



# Projects Abroad



## February 2014



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### Letter from the Editor

February ... The month of love, heat and fun. This month had brought us love from volunteer Jonathan Verpent with his donation, which showed us how much he loves the children at the building project, as well as how positively his care affected the children. This month has also been one of the hottest that I personally have experienced.

I had the great opportunity to spend two weeks at the building project which I thoroughly enjoyed, while making and packing piles of sandbags, mixing cement and playing with the children. These two weeks were amazing except the unbearable heat that we were faced with, but we managed to get our work done and hand out the donation unscathed. The volunteers and I had much fun this month, which always puts a positive spin on the overall outcome for the month.

I hope you enjoy this month's blazing issue!



Vash Singh  
Information Manager/  
Editor



## The Heart of the building project | A wonderful donation from Jonathan Verpent

Throughout the many times I have spent at the building project: assisting the building project manager, learning new skills and meeting new inspiring people; I am still very much overwhelmed and yet not so surprised about the inspiring volunteers that walk onto the building site and how they build people's lives not only physically, but emotionally as well. The building volunteers continue to carry on the legacy of the building projects unwritten motto of: building children's futures not only by cementing the walls but by emotionally building a positive attitude and bringing hope and love into their lives.

Less than a year ago I had been most fortunate to be associated with a remarkable volunteer, Jonathan Verpent, who for the second time donated funds for food which were distributed to the children at the crèche on the building site. This has been the highlight of my two weeks spent being involved with all the building projects adventures. Receiving heart-warming smiles from the children in those three days spent giving out food and drinks; awakened the most incredible feeling that reminded me of the true happenings in the heart of the building project.

My exciting two weeks had also been interrupted by scorching summer days, but also filled with the exciting atmosphere of the four amazing volunteers: Niels van der Schans, Annina Boerner, Amandine Barre and Casper van Gurp. Throughout the time spent we had not only been co-workers but have developed more of a family-hood which I find happens to most building volunteers. All in all, it was a marvellous two weeks.





# Faye Alkana | Host Mother Interview

Faye Alkana is a Project Abroad host mother that stays in the Grassy Park area in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. She has been hosting with Projects Abroad for several years now, but was hosting volunteers long before this as she is still going strong by proudly hosting for over one and a half thousand volunteers over the last 15 years. When I ask Faye what she likes most about being a host mother she said "One of the main reasons regarding the love I have to be a host mother is that we get to have the whole world in our home! We learn so much so that we will never have the need to open an Atlas. It's all about giving a huge welcome hug to the volunteer upon arrival straight out of the van. It immediately comforts their tension before going into the family's home. It is also the first impression to the volunteer about the host."

You already know their names and this is the most memorable experience to the volunteer. We share cultures and every day is a new adventure while never having a dull day. It is being there for my volunteers who instantly become my adopted family /children. All the volunteers get equal treatment from us. That's what makes a host mother special. Volunteering is almost like marriage: Respect, trust, understanding and loving to care for each other goes a long way."

A typical day in her home with the volunteers; is waking up with a positive mind, wait for the volunteers to turn up in the dining area to start their day of with a hearty breakfast and later in the evening they will chat over the dinner table about each other's activities during the passing day. A good substantial dinner with a full tummy and well fed volunteers; that is what makes her day!

She explains: "It's an indescribable experience. The first impression is the everlasting Warm Welcome we give and the sit-down brief thereafter. I am super aware that they note this. Enjoying a welcome treat/snack and relaxingly chat is how we self-adopt one another. Hours later it feels as if we knew each other long before. This is the secret to a happy living with volunteers in your home. Interaction also goes a long way."





She believes to adapt to all the volunteers different personalities it starts off with open honest conversations. We all have to wind and unwind to build a happy relationship. A volunteer can feel warmth and comfort in your home and that brings out their true personalities. Only a strong positive host can handle unusual characters with different personalities. It's her sharing of duty to make the difference in other people's lives. After almost all her life of being a career lady, she chose to become a work from home based company owner and a super mom. "My hosting might be a little different. In the mornings I am very active. I start setting up a breakfast table. It is very effective as we do not have waste food. Each volunteer has the opportunity to make their own lunch packs and breakfast which is saving wastage of foods."

The table is laid with various items: brown and white breads, assorted jams and peanut butter, sliced processed meat, salad greens, juices, cereals and oats, fruits and on surprise days: homemade muffins, fluffy flapjacks, spongy scones and crispy waffles! When the driver hoots outside, I go out to the gate and see them off to work with a positive send-off." Laundry is done by hand in summer and machine in winter. Thereafter, she starts planning dinner. She does stocktaking to do shopping 3 times a week. "I shop in advance to save petrol costs." Dinner is normally done by 14:00 pm and reheated when its dinnertime, which is around 18:30-19:00 pm."

### **Some useful ideas - By Faye Alkana (and she hopes all host families will relate to this)**

#### **TIPS:**

- 1] Buy tin foods and non-perishable foods in bulk. It's usually discounted and normally has an extended expiry date
- 2] Keep some long life milk in your cupboard. (You never know when there was a cat in the house during the night time!)
- 3] When cooking - Do not do baking on the same day. (This saves on electricity)
- 4] Do oven dishes, roasts, large baked mince or chicken pies, quiches and mac and cheeses on the day you plan to use your oven
- 5] Bed lamps. I started using battery operated bed lamps. They give sufficient light for the night.
- 6] Buy hard fruits. (e.g. apples and oranges instead of a bag of bananas, which over-ripens overnight.)
- 7] Make fritters or muffins from the fruits which do not get eaten.
- 8] Dinners: Cook certain foodstuffs in bigger quantity. Freeze. You can easily turn bolognaise into a lasagne or a pasta bake.
- 9] Buy extra linen.
- 10] Bedding. Invest in dark colours. Stains such as ink pens and nail polish will not be easily noticed.



# **The life of a French volunteer at Business Project Heart Capital**

Charlotte Pastureau is a 26 year old French volunteer at Projects Abroad South Africa. In the past Charlotte worked as a business consultant in Paris and decided to resign from her job in December. She needed a break in order to do something meaningful with a positive impact on disadvantage communities. Charlotte particularly wanted to learn more about social entrepreneurship and discover Cape Town. She now plans to find a way back to Cape Town for good!

She is currently working on a business project at Heart Capital, a boutique Impact Investment company whose goal is to drive significant social change in a financially sustainable way. Heart Capital is based in the beautiful Old Brewery Castle in Woodstock, Cape Town. The whole organization is driven and run by unpaid interns, using their experience to manage different social enterprise projects throughout Cape Town. The interns are crucial in Heart Capital's business model and therefore Projects Abroad connects volunteers with Heart Capital. Her daily tasks are mainly working in the Hub (Headquarters) of Woodstock but also to go to South African townships such as Philippi and Khayelitsha, where they set up their ventures FoodPods and Hubspace for instance. She spent her weeks on Excel sheets and PowerPoint presentations but was always ready for physical work. She assists Peter (Heart Capital's CEO), in developing master plans for Heart Capital, Foodpods and Hubspace, that is defining all the work to be done by the end of the year. She is also in charge of putting visual management in place for the first time in the organization. "Peter insisted that my 'work package' be completely consistent with my background in business consulting," says Charlotte.

In the words of Charlotte, "The list of things I learnt at Heart Capital is endless: social entrepreneurship, project management, start-ups management, innovative management solutions." Charlotte feels she has made a difference by being welcomed every day with a joyful "Good morning you beautiful global making changers!" She ended up believing it. "It's hard to conclude that you made a difference after a few weeks of work," says Charlotte. She has no doubt that Peter and Mandy (his wife and co-founder of Heart Capital) and also the beautiful Hearties who work at Heart Capital are making a difference and step by step they are changing the world. She experienced a culture difference at Heart Capital because she comes from a worldwide company with hierarchy principles. She adopted Hearties' culture: "Live. Work. Play." This experience will be extremely useful for her future as she found the organization she dreamt of and also know that human management exists and works tremendously well!

She has so many memorable experiences with her team; "Partying, camping, hiking, baking, farming..." But her most memorable experience would remain her first day at Heart Capital, listening to Peter's introducing speech. At that particular moment, she knew her life wouldn't be the same anymore. She advises future volunteers to: Work hard! Play hard! Grab each moment, time flies by. She fell in love with Cape Town from day one.



## Suits! | Human Rights Project update



The Projects Abroad Human Rights Office in Cape Town focuses on legal service assistance and social justice programs. Volunteers conduct enormous amounts of research at the office every day or are able to participate in legal and social justice work out in the field, while appearing in court and visiting clients in jail or visiting a variety of social centres in the area. Each volunteer is however encouraged to become involved in both legal services and social justice field work. Volunteers participating in the social justice programs will visit juvenile detention facilities. When visiting the social justices programs each staff member and volunteer at the Human Rights Office tries to be positive and motivating when they interact with many of their clients, particularly the juvenile offenders.

The case load at the Human Rights Office is currently very high, and they are always grateful for new volunteers or interns. There is a lot of work to be done and individuals who are serious about making a difference are encouraged to join the team. Whether you are skilled or simply interested in the field, if you put in the effort you are guaranteed to gain unique, diverse and hands-on experience during your time at the project.

The Human Rights project also runs food drives to help feed homeless children and others, they are striving to create more and improve their initiatives. We hope to hear great things about the Human rights project in the year 2014.



# Brendalisious

The Best Host-Mother the World Has Ever Seen

Words: Elin Wahlström (Sweden)

I don't always see myself as a 'people's person'. I love it when I've gotten to know wonderful new people, but the process leading to that moment for me is exhausting. I am in desperate need of my alone time, and I hate to be in someone's way. All this considered; it was not an obvious choice for me to go and live in someone else's house, in a country wildly different from my own, with five girls from a bunch of other countries. I would have to battle with getting to know a new city and new people, plus it was inevitable that I was at some point going to be in someone's way. This may make me sound like a loner and a complete bore who shuns social contact more than anything, but I promise you, I am really quite nice once you get to know me.

Nevertheless, I decided: 'What are life for if you don't step out of your comfort zone once in a while, and what better way of getting to know a culture than living in the middle of it.' So off I went to South Africa! On Wednesday the 9th of October, dog-tired from a 12-hour flight with disgusting aeroplane food and not nearly enough sleep, I stepped into Brenda Moses' kitchen in Cape Town and life hasn't been the same since.

What Brenda might lack in stature, she makes up for in authority. No one will walk over this lady; she knows how she wants things and she's not afraid to say it. Add to this a great sense of humour, a warm embrace, a large portion of gumption and a whole lot of love – and you've got Brenda. I couldn't think of anyone better suited for the role of a 'host-mum'. The process of having young people from all over the world constantly moving in and out of your home must be exhausting, but with Brenda you could never tell. The only time you can sense that this process is taking a toll on her, is when she speaks about accompanying people to the airport when they are leaving (something she swears she will never do again): 'That is when I first realised, I had to have a heart of steel to do this', she says. Other than that, no problem is too big, too small or too embarrassing and if you treat her with respect and accept the (very few and very reasonable) house rules, Brenda's always there for you, and you can feel it.

I never thought that I could feel so comfortable with someone in just a few weeks, but I have no trouble snuggling up on the bed next to Brenda, telling her about my day, and hearing her stories about all the previous volunteers who left their special mark in her heart and in her home. The most amazing thing about Brenda is that she takes all her volunteers to her heart, ultimately viewing them as her children. The first few times she said it, I was kind of thinking that maybe that is something she would just say to make people feel welcome, but after two months, I know that it is genuine. It certainly takes an open, generous heart, a massive amount of patience and a great deal of listening skills to be able to connect with so many different people, but for Brenda it seems effortless. I'm fairly certain that I do not only speak for myself when I say that whatever you need to feel at home-away-from-home, Brenda provides it in some way. In her own words: 'I don't want to be rich or be a millionaire, I just want to be happy. Here is my blessings (making a sweeping hand gesture to all of the girls in the room), you are all my blessings.'

Besides making sure that I will always see her as my own South African mother, I think the fact that Brenda makes the transition into her house so easy, really helps when getting to know the rest of your housemates. My housemates are all wonderfully funny and inspiring girls, who might also have something to do with it, but the easy-going environment that forms the Moses' household is definitely the ideal place for getting to know new people. Even though I had been looking forward to this adventure, I never expected it to provide me with a whole new family on the other side of the world (and spread around Europe), and when I leave here, it's going to feel like leaving home all over again. I know that I would have enjoyed this trip either way, but I consider myself incredibly lucky to have ended up in Brenda Moses' house. It is amazing how much she gives of herself, and I can only hope that she feels as if I have at least given some of me back.



# Photo Spread I Building





