

# Global Responsibility and Leadership

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# **Internship Report**

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## **Preface**

There are several reasons to why I chose to work at the Michealshof Sammatz. After two years of theoretical learning in university my desire was to work on a purely practical level. I believe that the value of a practical experience is highly important for me, offering me insights and practices of “The real world”, balancing and connecting the two very different theoretical and practical worlds. The community, farm life and work with children offered me the possibility to achieve the latter and additionally dive deeper into, what I consider, a most valuable and knowledgeable experiences, working with children. Furthermore, I wanted to obtain knowledge of working closely together with a team dedicated to change and most importantly with a conviction tied loose of most external pressures and desires. The educational philosophy behind the institution was a further motivator behind my decision, offering a Waldorf and thus a close individual development guidance philosophy. My specific choice as to work with children in the community, derives from my perception that they form the future of our development. However, the children I wanted to work with offered an additional and mostly very different challenge as they have experienced many things, from all kinds of abuse to lifelong foster care.

With this internship I aimed at understanding the consequences of children that had been abandoned, abused, and were left behind by the conditions where the system had failed. I wanted to experience and understand the underlying issues that are evoked through unstable and purely wrong upbringing. From an educational perspective I wanted to learn what it means, not to form and educate, in order to make the best possible fitting of a child for society and its system, but what it takes to “save” children from the worst and from within them evoke core values, experiences and skills in order for them to find a healthy place for themselves in the future.

I found the internship via relational connections. As my original plan to go abroad had failed due to covid I had to adapt quickly and send a motivational letter as well as a CV listing my experiences and education to the institution. After some mail exchange I was accepted and travelled to Sammatz located outside of Lüneburg. Thereafter, I was able to investigate the different sectors the organization had to offer, yet it was clear for me that Peronnik (Child Foster Care) was my sector of choice.

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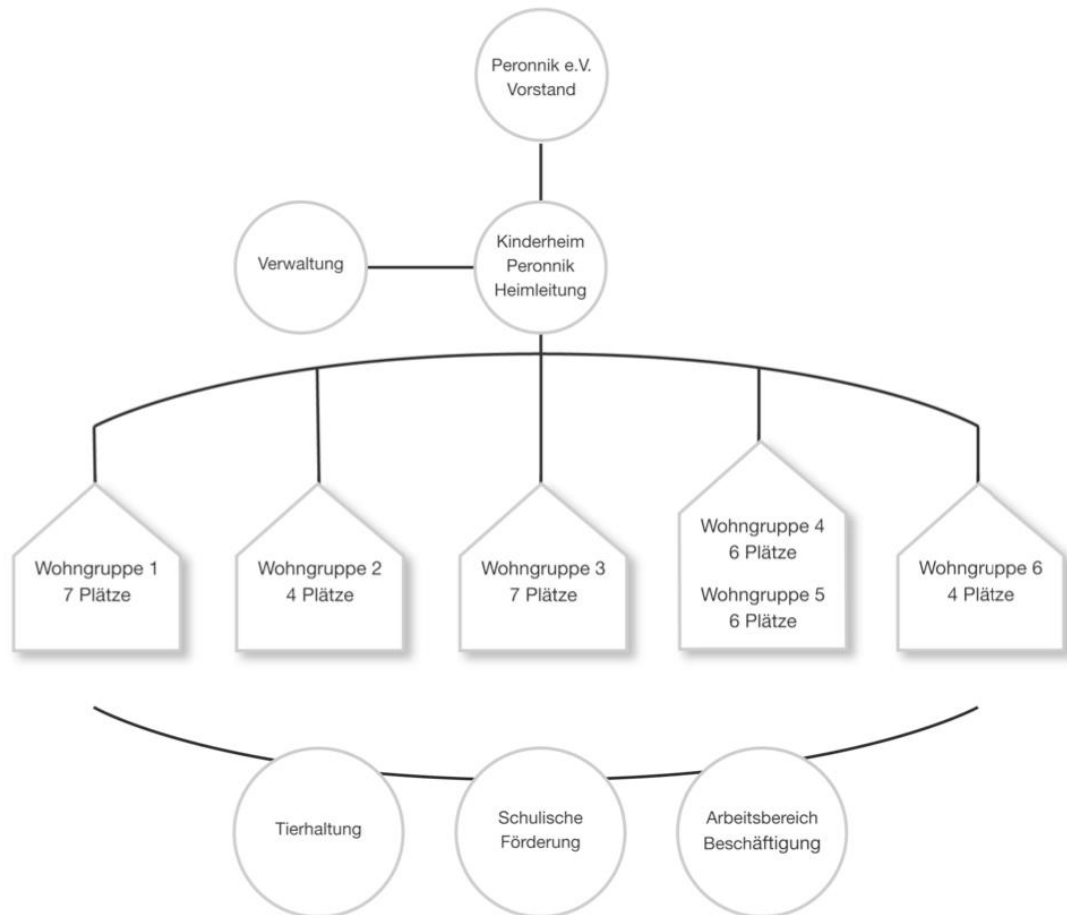
## **Description of the internship organization**

Michaelshof Sammatz is a Large Demeter Farm located outside of Lüneburg in the North of Germany. However, it is much more than just a biological farm. Sammatz includes many different sectors with its big Organization, ranging from a Local Café and Restaurant to a large construction site for the 300 international and diverse inhabitants making it the biggest community project in Germany. It also includes a Kindergarten for its own offspring and Peronnik, a child and teenage foster care institution.

Peronnik is divided into 6 separate houses that permanently care for overall 34 children in need of special care. Each of the children have their own room and live together with 4-7 other children under 24/7 permanent care and supervision. The children and teenagers range from the age of 7- 19 years of age, all mixed in their respective housing under careful expertise and consideration. (See Figure 1.)

The Goal of Peronnik and their work is to educate and raise young individuals to multi-facetted, interested and socially acceptable individuals. The care and support Peronnik offer's, aims at reducing disadvantages and increasing independency so as to prepare to integrate them in society or back to their families/ foster families. They aim to support the individual abilities and skills of the children, strengthen and catch up on important development steps of the young individuals and practice and foster socially accepted behaviour. Peronnik relies on several important aspects for their education. A clear and structured day and week rhythm to provide the individuals with a feeling of safety and orientation. Most of the children and teenagers attend school and are thereafter involved in diverse afternoon and evening activities, each manufactured to the respective age, abilities, and necessary development steps. As Peronnik is part of the bigger community project Sammatz they actively benefit from Farm life, including vast access to a natural surrounding as well as work with animals. Additionally, Music, Art, creative projects, and free time activities are part of their routine. (See Figure 1.) (Leistungbeschreibung, 2016)

Furthermore, Peronnik relies on and fosters a setting of family values such as friendship, a close relationship, and regular joint activities such as meals, Birthdays, or other celebrations. Each of the children and teenagers have their assigned personal individual professional of trust. Hence, the employed professionals additionally take on somewhat of a position of a family member both for individuals as well as for the entire house. (Leistungbeschreibung, 2016)

**Figure 1**

Leistungbeschreibung (2016)

## Peronik House 5

I was absolving my internship in house 5. House 5 is home to 6 children and teenagers aging from 6-19 years. The day begins with at 6:30 h and ends at midnight. In the morning 6:30 - 8:30 h children are woken up and prepared, by two educators, for kindergarten and school. At 12:30 h some children come home and eat lunch, which is followed by a lunch break. At 15:00 h the afternoon activities begin ending at 18:30 with three educators per shift. At this stage children and teenagers are supervised and cared for in the previously mentioned activities. Individual treatment, therapy or individual tutoring also falls into this time slot. 18:30 marks the begin of the evening shift starting with a joint dinner. Subsequently the children and Teenagers are prepared for the night including individual shower, bathing, or reading and music times.

## **Description of the Internship**

My shifts mostly included the afternoon shift (15:30-18:30 h), the evening shift (18:30-21:30 h) and regularly the night watch from 21:30 to 23:30 h. Depending on the shift the assignments varied. The afternoon shift included the care and supervision of mostly one individual child, hereby I was generally assigned to one of two children, a fourteen-year-old girl, or a six-year-old boy. However, this varied also including all other residents of the house depending on the situation. The shift generally started with an outside activity around the Farm, this included walks, bicycle rides, farm activities and exhibitions, on rainy days this time was spent inside playing games or with creative projects. Hereby the main assignment was to supervise and entertain the individuals, creating a valuable time and balancing the emotional state of the individual. At approximately five o'clock every resident of the house reconvened with their supervisor for a joint afternoon snack and coffee, followed by afternoon assignments and duties such as showering, telephone, music, PC, or groceries time. Hereby I helped the individuals or supervised the situation. At 18:30 I regularly began to prepare and set up dinner followed by supervising a joint dinner. Between 19:30 – 21:00 I brought 1-2 children to bed, this included preparation for bed and the next day, singing or reading for the children and reflecting on the day or their current emotional state. The last thirty minutes were dedicated to preparations for the next day and cleaning. The night watch duty was to be present in the case of individuals sleeping issues, nightmares and for safety reasons. The assignment here was mostly pure presence and was replaced by the professional sleeping in the building around midnight.

## **Results and Output**

The build-up of a relationship to the children and teenagers is not something that happens easily and overnight. The individuals' experiences have taught them that interpersonal relationships are not of much value. Due to neglect, ignorance and abuse gaining their trust and full attention takes time and consistency. Accordingly, I for the first one to two weeks only attended settings with other supervisors and sometimes with older teenagers that do not regularly receive individual supervision. Additionally, not only the children and teenagers required familiarization with me but also, I had to overcome certain boundaries that had not been part of my past experiences. I had to acquire core educational and pedagogical skills to be able to act and influence different circumstances. Understanding the daily and situational structures and rules were core to be able to act as a supervisor in given situations.

A core challenge throughout my internship and profoundly in the beginning were the situational contexts which were unusually delicate to handle. As a supervisor analysing and being highly conscious of the situation was key in navigating the individuals emotional state and thus the entire context. I got to learn that crucial tipping points could determine the rest of the day, not only for one but several or even all individuals of the house. Depending on the

emotional state of an individual and their experiences throughout the day it was vital to be conscious and to understand the individual situation and needs.

These situational moments were crucial to handle to not trigger one or several other individuals. Often an outburst of one individual entailed that trigger points of others were evoked leading to a domino effect that finally often included many of the individuals to fall into their coping mechanisms that varied from aggressive outbursts to panic attacks and psychological instability. As the different individuals struggle with diverse past experiences, their need for attention and care in different contexts varied significantly. The different coping mechanisms require the supervisor to adapt to every case individually and different, whereby some individuals resorted to short-term situational reactions whereas others fell back to an emotional state of even several days. Hence, it becomes clear that two steps forward and one back is a well-meant metaphor.

A standing out regularity of difficulty, that became clear to me, was the sensitivity of transition periods. Transition periods were moments in which an individual perceived a significant change to the day so far. These moments were the return from school, the start of the afternoon or the transition period between 18:30 h to the point of dinner. Transition times as such were already difficult as inevitably these contexts were less structured in its nature and especially were perceived unstable by the individuals as the situation was simply changing. A large factor contributing to this perceived unstable change was the shift change, so personnel exchange, that entailed some children and teenagers to experience a decrease in their inner stability and subsequently in their actions. Depending on the emotional state on a given day children and teenagers were more, or less prone to these changes. Individuals additionally varied concerning the latter. Conclusively, these different factors and situational contexts made it challenging and knowledgeable at the same time.

Over time the previously mentioned challenges improved. A large component of this was the experiences I gathered, the situations that repeated themselves and my knowledge of the children and teenagers as well as the background stories to the individuals, that I received from the professional house leaders. A further development that is not to be disregarded in its emphasis, was the relationship that the individuals built up to me and vice versa. Especially for these individuals a build-up of trust was fundamental in building up a relationship in which I as a supervisor could function, evoke an impact, and earn enough respect to be able act as somewhat of an authority.

Through time and consistent presence, I was slowly able to establish a relationship. In itself, this was already a highly rewarding experience. Once I was able to understand the individuals and their needs and coping mechanisms, my courage increased to intervene in unstable moments. Unstable moments and the consequences of these individuals were often far from the ordinary and what I had experienced in former settings, working with children that had never experienced what these individuals had gone through. Anger and serious aggression were very present reactions that were intimidating and not part of former circumstances I



was used to. Having to restrain a boy of six years of age with his arms behind his back and watching out for biting, kicking, and punching, is an example of a moment that seriously broadened and expanded my consciousness and perception. I gained much individual knowledge on how to react and avoid tipping points in various contexts for children and teenagers that required very different response behaviour.

## **Reflection**

One of the most profound things I learnt during my internship was about myself. Working in such an environment does not allow one to act or pretend about yourself. These children have the unique quality to bring out your true self, inevitably as they can see to your core. Acting on a behaviour that is not continually naturally yours does not build up a relationship or earns your respect. This was considerably difficult especially in a new setting, confronting me with unprecedented situations and actions. Additionally, acting as an authority figure was challenging. When am I to be strict? When do I have to stand my ground and have to “pull through”? When is it time to be soft or lenient with the individual? The latter were questions that I encountered throughout my shifts with the added challenge of utilizing the right pedagogy for the specific individual in specific contexts and simultaneously acting in line with yourself. One of the professionals in the community said to me: “You are naked in front of the children”, which quite precisely described the difficulty as an acting supervisor. If I was to describe the biggest challenge and at the same time the most knowledgeable experience of my internship, it would be acting in balance with yourself, your core, and your function as a supervisor and educator. I learned to take my time before providing a response reaction and to act in line with myself. A specific example of this was to “pull-through” once I had “deliberately” expressed my position to something and not to give in when it gets difficult, and the doubt got hold of me.

Approximately halfway into the internship I was supervising two individuals with an experiential educator providing outdoor activities and circus material, where I found an old almost unplayable Diabolo. This might seem absurd, yet as a teenager I used to play at a, if you can call it, professional level in a circus performing in and outside of Germany, which abruptly ended due to a dispute with my performing, duo, partner. What I want to convey is that I learned that things fall into place when you follow your core and derive your motivation from it. I consequently brought all my Diabolo material from Hamburg. From this point on Diabolo became the main activity for many members of the house and even clearly spread to other houses. Two houses bought multiple entire sets and the children, teenagers and I often played daily until dark. It was warming to observe this development, the fun they had and what an impact one can bring with oneself, even without professional education in this field.

Regarding the knowledge learned in my degree program “Global responsibility and Leadership”, my experience at UCF had especially taught me self-development, reflection, and leadership skills. These were vital in understanding and finding my core in order to act as a consistent authority figure and to reflect on myself, processes and situations. Due to the pre gained knowledge I was able to further develop on my journey as an individual. A specific

example is the further discovery, visibility and categorization of my emotional state, my boundaries, weaknesses, and strengths.

Additionally, the psychological knowledge that I had gathered over the previous two years, and parallel in my minor courses, helped me significantly in understanding certain processes and emotional reactions of the individuals I supervised.

Furthermore, I acquired an increase in knowledge on traumata of young individuals and what severe consequences this has, most likely for the rest of their lives. From a total stagnation of development at a young age to severe aggression, depression and anxiety to major trust and stability issues, to name a few. Hence, I was able to broaden my knowledge on educational measures and pedagogy that serves to address and better these issues. Including to shape children and teenagers to finding and strengthening their core self and abilities to be an independent self on our planet. This job is not characterized by shaping and educating children to function in our system but to “save casualties” and foster core abilities for an independent life without severe lifelong fallbacks.

It was a powerful experience to be able to enhance the children’s experiential learning by playing diabolo with them. Thus develop their personality, including their willingness to take risks, feel themselves and creating experiences that the individuals could identify and develop with. At this point it is overdue to say that my time working together with the Peronnik team, and the children and teenagers was outstanding. Due to the new experiences, I made and the natural severity of the individuals backgrounds and problems, which I mostly learned and thus reflected on, portrays a sometimes-doomy picture. This was not at all the case, the children were loving, funny and most of all were themselves. It was always fun and positively interesting to spend my time with them. The individuals concurred a big part of my heart and provided me with a new, very interesting and beautiful time, which I am very grateful for. ALWAYS AGAIN!

## **Living in the community**

During the internship I lived within the biggest community of Germany, home to almost 300 individuals coming from across the globe. I stayed in a shared room located in a house where up to 50 people lived at a time. It was a truly inspiring and motivating experience to see people work through their belief, creating an oasis of large self-supply, sustainable solutions, horizontal decision making and filled with critical thinking and philosophical question of why and who we are. The Michaels Hof is a community that I see is living in a system that is desirable for the future. Disconnected from a vast amount of destructive behaviour and creating a prime example of “Global problems Local solutions”.

## References

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