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New MULTIMEDIA project

During our four-week-stay at Aldeas de Paz we started a new Multimedia Project for the children. The idea of this project was to offer the kids the opportunity to work with a new medium in order to express their thoughts and ideas. A specific film would be introduced to the children with the hope of leading them to reflect on their feelings and their social situation as well as the influence and function of audiovisual Medias.

The needs and wishes of children often have little space in or are overlooked by society. It was thus decided that the children should be given the opportunity to create their own film with the idea of uploading and sharing it via the internet allowing their message to reach a broader audience.

For this purpose a great deal of our time was spent designing and planning how to make a so called "trick-box" i.e. a wooden photo-box to produce stop-motion-movies. After three weeks of craft in the wood workshop the trick box was finally finished. There were many doubts and queries about how it would be received by the children. Would they enjoy it?



Jonathan and Lukas introducing the multimedia project

To conclude our part of the mission and to prepare the ground for the future steps of helping the children to produce their own film, we spent these weeks arts and music classes introducing the project to the children. We showed them a short-movie "La Pyramida" which they seemed to enjoy very much. Following the film, a discussion involving the topics of food, power and violence were addressed and the kids tried to relate these issues to their everyday lives. We also managed to talk about the technical process of producing short-movies and asked the kids to collect ideas for their own film. The children were so enthusiastic and excited about the prospect of this project showing real interest in the analysis of the film and it's relation to their own personal experiences, we got the impression that they are really looking forward to telling their own stories.....

Jonathan Scalet & Lukas Schmidt

Personal experience of a volunteer

Having signed up for the NGO Management and Administration internship my thoughts about my time here were something along the lines of 40 hour weeks spent working away at a computer in the office. When I arrived I realised I was wrong. The specialty of this foundation is its work with children, all the other activities are in the background. Of course we do have time to garden and build chicken coops, but the focus is always on the work with the beneficiaries. I thought I would just partner with somebody who would tell me what to do, how to teach and especially what to teach. The reality is that everybody is really involved in the teaching process. I was surprised by this fact but believe that it is a really great idea. It

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means that everybody working here has the possibility to build their own project and focus on the things they believe to be important.



Working with the beneficiaries

Before my arrival, another element I hadn't expected was the living situation. I didn't think we would build such a good community. We live together according to co-operative living 'rules', which means that all the housework duties are allocated to various volunteers. This allocation changes every week and creates a feeling of responsibility. You spend a lot of time together although I also recognize that if you need some alone time there is always the possibility of relaxing in the hammocks during your lunch.

To summarize my experience so far, I would say I hadn't expected my stay at the foundation to be like this but I'm really enjoying it. I'm looking forward to the next few weeks and everything that I'll learn along the way...

Caroline Weingrill

Weekend Trip to Boa Vista

One of the many positive sides of Santa Elena is its proximity to Brazil. A 15 minute drive from the Fundación Aldeas de Paz will take you to the border of Venezuela and to the small Brazilian border town Pacaraima.

This time we (five volunteers, Cristobal the manager of the Fundación and his small family) decided to go further into Brazil to explore a little more of this Portuguese speaking country and its culture. In a taxi we drove to the next bigger city called Boa Vista to visit an old friend of Cristobal. While sitting in the taxi, rain forests and small mountains flew past us. The nature on the way to Boa Vista was absolutely amazing and only seldom interrupted by small indigenous villages. At one point we drove over a river, which is probably the biggest river I have ever seen in my life; I remember Cristobal mentioning: "Oh, this is just one of the smaller rivers of Brazil."

After three hours we arrived in Boa Vista and at the house of Cristobal's friend. The neighbourhood is very interesting; there live almost as many dogs as people and the houses are quite poorly built. The house of our host Franco was definitely my favourite: In the front were hung up hammocks and swings and also one pitched tent, in which a friend of Franco was spending the nights with his girlfriend. The living room was quite big, but only filled with a small TV, a rocking chair and some shoes. The walls were directly painted with children's drawings. The kitchen was certainly my favourite room: the walls were as colourful as they can be and the shelves were stuffed with homemade food, tomato cans (which were used as glasses) and tools.

We were warmly greeted by all people living in this house and also all the children from the neighbourhood that liked to spend their time here.

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We gathered around a table to have lunch together, but before eating, Franco and his friends had their little routine (in which we all joined in, of course) of humming, singing, clapping and “hau HAU hau HAU” –sounds to give thanks for the meal. After this we all started laughing and eating. I soon realized that I did not understand a lot of what was being said. Their Portuguese-Spanish (they like to call it Portuñol) mix and my restricted knowledge of the Spanish language made it very challenging to understand them. However, this was not important, as those people unquestionably enjoyed making fun of everything, laughing about everything and especially singing whenever the chance arose.



Having a refreshment on the market

During the whole weekend that we stayed at this place, I was probably kissed a thousand times by Franco (which is an absolutely normal gesture), had some spontaneous stretching exercises with him, and talked to a French hippie over a bottle of cachaca about his 30 year old and extremely eventful life.

We also visited a nearby beautiful river and the huge market of Boa Vista under the merciless sun, giving me a super-sunburn.

On Sunday, we drove back home to the Fundación, all of us glad to finally have a long and relaxing shower.

Kim Schirrmacher

[Our unique waterfall experience](#)

On Sunday some of the other volunteers and I decided to organise an excursion to a nearby waterfall. Geder, a long-term Venezuelan resident at the foundation who knows the surroundings well, agreed to guide us on the 2 hour trek. At midday the weather was brilliant and so we started making our way to town. Many other Volunteers, even Dora unaccompanied by Santico and Vera, (a rare occasion) took the opportunity to spend the afternoon walking to the natural swimming pool and waterfall. A lover of nature and all things wild, Dora was particularly excited to have the opportunity to join in with this excursion.

Arriving in town, under a grey sky and some unwelcoming clouds, jokes were already being made about the weather and what sorts of creatures we might encounter walking through the forest. Unfortunately, it even began to rain. After one and a half hours of moving from street to street and a small hill climb, we came to a water reservation. We started joking about how this was the waterfall in all its natural beauty. All we could see was a pipe protruding from concrete with flowing water. The joke was on us when Geder told us that “we’d arrived”. We were a little shocked, Dora especially; as we thought we were going to a waterfall in the forest. Despite our disappointment we were able to laugh the situation we’d found ourselves in and realized that this was the funny

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side of the language barrier and culture difference. Geder thought this would be a safer and less tiring option for our first trek. Content in the knowledge that we had a guide who had our best interests at heart we sat down for lunch.

While we were eating Geder mentioned that there was another 'waterfall' roughly 40 minutes away. He pointed to a forest path that looked promising and would soon lead us to our final destination. We set off again and after 30 minutes of walking along a path that led us through a wonderful untouched forest we arrived at a kind of small dam. There was yet another pipe and, although it wasn't a waterfall, after climbing up the dam we found a wonderful natural swimming pool. Despite the cold water and steady rain we had a lot of fun.



Geder and his Olympic worthy diving

Geder and another volunteer showed off their diving skills jumping into the 'pool' from a rock

roughly 2 metres high! After bathing we decided to explore the surrounding area by walking up along the river. It was very tricky as the rocks were slippery but it was a lot of fun! After a long day we returned to the city where Cristobal picked us up in the car. Tough we didn't see a natural waterfall but it was an awesome, funny and exciting excursion. Now the phrase 'Let's go to a waterfall' is a running joke among us.



Having a break and enjoying the wonderful natural surroundings

Caroline Weingrill

This month has been challenging to say the least, packed with different outings and activities it has seen the coming and going of many different volunteers from all over the world. Some who have completed treks to Angel falls and others who are off to explore Mount Roraima. We're always very sad to say good bye but are also looking forward to seeing all the fresh new faces. Most of all we're thankful for the contribution and hard work that everyone puts in towards the wellbeing of the children and community here in Santa Elena!