**Report Internship 2015 – Chloe and Raphael**

In this ardent summer, we were honourably representing University YMCA of Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong, to participate in the Global Y Trainee Programme 2015, and to work in YMCA Siegerland, Germany for one and a half month. (CVJM for YMCA in German, in other words, Christlicher Verein Junger Menshen) Give thanks to cooperation of YMCAs of Hong Kong and Siegerland simultaneously, with regards to the programme this time, for providing us with this precious opportunity to explore the cultural and social service experience in Germany!

 Siegerland is a district covering the western part of Siegen-Wittenstein county in the south of North-Rhine-Westphalia, bordering the counties of Hessen and Rhineland-Pfalz, in which Siegen is the main city with 105,000 inhabitants. YMCA is a Non-Profit-Organization partly financed by fees and mainly financed by donations. CVJM-Kreisverband Siegerland, where was the main workplace during my trainee programme, was founded in 1875. It is an umbrella organisation of 58 local YMCAs. It is a sub-region and part of CVJM Westbund. CVJM Westbund is one of the 13 member movements in CVJM Deutschland, the nationwide umbrella organization of YMCAs in Germany.

 Different from the stifling bustle under concrete skyscrapers, discerned as an image of Hong Kong, with compact urbanites in the metropolitan city, Siegerland is perceived as a rural region in Germany, consisted of small towns and villages, which are embedded in wild forests of pines and oats, as well as vast golden ryes and green cornfield (Maislabyrinthe in German). The low population density of the local villages allow the residents to build their own houses in historical and archaic style, typically called medieval architectures, commonly in addition to a free green garden behind their living place with planting or leisure sunbath. This is absolutely a picturesque landscape to us, and totally contrasting against that of the stressed population and compressed space in Hong Kong. (It’s too fascinating for us to believe! We sounded like living in the fairy tale world!) The impression of the nature is one of the unforgettable scenes of us in Germany, who are the pressured dwellers in a modern city for over twenty years. The relaxing time and sunshine vested by natural pictures, the scents and freshness from the grass, the breeze from the open views, and the hazy fog within the forests and shrubs, were conspiring to construct a mythical world and dream place for jubilant life to us as beautiful as a typical German fairytale. CVJM Siegerland is somewhere also fortunately being a part of this pastoral world. This precious experience is something we would never forget, which is one of the blessings from the trainee programme this time, something that we could share with my eyes and memory.

 CVJM-Kreisverband Siegerland supports and aspires the work of the local CVJMs by educating volunteers, offering special training for certain branches, preaching, counseling, offering administrative support, networking and caring for public relation. It is located in a youth hostel, namely CVJM Jugendbuildungsstätte Siegerland, where youth training and leisure stay and activities for volunteer teams and families. It was also the dwelling place during our stay in Germany. For working in CVJM-Kreisverband Siegerland, we had to assist the staff team in daily maintenance of the hostel, with several youth who were also staying in the hostel and working in the hostel as apprenticeship for 3 year. This apprenticeship programme is a traditional German system for youngsters to adapt the working ambience in the society as soon as possible, after their fresh graduation from high college, vocational school, or middle school, as well as for the ease of local firms and companies to recruit new bloods for their labours. Our daily duty as a housekeeper in the youth hostel was including reception of queries from houseguests and assistance in resolving their difficulties, help in culinary and cleaning stuff, setting up the event venues and equipment for groups and teams, preparing materials and tools for barbecues and campfire at the outdoor areas, and mowing the grass, if necessary and intriguingly, of the nearby areas around the youth hostel. Utmost the time in the hostel are fulfilling and fascinating with various kinds of missions, and interesting and helpful people whom we were working with. Even after the everyday work and during the resting hour, we could share a bottle of German local beer and some typical German sausages altogether as a record and coda for our working time here. We should feel grateful to have such blissful time with those lovely colleagues!

For every Sunday in CVJM Jugendbuildungsstätte Siegerland, the café area, Café Kostbar, would also open and be available for the houseguests and comers. We, as a part of our responsible duty, would work as a waiter in the café for catering the guests with beverages and cakes, and learning a great deal of German during the time dealing with the names of the items on the menu, which was a great helping hand to us in acquiring German quickly and effectively during the days.

Besides majorly working in CVJM Jugendbuildungsstätte Siegerland and CVJM Kreisvaband Siegerland, we would also be possible to attend different programmes of the local CVJMs in Siegerland. In the local CVJMs there were programs run especially for kids, teens, and young adults. At the beginning of my internship, we had joined two tent camps (Zeltlager in German) from CVJM Weidenau and CVJM Freudenberg respectively, for 20 days in total.

Firstly in the camp of CVJM Weidenau, taking place in Erdbach, which lasted for 8 days, was our first time to do wild camps in the wild forest, and to sleep in a big tent that is capable for 20 people. It was the camp for leisure and aiming at kids aged from 8 to 13 who are from Jungschar (Scout), Boys and Girls’ training groups of CVJM Weidenau. Unlike the small campsites with grasslands and barbecue sites in Hong Kong, it was much wider and open to the natural environment, and the kids in the camp had to build up their own tents, and other survival equipment on their own such as the clay oven, wooden observatory with clock tower, and camp flag, as they were more exposed to the wildness. It is hard to imagine the kids in Hong Kong kindred to those in Germany to use knifes, sews and other hard tools for building up such huge achievements by using their own hands at the age of 8. Kids in the camp also had to learn about the natural pharmacy and campfire building skills as the ability to survive in the wild environment in case of emergency or living in the forests. It is a thought-provoking idea to promote the environmental protection and energy conservation and utilization to youngsters, as they could learn knowledge and awareness of their living surroundings by doing interactive activities and outward bounding works. Volunteers from CVJM Weidenau organized this camp. They designed a theme, which was “Wild West” for the whole itinerary of the camp, so that there would also have different theme games for the children, such as Saloon, Cowboy game market, gold washing and horse riding, etc.  These games were interesting to the kids as well as us since there would have no such possibility to have water-sliding roll on the hill, or handicraft workshop by cutting and burning woods directly from the forests in Hong Kong during camps. The volunteers did a lot of preparation work on the programs for the kids every night by holding the mid-night gathering, and talking about the division of labour for the next day events, comfortably with snacks and beers. This is the first time we saw how Germans negotiate with each other under delight and no pressure for something formal and imminently scheduled ahead.  Even after the demanding and exhausting itineraries, beer could heal all the pain and deliver laughter and relaxation!

 The second camp was a programme under the corporation of CVJM Freudenberg and CVJM Brüschergrund lasting for 12 days in Dümmer See. The volunteers from two different local CVJMs who were also the past participants of the annual camp, and now worked as youth adult volunteers for the wild camp, were grouping up together for organizing the camp. They went to the campsite two days earlier than the formal commencement date of the event, for setting up the tents and materials required for culinary stuff and activities. I realized how demanding for the volunteers, as same as those in the first camp, to be ready for the camp with everything necessary for the tiny or delicate cases of possibility in the camp. It was a typical Christian camp for the kids (same combination as the first camp from the groups, i.e. Jungschar) aged from 8-14. They had bible workshop every day, with their bible reading and handicraft working with volunteers for allowing them to remember every story they have learnt from the bible. The work varied from different aged group in accordance with the understanding and degree of interestingness of the children, but it was still good for them to gain something thoughtful and meaningful to their ways of meditation and their lives.

We experienced a lot of moments with the volunteers and the kids in the two aforementioned camps, with their traditional games and camping events, as well as shared with each other gifts made by hands as well as our contact method for further communication. We became good friends from now on and we have been keeping contact and updates with each other even we are in Hong Kong for exchanging different lifestyles and interesting differences between cultures. We taught a lot of Chinese to the children and also the volunteers by helping them writing their names in Chinese characters and pronouncing them afterwards.  We gave them the nametags for everyone in the two camps with both their German names and the Chinese translation to satisfy their interest in Chinese. What was more warm and fruitful to us was we were taught by many people during camps a lot of German greetings and vocabularies, which inspired us of enthusiastic interest in learning German, and touched us by their zealousness and hospitality. They would become a big part of our process in learning German in the future, with their handwritings and accents as the source of passion and love power.

Apart from exploring the natural camping in Germany, it was our pleasure as well to have grasped the chances of attending several celebrations of CVJMs in Siegerland for their 125th anniversary. In the ceremony, we could clearly observe the normal routine of normal Sunday service and jubilee of Christianity in Germany. We watched their conventional brass band performance during the typical Sunday service, and saw how pastors in Germany delivered preach and blessings to their fellows. We met loads of warm-hearted people in different CVJMs during the celebrations, and we felt blessed as they touched me by their spirits inside their sights, and smiles, despite the hurdle of languages.

The corporation of local CVJMs and church communities are in a harmonic condition. In the past, different Christian communities would compete with each other for growing up their own numbers of disciples. But since the establishment of CVJM and the effort they paid to construct the symphony between parties, the groups nowadays can organize events for Christians altogether peacefully and friendly, with shared place and materials, which was seemed to be a big family with so many brothers and sisters altogether inside an asylum of God. We believe this is an unique way of German Christian organization to work with others different from those ubiquity in different cultures, and also the ideal way of people living under the God’s sight on the same earth.

During the working process, we discovered the neat working style of Germans and also their high respect of punctuality. They would not be rush in doing any duties as soon as possible like Hong Kong society. Contrary, Germans would design the range of time in advance for the work to be accomplished, and would not urge themselves of completing it. They agree that a long deliberation can result to the faster and efficient progress in successful missions. Punctuality, perceived as another key of success, is highly considered by the German workers. They do not allow themselves to be late for more than 5 minutes from the designated time.  Even if there were any procrastinations or lateness of the meeting, they would inform everyone at least half an hour or even an hour before the event begins. This is important for effective division of labour among the workers, and reinforcement of team spirit and sense of responsibility of individual.  These are the precious lessons that we have had during the program in Germany, of which we could bring along with us throughout my whole life in work, and also changed immensely my attitude of life and relationship with colleagues and friends.

Besides the working experience, we did have several unprecedented explorations to special German cultures! For instance, the typical family cuisines for kids and guests like us, the Elspe open-air theatre shows with regards to the story of heroic Winnetau under the excitations from horsing riding, even guns and bombs! What are worth mentioning must be the racing cars in Nuburgring, and also the visitation in local police office that we have never had in Hong Kong! Certainly we could not forget the original taste of typical German kebabs, as well as barbecue, Schitzel, sausages and beers! All of these memories were given by our beloved friends, and their warm families, with all their loves embedded that we never be afraid to embrace.

The Global-Y Trainee Programme, for us, is a kind of bliss that it offers us a surprise and ensures our possibility and courage for joining the fellas in CVJM Siegerland this time, eventually finishing it with cultural experience and lifelong memories and life attitude. This program can allow student to be innovative to understand different various opportunities offered from universities of the cultural exchange and outreaching programs. These are the precious and treasurable chances that students should cherish to broaden their worldwide views and attitudes from their origins, and during the process they are engaged to different cultures and communities. The first hand affection students encountered while being exposed to different surprises and parties are the strongest power to widen their horizon, and more importantly, to change their ways of living as well as those of every people they met, interactively. Thank you for everyone we met during these days, and those who supported us and conspired to offer a fruitful summer with treasurable moments and impression of numerous German baubles, especially Thomas, Martin, Bernhard, Jochen, Annette and their families for happiness and surprises you all have prepared for us, every volunteers that we acquainted in the camps for cares and excitements we have shared with each other, and everyone we have met during the time in Germany for giving us love and meeting up under our fates. You all are the colours of ours lives. We should foresee the rendezvous in the future, and be always reminded: do everything with love! May god blesses you all!

Cheers with thanks and hope,

Raphael and Chloe