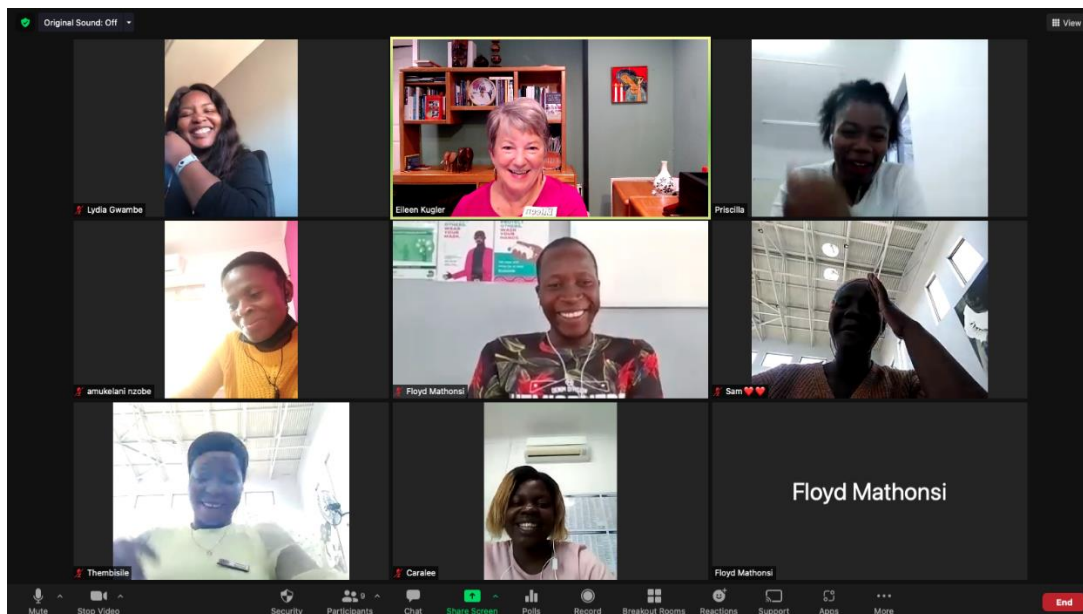


Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement 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

Report for People and Places

Eileen Kugler Good Work Foundation online book group

June - October 2021



- What was your motivation for e-volunteering?

I have always enjoyed volunteering with the teachers and community in Addo, South Africa, and have missed it during COVID. When I read about the opportunity to work with teachers in another part of the country through a book discussion, I jumped at the chance. I am in two book discussions at home that are online now, so I was comfortable leading it online

(Note from *people and places* – Eileen and her husband first volunteered with people and places at a school in the Eastern Cape in 2009 – they have returned many times since)

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- Was e-volunteering as you imagined it would be – if not how did it differ?

I expected it to be similar to book discussions online in the U.S. – once again showing how naïve I can be. As we tried to talk about the books, the participants were faced with rolling electrical blackouts and unstable wi-fi. They appropriately were wearing masks, which made it hard to understand them at times, and also hard to identify them. But over time, much of this worked out. The situation was much improved when they were able to use their own cell phones, thanks to Kate. The teachers were committed to making this work! All in all, it showed how resilient the teachers are and how they did not let obstacles stand in their way.

(Note from people and places – Kate is CEO of Good Work Foundation, people and places' partner in South Africa. She organized data for the teachers so they could log in independently, using Eileen's volunteer contribution towards the cost of this)

- placement dates and project

The dates were fine. We were able to find a time that worked well with their schedule and mine. There were sometimes meetings that interfered or other conflicts, so I rarely had all the teachers on at the same time. But I don't think that could be avoided.

- Preplacement preparation - were you happy with the information we shared with you during your preparation for this placement? what information did you consider most useful?

I felt well prepared for the situation. Truthfully, I think it would be hard for someone who has never been to South Africa to lead a discussion like this online. Considering the challenges of spotty wi-fi and masks, it was extremely helpful that I had familiarity with the cadence and general speaking style of the teachers.

- Your experience and work – including what resources you may have sent to the project and to whom – please attach copies of any written resources you may have given to them and let us know of any others.

I did not provide any resources beyond the book.

- What advice would you give to future e-volunteers, including any technical difficulties you encountered?

As with any volunteer experience, go into it with an open mind and an open heart. There will likely be unexpected challenges, but that is part of the experience. It builds our own resilience!

- Successes, disappointments and challenges of your placement

This proved to be even more meaningful than I had hoped. I learned so very much from the discussions. I am very glad we chose a book set in Africa, with a strong female character, and I hope that will be the case going forward. As challenging as the technology was at times, I felt that I was able to develop a relationship with the teachers, and equally important, they developed a deeper relationship with each other. Several mentioned how important it was to have an opportunity to learn from each other. They truly learned to respect each others' opinions and perspectives. I believe it will influence their development as teachers as well, hopefully seeing the importance of providing opportunities for learners to learn from each other and not just the teacher.

My disappointment: That I only had a few weeks with these teachers! I do understand the importance of working with a new group. However, I hope there are opportunities to connect with the first group as well. I strongly urge that I have an opportunity to mentor the first group a bit as it starts a participant-led book discussion. Perhaps I could be a participant once a month. I think the

transition to a group led by a peer can be a bit challenging, and I want to make sure it succeeds. This was a new experience for them and my not be easy to replicate without support.

(Note from people and places – Eileen will start a second placement with a new group of teachers at the start of the new school year. GWF plans to keep the first group going as an independent reading group, with one of the group leading the discussions)

- What was the highlight of your volunteer experience?

Developing the relationships with the teachers; and also hearing what the book discussions meant to them. One said she had never read a book from beginning to end before. Others said it gave them a new appreciation for reading. They all valued the opportunity to talk about the book together. I sincerely hope this continues.

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

I would recommend it, particularly because we cannot volunteer in person right now. But you need to recognize the challenges and the limitations.

- Anything else you would like to share with future volunteers about your placement.

Volunteering in South Africa – in person and online – has been such a meaningful part of my life that I cannot imagine what my life would have been without it.

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.