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FAWCO Berlin Reflection Essay

For me, the Berlin trip, thanks to FAWCO, was a nice opportunity to volunteer in a brand new environment, with a different culture. I thoroughly appreciate the time and effort that went into making this trip possible. I was hoping the Berlin trip would include more advanced and more taxing volunteer work. Some of the activities we participated in were new, engaging and interesting, while some felt very unorganized and underwhelming.

Unfortunately, some activities did not go as planned. For example, we were meant to babysit children whose parents were busy working for their next meal however, the children never showed up. Instead of taking care of the children we did some gardening on the complexes back yard and then we had to sit and wait until it was time to go to the next activity. Another example of this is when we had to fill bags with new baby items needed for expecting mothers but many of the items required for the baby bags were missing or they were few in number. While we got to put something in the baby bags it felt as if we did not really accomplish our goal which gave me a feeling of dissatisfaction. Organizing, fundraising and coordinating the volunteers has many uncontrollable variables and I understand that mistakes do happen, but it felt like we could have done way more with the time we spent at these places. In addition to mistakes within the activities themselves there were also huge blocks of time where we didn't do anything. We spent entire mornings or evenings sitting in circles discussing democracy, equality, or doing ice breaker activities to get to know each other better. While I recognize the importance of these conversations way too much time was spent on these conversations.

While some of the activities were rough around the edges some were also very engaging and interesting. One of my favorite activities was the graffiti tour. We got to walk around the alleys and back streets of Berlin to look at the decorated walls of various buildings in order to understand their meaning, how they got there, who made them etc. The graffiti tour was very interesting because the tour guide was very good at keeping things interesting. The graffiti tour was because it was pretty fun and I got to learn a lot about some of the culture in Berlin. In addition, many of the works of art on the street were impressive, beautiful, and sometimes even funny. Another one of my favorite activities was handing food out to the needy. A local church collected a lot of food that grocery stores no longer wanted. We then handed these items out to people who needed it. I enjoyed handing food out because we were talking with them and truly engaging. This direct contact activity and gave us the immediate sense that we were useful and making their day a bit better. Finally, it was also nice to meet and to get to know the other people in my youth group especially since most of them came from all over Europe. I still keep regular contact with some of them.

Even though some of the volunteerism experiences were not as impactful or as big as I had imagined them, it was clear that the coordinators and leaders work real hard to make a lot happen for those in need. After experiencing Berlin, I consider it to be a very patriotic and a very

nice city with a lot to offer its citizens and visitors. The bonus was being there during the world cup games and cheering on the German team. It was exciting and it was super fun. I loved eating the curry worst and all things schnitzel. Getting to spend so much time outside and away from technology was refreshing especially since the trip took place right after finals.