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Editor's message

Dear readers,

I'm pleased to send you the 41st edition of the Projects Abroad Togo newsletter. This newsletter aims to inform all of our volunteers about the projects, the volunteers' experiences, pieces of information about our country and its culture in general. On the Projects Abroad Togo facebook group and twitter all new, current and past volunteers can ask questions, get advice and keep up to date with what the Projects Abroad volunteers are doing in their various projects In Togo. I hope you will join us in great number

in Projects Abroad for a rewarding and worthwhile experience in our many projects worldwide. Whatever you decide to do, we, the staff are here to advise and support you before you arrive and while you are here. You are welcome.

Si vous avez un commentaire ou une suggestion à faire, vous pouvez écrire à Rodrigue sur rodrigueklu@projects-abroad.org.

Bonne lecture à tous.

Rodrigue

Famille d'accueil :Madam Lulu Deladem AGBENOU-ADZIMAHE

I am madam Lulu Deladem AGBENOU-ADZIMAHE, a simply modest woman of 59 years old, who has the desire for good gestures and love towards my guests or volunteers.

I don't have any particular way of entertaining them, apart from what others do; my secret is, I put myself at their disposal, listening, attending to them, trying to watch and know what their needs are.

I treat them generously and affectionately, I make them feel like one of us; watching their movements, counseling them if possible.

I am able to communicate in English or French, if the need arises.

Hosting the volunteers is a task I do good heartedly. It is an opportunity to meet different nationalities and cultures.

Immersion dans un pays « riche »

Mathis Dumont, volontaire français, mission enseignement

Arrivé le premier avril de cette année, j'ai décidé de partir au Togo pendant deux mois. Contrairement aux autres membres de l'organisation, ma présence à Lomé se déroule sous forme de stage universitaire afin de valider mon année de Master de Lille 3, en France. Mon choix s'est porté vers l'enseignement, et plus particulièrement celui du français, car ce domaine correspond au mieux à mon cursus. Les deux mois se sont passés dans le complexe scolaire La Sagesse à Lomé, au Togo, proche du quartier de Djidjolé.

Venant d'un pays qui a la chance de tout posséder, je voulais vivre une véritable « claque » culturelle. Et quelle claque ! A peine les pieds en Afrique, la chaleur, le bruit des voitures, motos et passants, l'architecture, la conduite, mais surtout les relations humaines m'ont énormément surpris.

Être en totale immersion dans une famille d'accueil permet de mieux assimiler la culture togolaise. Le français a beau être la langue officielle (qui est très peu usitée entre habitants, qui parlent éwé), le Togo n'a absolument rien à voir avec la France.

Concernant le stage, il consistait à préparer et présenter des cours de français et élaborer des projets culturels en lien avec la francophonie. Cependant, la crise dans le monde éducatif au Togo n'a pas aidé à ce que ce stage se passe dans des conditions optimales : fermetures des écoles de Lomé, puis dans le tout le Togo, que ce soit les écoles publiques ou privées.

Heureusement, grâce à l'efficacité de Projects Abroad, j'ai pu retrouver un endroit pour continuer l'enseignement ; l'orphelinat REMAR. Et une fois de plus, une autre claque, moins agréable, fut de voir les énormes inégalités d'enseignement dans deux institutions très différentes mais très proches géographiquement. Durant ces trois jours, j'ai eu la chance de côtoyer ces enfants et un autre volontaire de l'ONG, Français lui aussi. La fermeture des écoles ayant duré une semaine, j'ai pu reprendre mon travail à la Sagesse.

Je conseille à toute personne rêvant d'aventures, se débrouillant tant avec l'anglais que dans la vie de tous les jours (et supportant aussi les fortes chaleurs !) d'aller au Togo, de vivre dans la dynamique de Lomé et la tranquille et verdoyante Kpalimé. Parler anglais n'est pas obligatoire mais permet de vivre avec les autres volontaires non francophones et venant des quatre coins du monde. Des activités chaque semaine vous seront proposées, dans l'ambiance du Togo et de l'Afrique, et les volontaires de Projects Abroad arrangent eux-mêmes leur fin de semaine pour se retrouver.

Le Togo est un pays riche, extrêmement riche en relations humaines dont tant de pays devraient s'inspirer. Le plus dur n'est pas d'y aller, mais d'y partir.

My experience in Togo

Kiana Frick

American

Care Project

Last year, if you asked me “Where’s Togo?”, I would think maybe you just had a weird accent and were at McDonald’s looking for where to pick up your food. Over the last month here (West Africa... between Benin and Ghana, by the way) I have discovered a small, beautiful country filled with beautiful people.

I came to Lomé, Togo to do “Care” with Projects Abroad as a part of my gap year. I chose this place because I wished to continue practicing my French, work in an orphanage, and get off the beaten path. Togo fit the bill. On my first day here, I remember just staring out the window, the window of my bedroom as soon as I woke up, the window of the car as we drove around town on my introduction... just staring and staring trying to comprehend that I was really, truly here in this place so foreign, exotic, and slightly intimidating. I never imagined that after one month I would be as comfortable as I am walking in the streets, waving to children who scream “yovo, yovo!”, negotiating taxi prices, and eating Fufu. I had such an array of experiences from the classic “I’ve arrived in the third world” sickness to amazing weekend trips to waterfalls in the mountains or biking through Voodoo Villages. But amongst all this excitement, by far the best experience is my volunteer work with the wonderful kids of Mercy Children’s Home.

What do I do? I spend time there. That’s pretty much exactly my job description, ambiguous as it is. In the mornings almost all the children are at school and so I sort bad pieces out of rice or I wash laundry. The first couple days I did this I felt very useless and considered taking a different project in the morning. Now I love that time of day. I get to talk with the other women who work at the orphanage about how they are doing, I ask questions to the director about needs, I enjoy the simplicity and peacefulness of picking through rice, and I play and play with the smallest child who is not old enough for school. We practice counting numbers together with the bad pieces of rice, or we play “où est Assan?” (his version of hide and seek) or on a very special day I bring a balloon for him to toss around, squealing in laughter, until it pops and I have to explain that it is finished, I can not blow up the little fragments of plastic. His little voice giggling “tata, tata Kiana” and the image of him running to me arms open will be with me the rest of my life.

The afternoons all of the children are "home" from school so it is a bit crazy, in a fun way. I go home for lunch and my language class and return to the orphanage between 3-4 just when they are waking up from their after lunch naps. I stay there until around 6:30 doing such a variety of things. Really, everyday it's a new adventure, surprise, and joy. I knock on the door and some child comes running to open it. I start to say my Ewe greeting for "how are you" and I am quickly surrounded by 10 children. We sit down and some do my hair (despite my constant insistence that it is too hot to wear down) while another boy reads to me from a Disney fairy book he found (he is the top in his class, and you can tell he has potential) while several of the younger girls all try to fit on my lap.



That happened one day. Some days I help with English or Mathematics (Its tough- a 14 year old might be working on the homework assignment a 12 year old would have in the US but she only has the math foundation skill of an 8 year old). Other days I am the student and I learn the Togolese national anthem. A couple days ago I played football with the boys and yesterday I went out to buy some candies for a girl who is sick and had just finished getting a giant needle in her rear without a tear. Two weeks ago I started a dance troupe with some 7-11 year old girls and videotaped them doing their traditional dances and then let all 12 of them try to squeeze around me to watch the video on my camera... over and over and over again. Last week I, along with another volunteer, gave a talk to the older girls about feminine hygiene (a challenge, both due to it being a whole set

of French vocabulary I don't know and due to the fact that the same health standard we are used to in the States is just so difficult and expensive to attain here).

They are joyful, and beautiful, and amazing kids. They have had a tough start in life but they don't complain. They have so little and yet they give so much. They try to share their lunch with me every day, and I have had little jewelry items from the oldest girls bestowed on me with great ceremony. The greatest thing they give though is their wonderful spirit. The kids sing and dance and play and give great hugs. Their laughs are contagious. They are precious and they have taught me so much about life. Yes I will be leaving them soon, and I might just cry, but I will be forever thankful that I came.

My experience at ASFEEN

Catherine Jaquiss, UK Human Rights Project

When I first arrived in Togo, the first thing I noticed was the heat. Despite it being around 2am, the air was hot, humid and oppressive. My first week was difficult – Togo was so far removed from any other country I had experienced. But now, on my final day, I can say I truly love Togo, and do not want to leave.

I started working for ASFEEN, 'L'Association des Femmes pour l'Epanouissement des Enfants.' ASFEEN's goal is to make children and women aware of their rights. They see women and children as being the two key demographics for improving human rights in Togo.

They have set up 25 groups of about 10 children in some of the most underprivileged areas of Lomé. These students are educated by ASFEEN on their rights, so that they can, in turn, educate their friends around them. The students can contact ASFEEN at any time if they see a child's rights being infringed, and ASFEEN will come to the village to intervene by talking to parents and teachers.

At the moment, they are also working on a campaign to build bridges with women in rural Togo.

I set up my own project to do with ASFEEN's children's groups. I wrote a small play to teach the children about the importance of women's rights. One scene depicted a woman whose rights were being infringed by her husband and the other whose rights were being supported. I then discussed these scenes, deciding which one best represents women in Togo today and what we can do to improve the situation.

Just as all children are different, the results of my project varied from school to school. Because I often carried out the project at the end of the children's school day, sometimes they were tired and uninterested. However, some children took to the project with great enthusiasm. Some even dressed up!

It was truly inspirational to hear the children come up with practical and original ideas on how they could improve the situation of women in Togo.

I also went to tribunals on a weekly basis. Since I hope to become a barrister in the UK, I found this really interesting, if not sometimes harrowing.

The concept of 'innocent until proven guilty' is not put into practise in Togo. Even the choice of seating for the accused set them far apart from the 'civilians.' They were all handcuffed together, two by two, and sat on long wooden benches on one side of the room.

The observers and witnesses sat on the other side, facing them, on padded seats.

A group of magistrates sat at a table on a dais perpendicular to the defendants. When a defendant's name was called, he or she was unchained from his or her neighbour and came forward to stand in front of the magistrates. After their identities were confirmed, it was on to the questioning.

Guilt was decided within five to ten minutes (and yes, nearly all are found guilty) by the magistrates alone. Unlike in the UK, where magistrates can judge only relatively minor cases, the defendants yesterday included suspected thieves, drug dealers and child traffickers.

One of the magistrates did most of the questioning, and then another stood up and made the case for the prosecution. Each defendant was then sentenced.

Only one of about thirty defendants I saw had a lawyer. All the others had to come up with their own defence. It's a sobering thought to think that Chris Grayling has visions of this kind of justice system at home.

My observation of tribunals has perhaps been the most difficult part of my time in Togo. Defendants were sentenced without recourse to proper evidence or compassion. On the other hand, the thing I love most about Togo is the kindness and compassion of the Togolese people. You can't walk down the street here without being greeted or welcomed. Strangers, including children, will offer you help without expecting anything in return but your friendship.

I want to thank in particular Nicole, Martin and Brigitte at ASFEEN for giving me the opportunity to support the women and children of Togo. The office might be tiny, housing just three highly committed and knowledgeable individuals, three desks, a cupboard and two computers, but the difference they have made to the women of Togo belies their status. Nicole, Martin and Brigitte are all kind, formidable and dedicated individuals who know how women are treated in Togo, and have a clear vision for how they should be treated.



ASFEEN organised a party for my last day in Togo



We visited a women's group who make liquid soap in order to be financially independent.



Ricky and I at Nana FM – we appeared on the radio to talk about the rights of disabled children



Me with another women's group in Davyé.



The children acted out the scene, then answered some questions afterwards.



Me with Nicole and my attestation

Mots de fin

Nous tenons à remercier infiniment tous les volontaires qui viennent soutenir le Togo à travers leurs différentes actions dans leurs lieux de travail respectifs.

Sachez que votre présence est toujours pour nos placements une occasion d'échanges mutuels enrichissant.

Nous voulons également dire merci à tous les volontaires qui ont envoyé leurs articles et photos pour le bulletin de ce mois de Juin.

Bien de choses à nos lecteurs pour leur soutien moral. Nous n'oublions pas les bonnes volontés qui de près ou de loin ont apporté leur soutien à la réussite du bulletin de ce mois.

Album du mois de Juin



Les volontaires à la découverte du pays.

