

Kate from People and Places was my first contact and remained helpful even after putting me in touch with Calabash(local partner). Kate answered my questions quickly and clearly. I appreciated the information about my placement and reports from previous volunteers. P&P also provided the contact info of fellow volunteers and it helped to compare notes. I felt properly supported.

When I arrived at my placement, I was naturally overwhelmed. During the first orientation day, the teachers introduced themselves. (I learned the names gradually.) Future volunteers should expect a "learn as you go" process. The school had an idea of where and with whom I would work but no clear expectations for what I would do. I found that it was up to me to create and complete goals based upon the needs I witnessed at the school.

I loved my time at Tshume. The staff was so kind and helpful. The children seemed eager to please and I truly loved them.

Since I was at Tshume for a term, I was able to serve in many areas. I taught English to small groups of children in grade 3. This was my time for creativity. We would read as a group or sometimes I would have them read individually. Then, I would always try to have a game or activity to help reinforce the text. I also worked on English with grade 4. The teacher, Linda, and I would teach the same lesson but I would focus on a group of 8 of the slower children.

Due to unfortunate circumstances, I ended up assisting with art for grades 5 and 6. Luckily, I had a fellow volunteer with me for my first month. She initiated the classes and I was able to follow her example when she left.

I definitely came to expect the unexpected. Sometimes the school would be in utter chaos (or at least it seemed that way to me) and I would have to adjust my schedule for the day. Frequently, children would be alone in the classroom because the teacher had a meeting, was sick, or had some other obligation. I would sometimes take these opportunities to engage the children in a game, singing, or read them a story.

While I was there, I started work on a storage room. It was an absolute mess. When the school receives supplies and textbooks, they do not always have a clear place for them. I found ancient books, books still in the original wrapping, useless Afrikaans books, and whole sets of great books for the classrooms. I was able to leave the room somewhat sorted. I left sticky labels with the school administrator that can be used to keep the books in order.

I never would have been able to find this wonderful opportunity without People and Places. They found a place that needed something I could offer. They put me in a project that aided the community under its own terms.

Future volunteers are very much needed at Tshume. The store room needs more attention. Volunteers can remove rubbish, organize materials, and might move appropriate books to the library. The library would be another area where a future volunteer might be helpful. While I was there, the library was hardly used. There is no system in place for the children. Someone could set up times for classes to visit the library and perhaps organize a way for the kids to borrow books.

Other volunteers and I were able to go on a few excursions. I visited a few game parks (which I recommend to anyone). We visited the nearby oceanarium, Bayworld. My host, Mickey, would sometimes take me shopping at Greenacres mall or to visit her family. As I gained friends, I could go to taverns/clubs in the evening. Usually I would just spend the evening at home with Mickey. I could also go to the local internet shop to communicate with my family and friends at home.