

My name is Sarah-Marie Pfister, I am 18 years old, from Germany and worked from September 2017 until June 2018 as a volunteer with Bocas Sanas. In the following I want to present my tasks and experiences with Bocas Sanas.

In summer 2017, I heard of Bocas Sanas through my mother for the first time because she is a friend of Cristina and got therefore information about Bocas Sanas. I was interested in the program because I've searched for a social organization to work with since I graduated from school in 2017 and wanted to spend some time working voluntary in another country before starting the university. I liked the fact that I could work in school with children and get to know the everyday life of school in the Dominican Republic. Besides, I was interested to see how the project of Bocas Sanas works. 20 schools of the region of Puerto Plata take part in the program of Bocas Sanas. When Cristina and I go to a new school, we present the program in front of the classes and present the causes and reasons for the importance to brush teeth daily in school. For example, many students don't know that caries is the most frequent disease in the world and when you don't cure caries, the bacterium will spread and infect other areas of the body. The best prevention for caries is therefore good and balanced alimentation and to brush one's teeth daily.

One of my tasks for Bocas Sanas is that I take fotos and publish them in instagram to get more audience for Bocas Sanas. In addition to that, I help Cristina to prepare presentations of Bocas Sanas and we both present the program in front of the classes or play games with the little students to illustrate the subject even more. We dress some children up as dentists to show them how it looks like and to take them the fear of going to dentists. Another method we use to catch the students is to give them pills. With the pills the children can see if they have brushed their teeth well. The parts of the teeth that are white are clean and the parts that are red are dirty. Like that, the students see where they have to improve their brushing and concurrently get more motivated to brush their teeth when they see a lot of dirt in their mouth.

Furthermore, we check constantly in schools if the children brush their teeth well and bring new toothpastes and toothbrushes and a box to reposit the material. The toothbrushes and toothpastes are donated by Colgate and the boxes are donated by Bocas Sanas. Since most schools don't have sinks, Bocas Sanas donates money to buy appropriate sinks for 10 students to brush teeth at the same time. The money of Bocas Sanas comes from donations of the Netherlands. The director Cristina organizes festivals to represent the Dominican culture in the Netherlands. The money gained by those festivals and further donations is offered to Bocas Sanas.

My personal experience of the social work with Bocas Sanas is quiet positive seeing as Cristina was always open to new ideas and to my opinion. For instance, I regognized that some teachers of schools don't show enough commitment towards the program and consequently the students only brush their teeth when we come to visit. I proposed therefore to do presentations not only in front of the class but for the teachers as well. Actually, we realized that many teachers didn't have sufficient information about Bocas Sanas and were a lot more interested and involved when we presented them the program especially for them.

So all in all it can be said that I learned a lot about working in an organization and working with schools. On top of that I improved my spanish skills, talked in front of many people and got to know the culture and life in the Dominican schools and in the Dominican Republic in general. For example, it was new to me that children go to school at the age of 3, that they wear a uniform and that they celebrate a lot of commemoration days. On the day of alimentation the students have to bring fruits or vegetables to school. Another example is that on the day of the woman the students talk about the importance of women and do theater and presentations of that topic.

That social year with Bocas Sanas has been a great experience for me. I became acquainted with a new country and a new culture. From the start I adapted to the Dominican life including the different climate, the traditional food and the different mentality. I developed as a person due to the fact that I had to face many new circumstances and challenges. Since I got to know many new people and a new lifestyle, I gained a lot of new perspectives of life. I'm really grateful for that year that I will always remember and want to thank my mother and Cristina who made that experience possible for me.