

My Solidarity Leave® in Madagascar

Carole Briquet's experience

This August, Carole Briquet, HR Manager Southern Europe, took two weeks of her annual leave to go to Madagascar on Solidarity Leave®. She is sharing with us her experience and some pictures:

"On Friday the 16th of August, having finished work for the day, I went to Paris to catch an overnight flight to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. After a stop-over at Mauritius (unfortunately I didn't leave the airport ☺), I reached my destination during the afternoon.

At the airport, I went through visa formalities and took the temperature test; indeed, Ebola virus is still a concern in this part of the world. Planète Urgence organised a taxi to collect me: a Renault 4 L. At first this choice of vehicle surprised me, but I quickly understood that Citroën 2CV, Renault 4L and Renault R5s, are the official taxis in Madagascar.

The hotel was about 10 kilometers away and by the time I arrived it was dark as in Madagascar, night falls early between 5.30 and 6. Knowing that 2 other volunteers had already arrived, I contacted them immediately so that we could share our evening meal together. Sabrina (who had arrived a week before), from Toulouse, had the task of teaching IT to students, and Amandine from Marseille, promoted alphabetization for children in need.

From the start we got on well and planned an outing for Sunday, the next day making sure that we were back and to bed early (9.30) – not only because we were starting work the next day but also because late-night outings are strongly discouraged. The temperature is acceptable during the day but at night I needed at least two blankets as Antananarivo lies at an altitude of over 1200 meters.

On Monday morning, I got up at 5.30, as usual and the taxi collected me at 7 allowing me plenty of time to travel. The Enfants du Soleil centre is on the outskirts of Antananarivo but is difficult to reach because of the massive traffic jams and narrow roads.

During the trip, I was surprised to see people barefoot and pulling carts loaded with goods. The government have tried to stop this means of transport in order to improve traffic flow, but without success as this work is the only means of a living for these people. Interestingly, traffic lights have disappeared in favour of policemen so together with the carts, there was certainly a lot of traffic jams and a lot of hooting. For short trips, walking or cycling would of course be easier.

I arrived at the Enfants du Soleil centre (the base for my Solidarity Leave®) which is a hostel for children aged from 3 to 20 years who were previously on the streets with their parents. At the centre they receive an education and benefit from a structured environment with the aim of offering them a better way of life. Unfortunately, some children run away from the centre because they prefer to beg with their parents than go to school.

My task was to train librarians and educators to manage a library; the aim being to attract children to the library. My training certification; my passion for reading; my commitment and my previous actions in Senegal with children enabled me to build a training program before leaving.

The group I trained consisted of 8 women aged 25 to 52. Most of them had an excellent level of French and a good academic level.

During the training, I rarely conducted lectures and opted for a more participatory and active

approach and this seemed to work well. Everyone was enthusiastic and in a good mood. From the start we developed a trusting environment.

I suggested they put their skills into practice and we organized a big book festival and invited the 130 children and their carers.

Aside from managing a library, my 8 pupils learned how to prepare, plan and organize activities and whilst they realized how much work was involved, they were highly motivated. Indeed, there was no stopping them! 14 different workshops were on offer, including one on drawing and another on « face painting » as a reference to Colart products that I had packed in my suitcase 😊.



The feedback was very good, and this success was of course due to the course participants but also to the carers who helped a lot during the day.

On the last day I handed out certificates and they were very proud. I received many messages from Planète Urgence, Enfants du Soleil in Madagascar and in France, from participants and carers. This sign of gratitude meant a lot to me and I am proud to have contributed to the content and ideas for the libraries in the future.



This experience is one of a kind and brings so many wonderful things on a human and professional Colart International Holdings Ltd. The Studio Building, 21 Evesham Street, London, W11 4AJ
+44 (0) 208 424 3200 | info@colart.com | colart.com

level. The culture shocks, adaptability, skill transfer, are things that I enjoyed.

I want to thank Colart for allowing me to take 2 weeks of solidarity leave® for this assignment and I hope other volunteers will be inspired to follow the route opened by Sonia Bergeot last year in Peru.

Carole

