

SiemensWelt

Diversity

All the colors of the rainbow

Jun 05, 2018 | SHS - Siemens Healthineers Irma Paringer



Irma Paringer

During May and June, diversity days highlight the fact that we are all different. This enriches us all, society as well as companies. Diversity is, however, also about celebrating our similarities, which can sometimes only be seen with a change of perspective. While on sabbatical, our diversity officer in Germany immersed herself in what was – for her – a whole new world. She looked after children in a township in Capetown as part of an HIV project, an activity that has enriched her life.

The color of the containers catches the eye. Amid the mostly gray corrugated sheeting and brown tones that are so prevalent in the surroundings along the dusty gravel road, bright blue-, turquoise- and red-painted containers welcome the children in the Blikkiesdorp township. And there is more inside, with bright pictures on the walls, colorful chairs and tables, and printed curtains where about 20 children who are just starting school are looked after each day. This is where Irma Paringer, Diversity Manager at Siemens Healthineers in Germany, spent her time over the past five months.



“The idea of taking a sabbatical once during my career has grown over the years,” says Paringer. “There was no question that I wanted to use my career break to live and work in another country. I wanted to gain new perspectives and immerse myself in other cultures and environments while engaging with the local people.”



This led her to apply for the AIDS prevention project HOPE Cape Town, which has the aim of improving the quality of life of children and families affected by HIV and the difficult circumstances associated with it. She moved to Cape Town, where she lived with various local people.

It was initially daunting to leave familiar surroundings and venture into a completely new and unknown world. "The drive into the township was a challenge those first days, and it was quite intimidating. But it soon became a routine I loved, as there was lively and sometimes adventurous hustle and bustle to see on the streets along the way." For example, she often had to evade stray dogs and weave around crowded taxi buses and roadside stalls during her commute.



“From the very beginning, I saw and experienced diversity on all levels in South Africa. It is quite clear why Nelson Mandela coined the phrase “rainbow nation”. Never before have I experienced a country with so much diversity and beauty, but also contradictions and challenges,” explains Paringer. According to her, even 20 years after the end of apartheid, the country still faces difficulties in providing all its citizens with equal opportunities.



“During my time there, I often had to put aside my usual way of thinking – our German conventions and standards didn’t get me very far. Yet time and again, I was able to draw on my experiences from my work at Siemens and pursue common goals and values.”



Trained in social pedagogy, Paringer spent her mornings with the children's group playing various structured games as well as free play, inside and outside. "It was similar to a childcare center in Germany, but with fewer resources in terms of materials and staff, and always a lot of improvisation," she explains. The aim of the project is to prepare the children for school.



Although school is compulsory, there are many children who don't go to school because, for example, they don't have birth certificates or school clothes. And there are cases now and again where the children's parents or grandparents who provide childcare are unaware of how to deal with authorities. Paringer and two South African colleagues who are permanent staff, a social worker and an occupational therapist, also helped in these situations.



“It was really exciting to be there at this time. The change in president created an incredible spirit of optimism. You could really feel the common thread that binds the many diverse groups in the country,” says Paringer. And the diversity manager in her adds, “This is where diversity comes into play – in our common thread. The trick is to take that one step further and work together to shape society and culture. This happens on a small scale, such as in the children’s group in the township, as well as on a large scale, such as at a company.”

She is still conscious of her change in perspective every day now that she is back at work at the new headquarters in Erlangen. “One of the most formative experiences that I took with me from my sabbatical is that I can also bring about change on a small scale, in my own sphere of influence, and make a difference for people.”



“It’s good to leave your comfort zone now and then and try something unfamiliar and new. You can also do that at home in your own country, but it’s great if you have the opportunity to experience this in another country and on another continent.”

Irma Paringer

Diversity

During May and June, diversity days around the world are dedicated to this topic. In terms of the working environment, diversity means the similarities and differences of employees in the various dimensions of gender diversity, disability, sexual identity, ethnic diversity, religion and age. These differences not only help make the world a better place, but also contribute in other ways such as making our company more successful.

Today, June 5, is Germany’s Diversity Day. The UN declared May 21 to be the World Day for Cultural Diversity.

Diversity at Siemens

Sabbatical

A sabbatical is a special part-time option consisting of both a work phase and a block of free time. It is a voluntary agreement for a career break. Employees must have been with the company at least 6 months and in practice, the sabbatical must be compatible with the person's work for the company.

A reduced salary is paid for the duration of the sabbatical. Since fiscal 2017, 162 employees at Siemens Healthineers in Germany have applied for sabbaticals.

Related Links

HOPE Capetown: More information on the organization where Irma Paringer worked

Contact

Irma Paringer (irma.paringer@siemens-healthineers.com)
SHS HR EMEA CWE GER DI&SC

Editorial team

Siemens Healthineers Editorial Team (internal.editors.team@siemens-healthineers.com)
SHS CC ELC

Find more news from Siemens Healthineers in **SiemensWorld** and our group in the **SSN**.



Siemens Healthineers wants to enable healthcare providers to increase value by expanding precision medicine, transforming care delivery, improving patient experience and digitalizing healthcare.

Disclaimer

All Siemens Healthineers News in SiemensWorld are for internal use only. Be aware: External Publication of the content bears legal and regulatory risks for Siemens Healthineers.

All products/features mentioned in the news may be protected by trademarks or registered products.

The products/features mentioned in the news might not be approved in some countries or, for other reasons, not yet commercially available. Furthermore, they might still be under development and not commercially available yet. Due to regulatory reasons their future availability cannot be guaranteed. Please contact your local Siemens Healthineers organization for further details.