

**MR. ARUN MARUTHACHALAM, MSW**  
**(Returnee-Volunteer)**

***My motivation to join this program...***

I just wanted to experience, observe and learn from a developed country like Germany!!

***My best moment at the place of assignment***

I volunteered at a place called Hofgut Oberfeld for 8 months in the year 2018. I took some agro seeds from India to Germany. I sowed it and it grew well in German soil. Only the Indian plants withstood whereas the other plants dried away. And this was a special article in the German newspaper. Even today while I recollect this I feel happy and this is most memorable for me.

***The culture-shock***

Yes, I did experience cultural differences in every aspect of living, learning including leisure time activities! I was sensitized during our orientation seminars in India and in Germany, but getting prepared is different from living with such experiences!! I can quote two incidences here. One as a community an event called 'pride walk' was organised by like-minded groups to exhibit their self-esteem was a new concept to me. The other one was at family, where members discuss on reproductive health and safe sex practices including purchase of anti-pregnancy tablets by teenagers. There are no differences in services including provisions like common rest-rooms in public places.

***Perspectives: Germany and India***

The people of Germany are independent, open- minded, they have fun but they know the means to always control. Men and women share work, including kitchen tasks. Germans think Indians tend to save for future but less enjoy the present!! Also opine India is over populated, which is obvious and we are aware!



## ***Stay and leisure***

I was fortunate to stay with a family who were kind and well exposed to such youth volunteers program. As expressed above, to live as a family member in a different family with different cultural background is new to me. It took about 6 weeks to integrate myself with the socio-eco system of my host family and I think this time is required. The result is today a bonding and we are still in touch!!

The concept of leisure is different from India. I learnt to form new friends from workplace and spent week end with them by visiting places; and I learnt swimming and am practicing this to keep up healthy lifestyle. I must thank my mentor who introduced me to such activities.

## ***Personal changes in me***

Yes, a lot!! To mention my top five: I improved my public speaking skills; I know to cook for a large group of people; I improved my proficiency in English language; I improved to learn and practice German language; I am more responsible and independent now.

## ***My learning to reciprocate***

I began to apply 'Principle of Acceptance'! I learnt to segregate different types of waste and I find it more relevant to preach and practice in India. I am conducting programs related to Terrace gardening and organic food in schools and colleges. I am still into agriculture practices and applying my learning like testing German seeds in my little farm land.

## ***Voice for future volunteers***

Just be you yourself!! Be open and curious to learn!! Know the opportunities but do that is comfortable to you!! "Leave your 'I' to be in your "Team"!!

*Excerpts from the interview by S. Sushmila, Present Volunteer in TAFEL, Germany*