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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 Coladas, 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.

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.

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 our website.

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## United we can do more - Fundraising Party

Because we want to provide as much support as possible for our children we organised a Fundraising Party at our Mama Elbá school on the 1 of October.

*"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."*

*Jette Ehrlich*



## 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

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“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



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

“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 Oehlgard





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### Medical 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 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> 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.



### 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. 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.

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



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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...



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