

Baobab Children Foundation

Ghana | Westafrika



Socially and physically challenged - hand in hand

Newsletter April 2020

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Normally I would have left for Germany by now, but „Auntie Coro“ as some call the virus over here and the situation in Europe made me stay in Ghana. There is not much to do over there and for me it is better to isolate here than in Germany. The last flights have left and the country has closed its borders.

I am now sitting on my terrace overlooking the sea, listening to the constant music the waves are playing. We are also staying at home as much as possible, washing hands, keeping distance, at least many of us are but as in all the European countries some people find it difficult to understand that this is a deadly virus. We the white people have brought it here, that's what many think. I even faced a situation where I was insulted by a young guy, because I asked him to keep a distance from me whilst I was paying at the cashier. So it is easy for me to keep a distance when I go for my daily walk, as people normally avoid getting closer to me. When I greet them in Fante a smile reaches their faces.

Ghana has locked down Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Kasoa for now. Nobody should travel to other regions. In the meantime 5 regions are affected. A lot of activities are going on to control the lockdown. Markets are sprayed, people relocated to other places to sell some food items, 120 chefs are cooking for the poor, financed by funds raised among richer Ghanaians. This is the first time I am hearing about Ghanaians donating to the poor in such big numbers.

The positive cases are rising gradually but not really in great numbers so far. 1st April we were having 195 confirmed cases, some have already recovered and 5 have passed away.

Schools have been closed for two weeks, services at churches and mosques, big events, conferences - not allowed! Beaches are closed as well as most of the hotels in the country. Trotros (public transport) should only take half of the number of people and this is controlled by police. But I still see full trotros and shared taxis.

For the last three weeks handwashing has been practised at each shop. Social distancing, difficult! All the roads to Takoradi are controlled and they screen the people for fever. Children taken from the market area, market women of the Central Market divided in two groups and relocated to Jubilee Park to make distancing work. Tourists have left the country as well as volunteers. That is why we also closed the Baobab House in Cape Coast as our main customers had left the country.

Our school was open for exams candidates until the end of March, but then we had to send them home as exams were postponed. Only a few very vulnerable children are staying at the Center. We cook for them and their care takers, as nobody should go to the village. Some boys stayed as they help on the farm.

This newsletter is dedicated to all volunteers we have had over the last 19 years. They came with more or less knowledge, skills or talents. Sometimes it was easy, sometimes it was difficult, but each of them has left something behind. I want to thank in this newsletter all these young people who have helped to make Baobab possible and who have dedicated their time to help build Baobab. We would not be where we are now but for all these young committed people who have been coming here. Thank you so much and you are always welcome.

That's why I want to give all the 5 last volunteers a voice in their reports.

Friederike, an Osteopath from Germany, I met at the beach. We talked and we found out that there was much we could do together. We were looking for a therapist to work with our children with disabilities and she was looking for a place to join. Friederike came for 5 weeks to Baobab and also inaugurated our beautiful new Therapy Center, as nobody has ever worked there before. She even trained one of our dancers to continue her work after she had left.



eleven patients

Friederike's report

"Fortune favours the brave" is something my grandmother used to say. With that quote in mind, I started my journey in January 2020 to explore the fascinating African continent. Without any specific plans but full of curiosity about the people, the life and culture I started my trip in Ghana. It was serendipity that I met Edith De Vos on just my third day in the country. She was looking for a therapist for the newly-built therapy center at the Baobab Youth Training Center, and I was looking for a possibility to make a positive contribution and to get to know the country and its people. For me as an osteopath specialising in osteopathy for children, I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity.

One week after our lucky encounter, I moved in to the volunteer house on the campus of the Baobab Center and received a warm welcome from the students and staff. I soon met those students who were going to be my patients for the five weeks ahead: Bright, Collins and Linda, three siblings who are all suffering from Becker's muscular dystrophy, Isaac D. with left-sided hemiplegia, Isaac Q. and Daniel, who had poliomyelitis during childhood and are now dependant on a wheelchair, due to severe scoliosis and paralysis of both legs. The two brothers Seybowie and Etuaful, who were severely neglected in their first years of life and have under-developed digits, as part of a genetic syndrome. There is also Benjamin, who has speech difficulties due to hearing impairment and Joshua, who adapted an asymmetrical gait pattern after a bicycle accident.

My work included reducing physical tension, doing exercises to improve strength, balance and proprioception and ultimately enhancing their well-being.

The therapy center is very well equipped and allowed me to be creative in the structure of my treatment; with a height-adjustable treatment table, wall bars, a gym mat, exercise balls and a balance board I was able to tailor the treatment around the individual needs of my patients.

Luckily, I had Frederick as my assistant accompanying me during the treatments. Frederick has been part of the Baobab Culture Troupe for several years and is teaching physical education at the Baobab School. He was translating during the treatment as most students speak mainly Fanti. I showed him many treatment techniques and exercises that he quickly adapted so that he can continue treating the students on his own.

I will always remember my time at the Baobab Center as a very happy time. I was deeply touched by the children's stories and I was grateful every single day for being able to make my contribution at such a peaceful and happy place and for being part of the Baobab community



treatment of Collins



Isaac is half side paralysed, at the right side Frederick



Etuaful has been with us since two years



Daniel had polio. He is longer with us
and now working at the cane
& bamboo workshop

Elena and Jakob finished High School and were participants of the German programme “Weltwärts”. They were supposed to be in Ghana for one year, but due to the corona virus outbreak they had to go back in March. They want to come back and finish their service as soon as this is possible. You are always welcome!

Elena's report

When I decided I wanted to go abroad for one year about two years ago, I didn't have any idea in what kind of project, with what type of people or even in which country this would bring me. To apply for a volunteer service at Baobab was the best decision I could have possibly made. Last September I entered the Baobab Center for the very first time and was overwhelmed. You can see pictures and read about it on the webpage or in a newsletter, but still you will never be able to imagine the complexity of this institution because you can not just describe Baobab in a few words. But I will try my best.

After my first week at Baobab, school started again and all the students came back from their vacation. Slowly I got to meet all of them and was able to find a routine in my working schedule. My tasks were in the academic as well as in the creative departments.



Elena with Linda.
Elena assisted Friederike in Linda's treatment



Elena with Madam Hannah
when we said good bye to them

In the morning I supported Madame Hannah in teaching the Special Needs Class, which increased in size in January. My work here has given me an incredible amount of pleasure and to work together with Madame Hannah in the lessons was perhaps sometimes a bit chaotic, but always eventful and joyous. Hannah taught me a lot, without even realizing it, especially about what it means to teach. The Special Needs Class was the main focus of my work at Baobab. Besides the Special Class you could often find me in the batik or sewing workshop.

On the weekend I was given the responsibility to lead the Beads Workshop, which was a bit confusing in the first weeks, but due to some failed attempts it turned out to be a happy and productive workshop. I also started a theatre group. We were able to write the play almost completely, but due to the sudden end of my work in Ghana we could neither perform nor rehearse it. Still it was a lot of fun time spent with the students. One of the best features of this project is the diversity it brings. No day is the same and my schedule has changed or shifted regularly. Sometimes you plan a special event for the students, drive to Accra to buy new beads supplies, organize a fun evening with dancing, implement projects in the Baobab House, create sponsor profiles and help write the sponsor letters or play with the students. Therefore a large part of my work was also photographing and documenting, for which I am very grateful. I also got the opportunity to work more in the Baobab House and helped with the renovation of the shop and from this year on I was allowed to work shifts there as well.

During my intermediate seminar it became clear to me what a treasure Baobab is and how much this project should be appreciated. From the beginning I could feel comfortable and at home at Baobab, all teachers, staff and also all students were unbelievably welcoming and have grown dear to me. Only after a few days I miss being there already and I hope that I can continue my volunteer service with Baobab in Ghana as soon as possible. The students have become my friends and even though I was mostly Madame Elena to them, I had the honour of sometimes even being called Sister Elena by them. Every single one of them deserves Baobab and the chance for education so much and I wish them all the very best. Thanks to you if you supported these children and maybe have even taken over a sponsorship. Having a sponsor and especially receiving a letter always puts a big smile on their faces. I wish I wouldn't have had to leave early and could have spent the remaining 5 months together with them, but unfortunately this is not possible at the moment. I thank Baobab for the time I had, there could not have been a better project for me. Baobab will always have a place in my heart.

Jakob's report

My name is Jakob Fröhle. I live nearby the town of Ulm in Germany and I am 18 years old. I was blessed to spend my volunteer service with Elena, my colleague from Weltwärts at the Baobab Children Foundation. Normally the Weltwärts volunteer service takes a whole year. Sadly we had to leave earlier. The German government called back all their volunteers in the middle of March because the situation is unclear how the Corona pandemic will develop in the next weeks. It hurt to say goodbye so early, and the more I am happy about the six and half months I could spend in the project.

My working sections were the ecological farm and the bicycle repair workshop. I worked with the farmers in the morning. We made beds, nursed seeds, removed weeds and watered the vegetables. The work with the farmers was interesting and lot of fun. I also had my own beds. I made them on my own and took care of them so we could harvest some vegetables.

In the afternoon I supported Barnabas in the bicycle repair workshop. The Baobab students learn how to take care of and how to repair a bicycle. Baobab regularly gets containers of used bicycles from Germany. We, as the Bicycle Workshop, fix them and make them ready for selling. Some of the bikes Baobab donates to schools in the villages around Kissi. The schools choose the students who are most in need of one. The workshop meant a lot of fun for me.

At Baobab you can not get bored. In the afternoons after closing of the workshops and at the weekends my volunteer colleagues and myself organized freetime activities for the students. We organized sports tournaments, card and group games and my colleague also ran a theatre workshop. Other activities were the writing of student profiles and sponsor letters with the students

The project of Baobab Children Foundation and the people in the project are dear to my heart. As soon as the situation allows it I want to go back to Ghana and finish my volunteer service properly, because I am not finished with Baobab yet.



Jakob a hard worker at the farm



Jakob with Mr Kwansah on our tractor

Peter's report

Hello, I am Peter, 15 years old and I met Mrs. de Vos, who introduced Baobab, during the summer festival of our school. Soon the idea arose to extend my two weeks internship and to do it in Ghana. So I spent the whole January in Kissi.

It was a great time at Baobab, with the students and other volunteers who were the same age or older than me. One by one, the students all greeted me in a very friendly way and were happy that I was there. I also had a lot of fun with the children and young people who live at the Baobab Center. Above all, I had great respect for what the students had gone through and are still going through at home. Of course, I had known a little bit before, but it is hard to see it in reality. And then also to see how nevertheless all Ghanaians still seem to be very happy, they are such happy people anyway. The history of Baobab and Ghana is also very exciting. During the four weeks I worked in the mornings with the Special Class for handicapped children and at noon I helped in the Cane and Bamboo workshop. In the first few days I was only watching and later I was able to also help out, that was very cool. I especially enjoyed the workshop very much.



Peter mit seinem Freund Joshua, little Ediths kleiner Bruder, von uns adoptiert

On Mondays I had my off day, where I made excursions, for example to Cape Coast. That's the next bigger city where the Baobab Restaurant and Baobab Shop are located. I also went to a very nice beach that belongs to the Ko-Sa Beach Resort near Elmina.

Now, 2 months after my return, I think of everyone very often, and more and more I realize that my view on many things here has changed.



The student's wrote with Friederike an application letter



Friederike with the Moringa groupe

Friederike got to know us through her parents who are living in my area close to wwFreiburg. She came in August 2019 for six months and left in February 2020. She also did a great job.

Friederike's report - Ghana changed me

4:30 p.m. at the Baobab Center. I sit with a few schoolgirls in front of the girl's dorm and we chat, or they talk happily in Fante - I just sit next to them and listen with interest. I don't understand much. In between, we exchange a few words in English, so I can somehow still follow the whole conversation. Around us, life at the center is in full swing. From a distance I hear the boys playing on the football field. In the school kitchen, the pots rattle, dinner is cooked. Carrying water on their heads, two girls run to the shower, two older ones are still doing their laundry. Next to me, the bowls for dinner are quickly rinsed. The caretaker urges all younger students one last time to finally take their bath. Soon it's time for supper.

It was clear to me that after graduating from high school, I had to get out into the world. When the opportunity arose to go to Ghana and participate in the Baobab Children Foundation, I was really happy. I packed my backpack and finally landed in Accra at the end of August. After ten days, in which I was able to gather some first impressions of my new home, I came to the center in Kissi. The first weeks there were quiet and empty, but when the holidays were over, there was a lot for me to do: I worked on the farm, among other things, initially also in the bicycle workshop. I helped the students in English and organized the center's sports and leisure program with the other two volunteers. In the Baobab House I helped to redesign the store, checked statistics and helped to calculate prices.

I quickly got to know all the students and spent time with them every day. Especially with some girls I developed a really close and cordial relationship. Now back in Germany I miss above all the ease of life of the people of Kissi and especially that of Baobab. It's crazy how time passed quickly. I am happy to stay in touch with the Baobab family.

This is today's news for you. In my next Newsletter I will talk more about the development of Baobab since my last Newsletter in November.

Stay safe, stay at home.

Best wishes from Ghana
Edith and the Baobab team

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africa action/Deutschland e.V.
Pax-Bank eG Köln
IBAN DE03 3706 0193 0000 9988 77
GENODED1PAX
Code word: GH 75 BAOBAB

CONTACT

SPONSORSHIP

Monika Lockemann
patenschaften@baobab-children.de
Tel +49-711-728 5638

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Edith de Vos Managing director of Baobab Children Foundation
WhatsApp +49 160 1720 236
ghana@baobab-children.de

FINANCES AND DONATION CERTIFICATES

info@africa-action.de
Address
africa action/Deutschland e. V.
Südweststraße 8
50126 Bergheim
Tel +49-2271-767540

