

Volunteer Experiences 2008

Last Updated Monday, 11 May 2009

The most recent article from this year has been written by Rui, a 30-year-old IT engineer from Portugal who spent 6 months working for Casa Do Caminho.

Leaving Casa Do Caminho, every volunteer has the opportunity to give written feedback to the Casa coordinators after their stay at the orphanages. According to the volunteer's wishes the information is treated confidentially or may be discussed in public.

Rui's personal account of his time at the orphanages is published below (translated from portuguese). If you have any specific questions, he kindly agreed to publish his email here. You can write Rui to [ruimgcorreia\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:ruimgcorreia[at]gmail.com),

I have been at Casa do Caminho between May and October 2008. I graduated in informatics and was "recruited" by the Casa as the responsible project manager of the ICT project. After I had arrived it became clear to me that the conditions of the computer lab weren't the best ones and that the maintainance of the PCs in good condition would be a bit more difficult than in a European company - to augment and improve the computer lab would be a real challenge. There was a good supply of electronic equipment and single gadgets, but the majority didn't work properly, so that e.g. exchanging a simple graphic card could turn into a headache. Nonetheless, my primary interest has always been working with the children. I was working as an educator once a week, and giving lessons in informatics. Moreover, I also inherited the mathematics lessons from the preceeding volunteer who was responsible for the informatics re-inforcement classes. It also dawned upon me that our children weren't angels without wings, but their general demeanour was much better than I had expected. However, soon after I had arrived, the existing volunteer team dissolved because many people returned home and with this change of educators, the children's good conduct aggravated significantly. At that time, almost all new volunteers had arrived after me, and I myself had only been there for 2 months. We lived through some difficult weeks, but with the outstanding efforts of all volunteers, the problems were overcome and the general behaviour of the children returned to normality! It was during this time that I had the most difficult moments in Casa do Caminho, but it was also the time when I realized that educating the children was what I liked best doing at the Casa. In the last three months that I passed in the Casa, I was in the advantageous situation that another volunteer with know-how in informatics came around. This gave me the opportunity to spend most of my time with the kids as an educator. In my eyes, working as an educator is the most exhausting and most challenging work in Casa do Caminho, but it is certainly also one of the most rewarding ones. But be careful not to expect that the reward from the kids for the work we do as educators will be unconditional gratefulness, great affection and friendship. To be an educator sometimes requires to put your own feelings aside and try to be as fair and as strict as possible. If we "only" behave like friends, it is difficult to achieve good manners in the children. And being fair is as important as it is difficult. The children have the memory of an elephant for things that once have struck them as an injustice, and if we fail only for one time, it is guaranteed that even after 4 or 5 months have passed, we will hear something like this: "But there was this one day when the Uncle [a word the kids use for the educator and other grown-ups] let Matheus do this and he didn't say anything ...". The great reward that we receive is to watch the children behave well while doing what is fun for both the kids and their educators in the time they spend together. The slightly tensed atmosphere lightens up when the educators take time to call the children to attention and let them complain about things, with the goal to establish an environment where everybody can relax and have fun together. After six months at the Casa, I left with the feeling of a mission completed. I made a lot of good friends, I got to know fantastic people who have shown me lessons of life which have widened my horizons. I have worked hard at the Casa, but I have also had tons of fun. I believe that those people who have the opportunity and willpower to face such an experience, just have to do this. May they be very flexible to accomplish a range of different tasks and may they be able to live in basic conditions with limited comfort. They should also be prepared to work hard and be extremely responsible personalities. Wear a smile on your face, good humor in your heart and an open mind for new cultures and experiences. If those conditions come together, be sure that you will not only be a very important volunteer for the Casa, but you will also grow personally, have lots of fun and live one of the most enriching experiences of your life. RuiC ***