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FAWCO Youth Cultural Volunteers 2018

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### My Personal Experience in Berlin

In June, I had the privilege to participate in a program with FAWCO; a week full of volunteering, scoping out the culture of Berlin, and meeting other students my age from all around the world. This experience has overall developed my skills in teamwork, volunteering and new social situations. Due to this program I have become aware and in contact with more global and social issues, such as human trafficking, poverty, the current refugee crisis, etc. On top of extending my awareness for these issues, I became close with many of my fellow students in the group, and created friendships that will last a lifetime. I feel that the connections we have made with the Berlin society indeed had a large impact and will prolong for years to come. This week has made me realise how lucky I am, as a teenager, to be so privileged in the life I live. This feeling has given me the need to give back to the community and to those who are less privileged than I. Having participated in previous volunteering programs where I live, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, the feeling of having helped those in need has been something that I often experience, inspiring me to continue to volunteer.

At the end of each day, I was fatigued, although I was not the only one. My fellow volunteers and I seemed to share the same experience. Our days were so busy, that we had no time to relax and decoil until the evening when returning to our host homes. On our first day of volunteering, Monday, we participated in only one volunteering activity, gardening, while the rest of the day was attending presentations. I felt that the presentations were long, yet interesting, although I did not enjoy the fact that they were in the same day. I believe that these presentations should be spread out throughout the week, to avoid feeling useless, or tired. For me personally, as a volunteer, I enjoy being on my feet and in action helping directly, which the presentations did not satisfy for me. The end of the day was relaxing and gave

us all a chance to wind down while taking in information in the “Youth in Democracy” presentation. The second day was molded more for my liking; we sorted clothes for the homeless and refugees in the morning and were able to explore Berlin and its culture in the afternoon. This gave me time to not only work in action, but later get to know and bond more with my fellow FAWCO youths. Our last day of volunteering consisted of painting hallways at the Ronald McDonald house, visiting the elderly at a senior citizen home, and attending the public viewing of the Germany vs South Korea football match at the Brandenburg Gate. At the end of this day, my fellow FAWCO Youths and I were very tired, although we were again able to bond over dinner at the house of an American Women’s Club of Berlin participant. This evening was eventful, while we also got to watch more football matches together as a group. Our last day before our departure was planned to expand our knowledge on the Berlin culture itself, by visiting museums and participating in a walking tour of the city. At the end of the day, we were all given the opportunity to cook and eat Syrian food with refugees from Syria who have migrated to Germany. This also gave us an insight on a different culture which have been accepted and possibly evolved in Germany. Although not every day of the trip consisted of volunteering, I feel as if I have made an impact on the culture in which I worked.

When it comes to my fellow FAWCO Youths, I could not have asked for better people to work with. Every person had unique attributes that came out to play in our volunteering activities. The fact that everyone had their own specific positive aspects helped the group thrive in each activity completed. Due to the fact that everyone had different strengths, some activities were easier for some more than others, but everyone had their strong points. The relationships I have made with my fellow students have made a large impact on me. For me, I already had two people also from Amsterdam on the trip with me, in whom my relationships with have also become stronger. I am still in contact with the majority of the group, and I believe that nearly everyone of them would go out on a limb for another group member in times of need. What surprised me about my fellow FAWCO Youths was the fact that everyone was so different from one

another, yet so similar. The difference between my friends at home and my fellow FAWCO Youths is that that my friends are not as eager to help and make a difference on the society than the people I have worked with in Berlin. Every person in our group was willing to get their hands dirty even if it meant it would only make the slightest difference in someone else's life or overall in the community. This sort of attribute can be very helpful in certain situations throughout life, and the fact that my colleagues have already developed this is amazing beyond words.

In regards to social issues, I was surprised by many little things in Berlin. As the days went on, I realised that there are a number of different social issues in which I was not aware of happening all around us. This struck me because I am used to hearing about exotic social issues occurring in less developed countries, such as human trafficking, but it was occurring all around us at that very moment. There are certain issues in which are more prevalent in Berlin rather than other locations, such as the refugee crisis, although it was something that was not easily observed. To work with this certain social issue we were taken into more secluded parts of the city, where this new culture may feel more comfortable. I believe that it is very easy to say that youth can affect change in politics and social issues, because we are the future. Participating in programs like these give us, as youth, the chance of an insight on what is occurring in the world around us, so we can use our imaginations in advance to begin to contribute to the society. As we are also only beginning to make a large impact on the world around us, we are able to use our fresh minds to create new ideas for improvements, and being a generation adapted with technology, we can use these innovations to also make an impact.

At the end of the week, when it was time for our group to go our separate ways, everyone was extremely emotional. It was certainly a day full of eating, playing football, laughing, crying, hugging and much more. The bond that each of us had created with one another made it more than difficult for us all to say goodbye. In the beginning of the week, the whole group was so awkward, I would have never imagined myself becoming close with anyone, but after a whole week together, working together towards

making the community a better place, we made connections that would last a lifetime. Looking back, I am so thankful that I decided to participate in this program. This program has helped contribute to mine and many others ideas on how to make our future world a better place, and has inspired me to contribute more in my own community and those around me to create more improvements within, politics, social issues as well as given me inspiration to work together with the others in the world around me.