

Out with friends

Muenchweiler: Woodland turned into multicultural meeting place



A self made xylophone was one of several activities where children and South African students were cooperating. Co-coordinator Petra Meder is testing the xylophone.

The woods near Muenchweiler/Germany were turned into a place of fun and games last week. Children from the Landau kindergarten of the Diakonissenverein (deaconess organization) met youths from South Africa.

Youngsters creep through the undergrowth like Indians, stopping here and there to bury little “treasures” for the kiddies, helped by Andrea Bueffel, certified teacher. Children’s joyful voices echo through the woods. When the sirene of the Malteser bus sound, eleven children, loaded with various materials, stream into the log cabin for lunch. “One of the little ones is still missing” says Ms Petra Sawatzki - Hey, known to the children as “Big Petra”. But missing Tamara is already standing next to “little Petra” (Meder) at the stove.

In front of the “castle” three mighty female voices rise above the woods, singing a Xhosa spiritual: Sisunda Plaatjie, Ntombethemba Peter and Mermoria Maxham from Port Elizabeth are rehearsing for a recording this evening. The 18- and 20-year-old South Africans, 17-year-old Masixole Poyoyo and their accompanying deputy head, Donovan Kluit, have been guests of students from the Alfred-Grosser-School in Bad Bergzabern/Germany.

Petra and Rolf Meder are in charge of the project. The kiddies come from Germany, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, Portugal and North Africa, plus the guests from South Africa and their hosts: The idea of a One-World living in harmony is being lived proactively. The sign on the log cabin reads "Emilienruhe" (Emily's repose), it could also read "Ubuhlobo", friendship, which is the name of the project which has made the stay of the South African guests possible and with which Rolf Meder has been taking help to the Walmer Township in Port Elizabeth for 10 years.

This project is sponsored by the Protestant Landesjugendamt in Kaiserslautern, supported by the school in Bad Bergzabern and the Malteser Hilfsdienst (a charitable aid group) in Speyer. Rolf Meder trains students as paramedics. This year's hosts, Alexander Oster, Sabrina Hengen, Sophie Dauerhauer and Liesa Steller will pass on their knowledge during courses and lectures when they visit South Africa in October.

Alexander says that Masixole was very surprised about how safely and securely one can move around in Germany. The visitors were astonished about the "miracle" of water flowing freely from the tap. The unexpected friendliness that greeted them as "Blacks" in a German "white" family astounded them, too.

Donovan Kluit, deputy head teacher at Sapphire Road Primary School in Port Elizabeth, is spending his holidays with youngsters in Germany for the second time. He says he sees Germany in a completely different light.

When Petra Meder, the head kindergarten teacher, first started to go into the woods with the children eight years ago, the family's weekend home turned into a haven of intercultural meetings. A little boy confirmed this answering his mother's questions on how it went with "the South Africans" in the woods: "There were no South Africans- we were out with friends!"

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