

CIF Germany / IPEP 2024

Our experience with CIF Germany was exceptional. It all started with an incredible team bonding experience in Bacharach, an ideal setting for getting to know each other and learn the expectations of the program along with social systems and policy in Germany. Sharing sleeping quarters, eating together and sharing experiences of our own country's social work services and challenges was the glue that established us as a close and caring group for the weeks to come. Our diversity of language, culture, religion, work places and political contexts was influential in our experience of understanding each other and growing both personally and professionally. We represented all continents from Argentina, Australia, Ghana, Spain, Slovenia, Kyrgystan. It didn't take long for conversations to start and for us to realise that despite these differences, we were all facing similar challenges and circumstances.

The team behind our program consisting of 5 dedicated and organised women, was able to develop a program that catered for both individual's interests as well as exposing us to the social, geographical and political context of the area of Mainz and Wiesbaden. Additionally, they were able to pull together a wonderful group of host families that were match according to our interests and lifestyle. This experience with the host family's ensured a complete cultural emersion and truly highlighted the German's hospitality, generosity and ability to speak English so well despite apologising for it! After some of the long days, coming home to a family environment with a meal prepared was the best and welcomed.

When we reflect on what was learnt during this time, we all have developed a sense of empowerment and personal growth as well as a sense of global citizenship. Experiencing language barriers and feeling foreign enabled us to empathise with those who experience it daily. It was like we were 'walking in others shoes' albeit temporary. Participating in practical workshops fostered confidence and trust building, all skills and worthy for social workers to take home to their country. Life long learning and professional development was valued by us all, and this ability to network was special.

We all truly appreciate the time we have spent here and are forever grateful for the experience.