



ALDEAS DE PAZ





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# The Invisible People of Paradise

**How a grassroots organisation in the Dominican Republic is changing lives for people living with a disability.**

Samana is a well-known Caribbean escape to paradise for western tourists. White sands, Pina Colodas, and crystal clear waters, but beyond the cocktail umbrellas and the 5-star resorts exists an incredibly sad reality for some locals living in 'paradise'.

In the Dominican Republic, it is estimated that more than 12% of the population are living with a disability. Most commonly these disabilities are physical and motor disabilities, visual disabilities,

attention deficit disorders, and auditory impairment.

People living in poverty with a disability are amongst the most excluded people in the world. The lack of government support and recognition of these people have made the continual violation of their human rights an invisible crime. People with disabilities in the Dominican Republic face social and economic exclusion and discrimination on a daily basis and lack any form of infrastructure to break away from this vicious cycle.

People with disabilities are also

regularly excluded from the educational system, as without inclusion mechanisms, children are often rejected from traditional primary education institutions. In Samana, the small grassroots organisation Aldeas de Paz is working to change this. With the establishment of Mama Elba, the first educational centre for people with disabilities, the volunteer-based team is helping these people find their voice again.

Mama Elba is already changing lives, but without a deeper understanding of the conditions these people are living with, the teachers cannot provide the best support possible for their students. A diagnosis of one's disability seems like a simple first step for anyone living with these conditions, but without government support, access to diagnostic facilities and therapy is an impossibility for the majority of these impoverished families.

Want to  
*change*  
the  
*world?*

INVEST IN A

*child!*



## *This is where they need your help!*

For just \$12, you can pay for a student and their family to visit the diagnostic facility where they will receive life changing information about their condition. For just 6\$, you can pay for a student to have one session of therapy. It is the price of lunch for us, but pays for the chance at a better life for them.

To learn more about the crowd-funding campaign or the work of Aldeas de Paz please visit the website <http://www.peacevillages.org/> or the social media platforms. [www.facebook.com/AldeasDePaz](https://www.facebook.com/AldeasDePaz) <https://www.instagram.com/aldeasdepaz/> <https://twitter.com/aldeasdepaz>



## United we can more - Fundraising Party

### **On the 27th of September we planned a Fundraising Party at our Mama Elbá school.**

This is a school for children with special needs and is the first ever educational and therapeutic initiative for children like that in Samaná. United we wanted to raise money for necessary therapies for the physical and intellectual development of the students. Sadly Hurricane Maria surprised us and made us to change our plans. Nevertheless we really wanted to realize this event. Together we decided that the 1th of October will be our day to do so.

That Sunday, in the green zone in front of the Peninsula Club was full

of fun, games, face painting, different performances, a lot of food and drinks and even a clown. Our aims did not change, because of the different date. We still wanted to raise money for a good cause and spend a wonderful day with as many people as possible. At the end of an exhausting but exciting and great day we earned an amount of 400€. Those are great news! From that money a lot of therapies can be paid. In addition to the money, we also earned a lot of unforgettable memories. Jette, a dear volunteer of ours agreed to share her gained memories with us:

"If you've passed the green zone in front of the Peninsula Club on

Sunday, 1st of October, you might have seen some little tigers, dogs or butterflies running across the meadow. Some of our talented volunteers painted the children's faces in the most colourful and funniest ways. You could hardly fail to see the sparkle in the children's eyes, being completely satisfied about their "transformation".

Girls and boys were dancing through the grass, having big and bright smiles on their faces due to the outcome of our event. Not only them but also we as volunteers experienced a beautiful and lovely atmosphere, enjoying it to its fullest. The discipline of all people involved contributed to the smooth running of the whole party. All in all, happiness most of the time depends on the people you are surrounded by, and on this Sunday the green zone seemed like a union of one whole family."





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# Arrival of the new German Red Cross Group

**Since the beginning of September we could warmly welcome our second group of volunteers of the German Red Cross.**

Like the first group, they will stay for twelve months in the Dominican Republic. The twelve people from different parts of Germany live in two different locations. Seven volunteers are staying in Santa Barbara de Samana, where our most important Project for children with special needs, the Mama Elba school is located. The other five live in Las Terrenas, which is our new location to spread the vision of Aldeas de paz. After they already have been here for more than a month, we were really interested in their opinion:



“If I got a cent for every minute I spent waiting for something/ someone, I could almost afford a jar of Nutella (12€ in Samaná).” – Lennart Eichhorst

“I have probably never walked as much as I did this month.” – Zoe Wagner

“I cannot even drink, as much as I have to sweat.” – Linda Beard

“This is a pleasant world with unpleasant problems.” – Jordan Preuß



“Even though the Dominican Republic is completely different from Germany it is quite easy to get used to the new culture because of all the beautiful beaches.” – Maximilian Djukic



“Living here showed us some difficulties, but also a life with ease we were not used to.” - Nathalie Fichte

“Now I really appreciate the privilege of drinkable tap water as we have it in Germany.” – Theresa Hösch



“I learned that sometimes the little things help the most such as getting a stapler for someone.” - Leonard Bargfeld

“The Dominicans (especially at work) are very friendly and understanding, but sometimes quite loud.” – Leticia Oehlgardt



“Finally I am able to walk around in shorts the whole day.” – Sophie Heitkamp



## M edical Mission of Doctors in Samaná

**A team of doctors from the Midwest Medical Mission from the United States visited the state hospital Dr. Leopoldo Pou in the week from the 9th to the 13th of October to operate people for free. Our volunteers from Las Terrenas and Samaná interested in a medical career accompanied the doctors all along. They were able to gain a tremendous insight into the medical reality of a developing country.**

A typical working day looked like this:

After breakfast, getting into a scrub and passing an entrance hall with a waiting crowd, our soon-to-be medical students start with their

tasks. In the first room, Greta is writing a paper for every patient, which includes his name, blood pressure and age. Sophie is interpreting the symptoms for a specialist in the room next-door. Meanwhile, Zoe is translating for an expert in the first chirurgic room. Leonard looks for a patient's wheelchair and Jordan helps to wake a patient up to move him from one room to another. Lennart is stabilizing a patient in that time on the operation desk in the second chirurgic room.

While many people receive medical attention at the hospital every day, it happens that some cannot get the medical assistance they need, because they do not have

the money to cover the bills. Others refuse to get a treatment at all. Missing health insurance and a lack of education are challenges the volunteers witness here with their own eyes. Sometimes that is hard for them to accept. Nevertheless, it was an interesting and helpful experience for everyone who participated. We thank the hospital and everyone involved for that opportunity.



## Vito enriches our Team



“All together we can do a lot of great work in Samaná, Las Terrenas or other parts of the Dominican Republic. But who knows? Maybe also in other countries of the world?”

These words are from Vito, our new volunteer coordinator from Italy. In his 32 years he experienced a lot of social work and volunteering. He volunteered himself in Peru in a school for one year, what helps him to understand our volunteers and support them better in their daily life. As he said, his aim is to understand the volunteers and push them to give their best for the community and the foundation, as he will be doing it too.

He also gave his best as he worked as a project manager and volunteer coordinator in Rome for another non-governmental organization.

For three years he took care of volunteers, who worked with teens with family or social problems. He studied to become a social educator and manager of social science. But in the first place, he wants to work hard to achieve a lot and do something special. We look forward for what is coming. Together we will create something special!

Bienvenido Vito!





# Hurricane Irma and Maria raged Red Cross helped afterwards



Both Hurricanes that had an influence on the Dominican Republic and on Samaná can be named as atlantic hurricanes or tropical storms. Irma arrived on the first Thursday of September. With an maximum speed of 295km per hour she destroyed a lot of houses, streets and even the electricity system.

The Hurricane brought also a lot of rain which could be seen in floodings at the coasts of the Dominican Republic.

Maria did not gave the residents a lot of time to get everything under control. The second Hurricane arrived in Samaná at the 21th of September. Again there was a lot of wind and rain that made it hard for the citizens of Samaná to continue their everyday life. Maria had a maximum speed of 280km per hour. Less than Irma.

Because of both Hurricanes we

had to stop our work for a few days. Without electricity, water, wifi and light it was quite different for us, but we managed without any problems. Our Mama Elbá school had to close for these days too like nearly all shops, stores and the other schools in the city, because of the circumstances. But luckily we could go on with our work on Monday in every area.

Unfortunately, not everyone was so lucky. In the north of the peninsula Samaná a lot of infrastructure and private houses were destroyed. More than in other parts of the peninsula. Often the owners did not have the money and the possibilities to rebuild them. In cooperation with the Dominican Red Cross group we wanted to help the victims of the hurricanes. We went together to their houses and collected information, like the amount of people in need, the amount of

children under a specific age and the damage due to the hurricanes. With these information the Red Cross group knows what goods are needed to help them. It was a pleasure for us to be part of it. Hopefully, we can cooperate in the future again. Of course we wish that it will be on a happier occasion...