted to try and see some turtles whilst I was there but it was too late in the season. If I would go back I would explore more of the interior of the island and the rainforests.



*Panoramic view of Reduit Beach – “my beach”*



*View from Segway Tour*





*Gros Islet Jump Up*



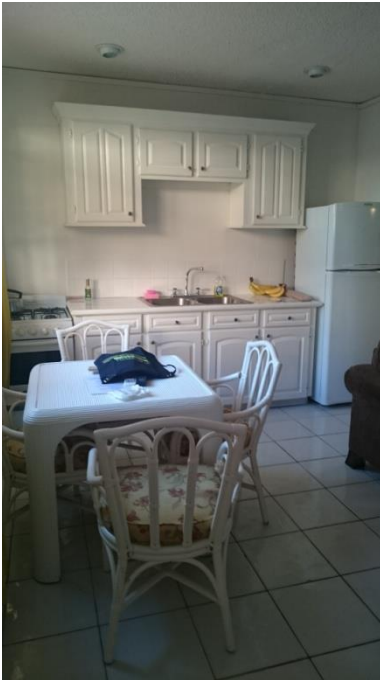
*Typical sunset, Reduit Beach.*

### **How was your accommodation?**

Accommodation was great. My apartment was lovely and cosy, just the right size for me travelling on my own. I had a open plan kitchen/living space with sofa, chair, TV, dining tables and chairs and kitchen area with fridge and oven. I asked for a microwave as there wasn't one when I arrived and that got bought over without a problem. The kettle was a good old one that had to be heated on the stove. There was an iron and ironing board. Efficient (and essential!) air conditioning. Nice bathroom with lovely shower and very comfortable bed and a built in cupboard. Everything was clean, if a little dated. There were enough plates, bowls, pans and cups etc. but I did buy myself a sharp knife and peeler from the supermarket (not very expensive). A word of warning about the supermarket – the two supermarkets in Rodney Bay stock everything you could need, however, a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables are quite expensive because they're imported (£7 for 3 bell peppers!) so these are best bought in the market in Castries. Everything else is pretty much the same price you would pay over here in a Waitrose. At Beachcross Elizabeth ran the reception during the day and she was lovely and helped me out a lot. There were two long term residents

there, Sarah, and Mike and Anna, who were very friendly and helpful and it was nice to sit out and talk in the evening. Otherwise, most of the other apartments were empty so it was nice and quiet. There was a laundry with a washing machine (there was a dryer but you had to pay) and lines and racks to dry your laundry. The pool is very small but very refreshing and needed after a hot day at work. There was also WiFi and it had a very good connection so that was great. The apartments were opposite the Rodney Bay police station so that was reassuring. As I was a lone traveller I was a bit worried about leaving all my personal items, so I think maybe a safe in the apartment would have been better.

Essentials to bring with you – mosquito repellent is essential! Lots of mosquitoes during the day and evening and also at the C.A.R.E centre as it is quite dark inside. Also, ear plugs! There are little frogs in all the undergrowth which are extremely loud during the night.



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