

A Journey Of Service And Growth

“Think globally and act locally” is a very powerful sentence that has stayed in my memory from participating in the South to North volunteer program in 2016–2017 organized by UEM. I first heard about the volunteer program from a UEM co-worker who was teaching English at my church, the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua.

As a young graduate with great enthusiasm, I departed for Germany to serve as a volunteer. The first few months were very difficult for me. Coming from the southern hemisphere, I experienced culture shock. A different language, a different climate, different food, and a different way of life—all of these demanded that I adapt.

My host family’s warmth, along with the openness of their extended family who welcomed me as one of their own, gave me strength even though I was far from my home and loved ones in Papua. Working at a kindergarten in Berge, surrounded by children from many different cultural backgrounds, allowed me to witness a variety of habits as well. At first, the children were curious about me, but as time went on, we grew into genuine friends. One boy from Iran even told his mother that I always played with him and read him stories. Such a simple act touched the heart of a child who had come from a difficult place shaped by conflict, reminding me how small acts of kindness can carry profound meaning.

During my time as a volunteer, I was blessed with a mentor who guided me throughout the journey. Under the care of Pastor Zoellner and his wife, I had the chance to meet several families of former missionaries who once served in Tanah Papua. I became involved in mission bazaars organized by the Schwelm district and even visited one held by the congregation in Waldbroet. Through these experiences, I came to understand the living partnership between the Schwelm district and the Yalimo Anggruk district, the Mamberamo district, and the Church Women’s Training and Development Center (P3W). The financial support for scholarships for children in Yalimo Anggruk and the reading program for women at P3W was not the result of large donations, but of faithful congregations gathering resources little by little. Witnessing this taught me the true meaning of Christian fellowship—what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ. It reminded me of the song we often sing: “In Jesus we are brothers and sisters.”

The International Coalition for West Papua (ICP) and West Papua Netzwerk are organizations that focus on human rights issues in Papua. During my studies, I came across a report published by ICP—a document often used as a basis for advocacy and lobbying. It was a valuable opportunity for me to intern with this organization. Being able to observe closely and take part in the work of ICP and West Papua Netzwerk was an

important period in my life, allowing me to deepen my understanding of the human rights field, learn how to build networks, and engage in advocacy and lobbying. After completing my volunteer service, I returned to Papua in 2017.

My one-year volunteer experience in Germany greatly helped me when I entered the professional world. I began working at the Synod Office of GKI Tanah Papua in the JPIC department, where my main responsibility was documentation. Thanks to the skills I had gained, I was able to adapt quickly to the work and build strong communication with colleagues. My internship with ICP and West Papua Network proved invaluable, as it taught me the power of networking. In my role, I also practiced building connections with local organizations and individuals engaged in human rights advocacy at the local level. We supported one another by sharing resources and working together. In the past two years, I was transferred to the Evangelism Department. Working in this department reminded me of the old missionaries in Germany, and I even met people who had once been mentored by them. The evangelists in the Papuan highlands remain faithful to their calling, following the example set by the German missionaries of the past.

Alongside the many positive experiences I gained during my volunteer year, there were also challenges. At times, I faced discrimination—people assumed I was a refugee simply because of my physical appearance. Yet, when conversations began, I explained who I was, where I came from, and what I was doing. From this, I learned an important lesson: stigma often arises from what is seen on the surface. But when dialogue takes place, words become bridges—connecting two sides, breaking down barriers, and opening the way for genuine exchange. What began as misunderstanding transformed into connection, simply through the power of conversation

Having the opportunity to serve as a volunteer with UEM allowed me to meet many people from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. This experience gave me the courage and confidence to speak up and share my thoughts. One significant step in my personal growth began when I attended the annual partnership seminar in Germany, where organizers invited speakers from Papua to provide updates. Later, in 2025, I was invited by the committee to be one of the speakers at this seminar. Moving from participant to speaker was a meaningful milestone in my personal development.

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