

Social Practicum in Tobias House

By Jonathan Lorand

My name is Jonathan and I am currently a student at the Steiner Atelier Schule in Zurich. As part of my curriculum, I recently completed a three-week social practicum in the Tobias House, working with and helping to take care of the handicapped. This is a short description of my experience.

Working at Tobias House I had a well-rounded experience of the daily life of the handicapped who are cared for there. Each day was full and varied. During the day, I worked in the main building, where there are the different 'workstations'. There the handicapped do various therapeutic activities from candle and homemade-paper making, playing music, doing crafts, or weaving beautiful textiles in the weavery. I spent most of my time helping in the wood workshop where we were making rattles for small children, as well as spatulas, and salad servers. Each person had different tasks that they were capable of, and I especially enjoyed working directly hand in hand with the handicapped, rasping and filing, shaping and forming the wood. To work together, to guide and help the handicapped to use their strength and their bodies, to help them create something, that was really rewarding. We also had a lot of fun together, joking, playing in the breaks, or on our daily walks in the woods.

In the evenings, I went home with handicapped to the living groups where they live together along with their caretakers. There I was treated to detailed tours of bedrooms, a game of ping-pong outside or a board game inside, or the day's exciting news. In the evenings, I also had responsibilities, such as giving a daily footbath and massage to one man who has trouble walking, or helping to cook and clean up dinner. After our meal, we would close the evening with music and singing, or a story read aloud by one of the caretakers. With the blowing out of the candle, it was time to get ready for bed, and time for me to go home.

Working at Tobias House, each day had a rhythm, and this rhythm flowed consistently from day to day. I realized how important this rhythm was for the handicapped, to have consistency and stability, as well as a connection to unfolding of the day. And for myself, it felt so healthy to have this rhythm – I realized how much it was lacking in my normal, scattered and hectic life. In addition, and of the utmost importance, was the sense of community that I felt between everyone, both the caretakers and the handicapped. For the caretakers, I saw that a sense of community was essential to be able to work as a flexible, effective team, as well to create a healthy emotional space for the disabled. For the handicapped, this community is their life. It is their source of physical support, social interaction, education, and most of all, their source of love.