

This is a “patchwork” of the interviews to people who have hosted foreign and South African volunteers at their homes. The interviewed people live in Athlone and Kayelitsha areas and have hosted young volunteers from Canada, Mozambique and other Cape Town suburbs, mainly in the framework of the Youth Exchange Programme.

For these women, the experience of hosting volunteers started this way:

“Owen [the Youth Exchange Programme's supervisor] came around to my house and asked if I would love to join Volunteer Centre, and he explained to me how it works and I said to him: “Fine, I have got two teen-age daughters that still live at home – one at university, the other at high school, “ and I said to him it will be something nice for them to experience to have some foreign friends and to learn something from them, as well.

And that is how I gave my name to Volunteer Centre and that is how I got into this; hosting the kids that come over.”

Carmelita - Athlone

“It was just a coincidence. Volunteer Centre was still looking for a home for the youth.

I didn't even know about Volunteer Centre or their activities. Then a friend of mine came to me saying that they are looking for a place for these youth and that these youth come far away (. ..)

“They can come to me!”

By so doing, I got involved, I just gave the place and from that it started.”

Brenda - Athlone

For the first time, after the democracy has been established in South Africa, they had the great chance to open their house's doors to Black, White, Coloured and Foreign People...

“I enjoy having them (...) I had a lot of fun because for the first time, as in South Africa (you know about the apartheid and all that) we were separated from each other, we didn't liaise; you were staying in your corners, I was staying in my corner...So, by having blacks in my home, I could learn from them and they could learn from me and for the first time different cultures came together and we could speak about a lot of things and I could learn from them and they could learn from me.”

Brenda - Athlone

“I live in a basically coloured community. These days everybody is welcome in the coloured community while back in the day it wasn't like that so we weren't allowed to move from area to area , we were sort of restricted in our ares. But in 1994 everything was opened up and we were free to welcome everybody in our areas and we were free to welcome everybody into our homes.

While back in the day, if they found white persons or foreign persons in our areas or in our homes, we would be arrested, taken to jail and punished for doing it, so, now, we are free to do as we want to do and we are free to open our doors to anybody. It has been great to be able to do that!”

Estelle - Athlone

... and to learn from them and their cultural backgrounds:

“You know, it is a learning experience. Some of us has never travelled, some of us has never visited foreign countries and we had limited experience with foreign people. It has been really great to be able to learn about different cultures and to learn about different experiences and to mix with people from different countries.

I think most of us would like to travel, would like to have experience and visit other countries and other countries and culture, but if we can't afford to do that we are actually able to do it now, by taking people from other countries into our homes and experience with us and learn about their cultures and about simple things, like what they cook, what they eat, what they like, what they don't like, and it has been nice!”

Estelle – Athlone

“you learn quite a lot from them because you speak to them, you ask them about their backgrounds and they ask you about your background, and you actually grow to love them; you get very fond of them!”

Carmelita – Athlone

“They are very humble people. They are young but very humble. They are very perceptive when you teach them something”

Brenda – Athlone

they overcame the difficulties that way:

“We used to imagine that problems will be huge, but as time goes on, you get to learn it wasn't a problem at all because the youngsters, amongst one another, figure out quickly what the needs of one another are. My daughters got along quite well with the foreigners .

I thought that the language should be a problem but not at all, especially with the mixed exchange group, South Africans and Canadians, and also South Africans and Mozambiquans.

If you don't understand you ask the counterpart and the counterpart will explain to you what the foreigner wants and you will understand.”

Carmelita – Athlone

“Speaking, listening, trying to understand, accepting. We are all different, we all come from different backgrounds, we are taught different things by our parents. All we can do is listen to each other and learn from each other and try and adapt to the way the different people live and make the best of it..yes! I just make the best of it.

Estelle - Athlone

and at the end of each of this experience they felt their lives had changed somehow:

“It has affected my life in a big way.

My oldest daughter who is at university has decided to join Volunteer Centre and she will be leaving in the next month, on a six months youth exchange programme.

She will first be doing the South African part, in Khayelitya, she'll be staying there for three months and after that, she'll be leaving for Canada, for three months.

So we are very very excited about that!”

Carmelita – Athlone

“Oh yes, yes, because you have to have a way to accept people, the way they are (...) some others don't eat what we eat, you offer them the food, and they say “No, I've never tasted it” “I don't know what it is” ...so What do you feed on? How can I do? And they say “I am trying something or maybe I will just try”..”

Pam – Khayelitsha

“It has. I am an only child, I don't have any brothers and sisters I have lived with. My parents were very protective, I haven't been out and around, they didn't allow me out during my teen-years but later on as I grew up and now learning to know other people and people from different countries, it has been extremely interesting for me and it made me think about life. (Foreigners) have opened up my eyes to different ways of life and different ways of doing things. That actually made me a little bit excited to travel.

I am also looking forward to travelling oversea a little bit soon.

It has made me look at life in a different way. I mean, Apartheid is a thing we lived with here but it doesn't exist in other countries. When people talk about, especially people of my age, talk about how their lives were maybe in Germany, in Switzerland or in UK they made me look at life also in a different way.

I don't have to think about the way I grew up. (...) I grew up in apartheid era and it was a terrible time and it was a hard time, but it's over now and, as I said, I have learnt to listen to other people's stories about their countries and it's great to learn about other cultures.”

Estelle - Athlone

and the young volunteers have changed, as well:

“gaining the confidence and later on as long as they stay you can see them blossoming, you know they became more confident. They didn't speak much, they started to speak more.”

Brenda - Athlone

and when the young volunteers left, the host families felt...

“and when they leave it's like you are
loosing your daughter”

Carmelita – Athlone

“so I have really found
new families now with
them.”

Pam - Kayelitsha

“I walked a road with them,
and when they left they started
to cry. They didn't want to go ...”

Brenda – Athlone