

As already announced in our last newsletter, this newsletter will be all about Panama again. Since 2011/12, yearly one or two volunteers have been doing their voluntary service in this country. Till 2018 a volunteer service in cooperation with the "Mercedarios del Chorrillo", who are located in the neighborhood of panama city, took place. During this period the volunteers lived and worked in the institution, mainly in assisting the teachers in school and helping in the boys orphanage. The cooperation was replaced by the " Hogar San Jose de Malambo" girls' home in Arraijan in 2018. Therefore, our volunteers have been sent there for the first time in the volunteer cycle 2018/2019.

Next to the memories and impressions from both institutions written by former volunteers, an interview with Albina, a social worker from Malambo is part of the newsletter. Additionally another former evivo volunteer who was spending part of her studies in Panama introduces the country in general to you.

Due to further restrictions imposed by Corona, the volunteers of 2020/2021 will not be able to enter or leave Germany to do their volunteer service. We very much hope to be able to offer our volunteer services again from the summer 2021.

Our thoughts are with all our project partners, host families, mentors, (former) volunteers and all others who are related to evivo volunteer services especially in times of steadily increasing the corona cases.

We hope that everyone is doing well and that life will be able to gradually return to normality everywhere.

We wish you all the necessary strength and creativity to deal with ever-changing challenges and demands.

In spite of, we wish you all a very beautiful pre-Christmas time.

Felictas Greis with the evivo team

Panama - a country divided, a world united. This saying welcomes visitors to the Panama Canal and illustrates the reality of the small country that connects South and Central America: a canal goes through and divides a country to facilitate world trade. The Panama Canal has become a symbol and made a small country a major actor on the international stage.

During my two years in Panama, I was able to immerse myself in the diversity that characterizes the country. Due to historical and colonial influences, different cultures found their way to Panama over the years and left their traces in society, culture, institutions and food, among many other. Panama's cuisine is characterized by a tasty mix of Caribbean and African ingredients with indigenous influences, together with European, American, and Asian dishes. This diversity is also noticeable in Panama's culture and is reflected in the great openness and open-mindedness of the population. However, history did not only leave positive traces. Panama is considered one of the richest countries in Latin America, but at the same time has one of the highest inequalities. A drive through the country reveals many contrasts. Even in Panama City, the country's capital, luxurious buildings border social hotspots with neglected residential complexes. Leaving the capital, one finds noble residential areas in which mainly foreign citizens retire but also small villages, some of which have no connection to running water. These contrasts and this variety of realities characterize Panama.

Contrasts can also be found in Panama's landscape. The country offers beautiful beaches and dense rainforest, untouched nature and a vivid metropolis, modernity and traditions. At the narrowest point of Panama, there are only 51 kilometers between the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean. Panama even has a volcano from which one can see both Oceans at a time. The San Blas Islands in the Caribbean offer turquoise waters and sandy beaches presenting the visitors a postcard-like panorama. The inhabitants of the islands, who belong to an ethnic group called Kuna, preserve their indigenous traditions and integrate them into everyday life. The unique cultural diversity, together with Caribbean joy of life, beautiful landscapes and open-minded people characterize Panama. Ultimately, I can only confirm what Tiger and Bear from the well-known Janosch children's book say: How beautiful Panama is!

Anne Laible FW 13/14

Interview with Albina, employee at the girls' home in Malambo

1. When was this organization founded?

The girls' home was founded on May 15, 1890 with the goal to offer proper care to children and teenagers whose rights had previously been violated and to rear them humanely, morally, in a Christian way and with a love for nature.

2. Which processes are there in this organization?

When a girl, a boy or teenagers arrive at our home, they are welcomed and integrated

into the houses, while we explain how we are going to work with them. They receive immediate medical attention and are included in the school. Furthermore, they receive the specific psychological attention that they need and are able to participate in the different kinds of care that are offered in areas of social work. This includes for example workshops for sewing, cooking, different kinds of sports or singing in a choir.

3. Who leads this organization?

The Sisters of San Vicente de Paúl and their headmistress, Sister Idian Reiss F.

4. What is your job in this organization?

I am a social worker.

5. What are your tasks?

To attend to the girls, boys, and teenagers during judicial and administrative proceedings, to supervise them and to keep in contact with their families.

Individual consultation for the children and teenagers and attending the families.

Taking care of women who suffer from domestic abuse.

Furthering deinstitutionalization.

Working together with the nurses, the health team and the team of psychologists, as well as the headmistress of the organization.

Working in projects and work shops inside and outside of the organization.

Coordinating the program for proper care-taking

Reporting back to the public authorities

Cooperation with child protective services during the care-taking

Taking care of the people who ask for help

Representing the organization to the government

Introducing organizations and national as well as international universities to our work

Attending to the German volunteers



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6. How many people work at the girls' home?

110 people

7. How did this organization develop over the years?

This organization has 130 years of experience

It is one of the organizations with the highest outreach and authenticity on a national level

The girls' home has attended international conferences

It has received multiple awards from private and governmental organizations and is one of the first institutions with a completely professional team

It is strictly organized and has a strong structure

The girls' home functions as a counselor for the projects and programs of multiple organizations

It is self-administered

It is part of work commissions regarding national strategies for topics of childhood and youth and it is known for the advocacy of the rights of children, teenagers, and families



Impressions from Arraijan

Hi, my name is Lina Schiek, I am 19 years old and I volunteered for the weltwärts program from July 2019 to March 2020. I was part of the catholic girls' home "Hogar San Jose de Malambo" in Panama, which accommodates boys of up to seven years old and girls until they are eighteen including their caretakers in different houses. These children and teenagers are either orphans or they suffer from HIV, are mentally disabled or have been sexually abused. This home also includes a school which is also visited by outside children, as well as a gym and sports facilities with a pool and a soccer field.

I used to work at the Malambo baby house, where children from 0-3 years live, and in the casa fatima, which inhabits girls from 6-12 years. My typical workday would first require me to support the care-takers in the baby house. In a room with a lot of toys, I attended to the smaller children, which were usually from 0,5 to one year old. My tasks also included feeding the small children with a baby bottle, to diaper them and to feed them during lunchtime. I especially liked to see all the moving progress that the babies made in such a small amount of time. I always loved to see a child learn to crawl or walk. In the eight months that I volunteered there, I also learned a lot of nursery rhymes and fingerplays and I really loved to sing to the children.

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In the afternoons, I was allowed to make up my own programs for the girls from casa fatima. I gave them swimming lessons in the Malambo pool and alternately brought my piano in order to sing with the girls. The girls and I really loved the swimming lessons.

The girls progressed really quickly and were getting more secure in the water. They were especially excited when they were allowed to swim in the big pool, which was really deep. And usually they were excited when we sang together, as well. They really liked to sing Christmas songs before Christmas, a Spanish pop song and the songs "Let it go" and "Into the unknown" from the Frozen movies. Sometimes we liked to draw mandalas or we braided bracelets out of wool.

Overall, I really enjoyed my time in Malambo. I lived in a flat share on the premises of the girls' home. I felt very welcomed by most of the care takers in the houses. I was invited to birthday parties that some of the care takers celebrated in Malambo. And we also had two small Secret Santa parties.

On the weekends I usually met with friends and explored Panama City. I especially liked to participate in the meetings of the Language Exchanges where people from different cultures – who nevertheless all lived in Panama - met regularly in order to have a nice evening together. Once we celebrated Thanksgiving together on the roofgarden of the directress.

I would have really liked to continue my volunteer service until July 2020, as it was initially planned, but due to the corona virus I had to fly back home at an earlier time. Nevertheless, I am really thankful for my time in Panama and for all the experiences and impressions I made during my eight months there.

Lina Schiek (FW 19/20)

Memories from Chorrillo in Panama City

Oh, beautiful Panama! Panama is not only characterized by the smell of bananas, as Janosch describes it so well in the children's book "The trip to Panama," but by so much more, which really astonished me during my year in Panama.

My new home during my year in Panama was Chorrillo, a neighborhood of Panama City, a poor district which nevertheless developed positively during the years. This was not only accomplished by the close-by beach promenade and the stadium: The citizens of Chorrillo want to lead a better life and they work really hard for their goals. Despite this, Chorrillo is on the foreign office's list of places that you would not want to visit as a tourist. Besides, it can be really hard sometimes to find a taxi to get you back home. Chorrillo equals to a ghetto, as you would say in Germany. For me personally, Chorrillo has become my ghetto during the year that I lived in Panama. I have met a lot of really nice and pleasant people there.

I worked and lived in the establishment "Mercedarios del Chorrillo." It is a catholic institution which consists of one retirement home, a school (for up to 9th grade), a kindergarten (for 2-3 year olds), a preschool, a church, and a youth center. "Mercedarios del Chorrillo" is a local congregation which takes care of the people, especially the children, of Chorrillo. Here, the children are allowed to go to school and they are given one warm meal during lunchtime. The school and the kindergarten of "Mercedarios del Chorrillo" are open from 7am to 3pm.

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Every child receives lunch which has been prepared in a large kitchen. In Panama it is mandatory to wear a school uniform: both the school children and the children who visit kindergarten have to wear them. My work day usually consisted of me meeting with the teachers and students on the schoolyard. From there, the children went to their respective class rooms. On Mondays we always raised the national flag and sang the national anthem, beforehand. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays the children split into different age groups and we went to church to see the church service.

My task was to support the children and the teachers in the computer room, during gym class, music lessons or in the kindergarten groups: I helped the children to take seat, to open the correct program on their computers, or to write, or play the keyboard. I also supported the teachers by taming the children who were often really excited.

Between 11am and 12am the children went to the comedor, where I helped to distribute food or to feed the children. Afterwards, the children had a small nap time before they were picked up by their parents, siblings, or grandparents at 3pm. The older children had lunch at different times and they also had to go back to school afterwards until 3pm.

I was really surprised by the fact that even the 2 and 3 year olds had to learn vocals and colors in Spanish and English, and that they had to go to gym class despite the heat, where I would already have had circulatory problems. It was also surprising that even the small children already learned their traditional folk dance – and they are really good at it.

After school I usually took some time to relax before I went into the city to go shopping (usually fruits) and met with the boys from the girls' home or I went to the beach promenade. After dinner I usually did something with the boys from the home, be it playing soccer or UNO. :-)

Katharina Klitzke (FW 15/16)



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