

Dear families and friends,

I hope all is well, and everyone is ready to start fresh after the summer break!

I am very glad to share with you that the first GIRLS CAMP that I designed, organized, and led was a success! Each of you played an important role in its accomplishment your generous contributions covered the different expenses such as the travel costs, clothing, toiletries, food, medicine, and travel insurance. So, on behalf of the campers and the staff, THANK YOU VERY MUCH from the bottom of my heart! Without your donations, this initiative would have remained a dream in my mind! Your support made it a reality! Most of all, you are now part of a movement that brings HOPE to rural communities through the girls and their teachers! The camp opened the girls' mind and shifted their perspectives about the future. That's why the theme this year was entitled "Exploring Possibilities".

I also put the pictures and information on my Facebook profile, and some of you might have already seen and read them. For those who are not connected to me on social media and / or prefer email communications, I make this document for you. I hope you will enjoy it! And I look forward to your involvement again next year for the second round of Girls Camp!

Happy reading, and feel free to share this with others as you please!

Appreciatively,

Rijasoa, Kikao, Rojo, Mr Patrick, and the cooking and cleaning staff,

Summary: The Girls Camp 2023 took place from August 14th – 18th in Antananarivo, Madagascar. In total, there were 33 participants from 7 elementary schools in remote areas of Madagascar: 22 Girls, 7 female teachers and four teachers' young children. I met those campers during the time I provided in-service training to them at their respective locations. That is, the camp is an initiative of mine born out of my work with the teachers in those far away schools. It came to my mind when I noticed students' enthusiasm and willingness to learn while teachers use liberatory and communal pedagogy, my dissertation research outcome. Therefore, the camp served as an opportunity for Girls, who likely to drop out of school in their teen years, to explore possibilities in jobs and professions for the future by:

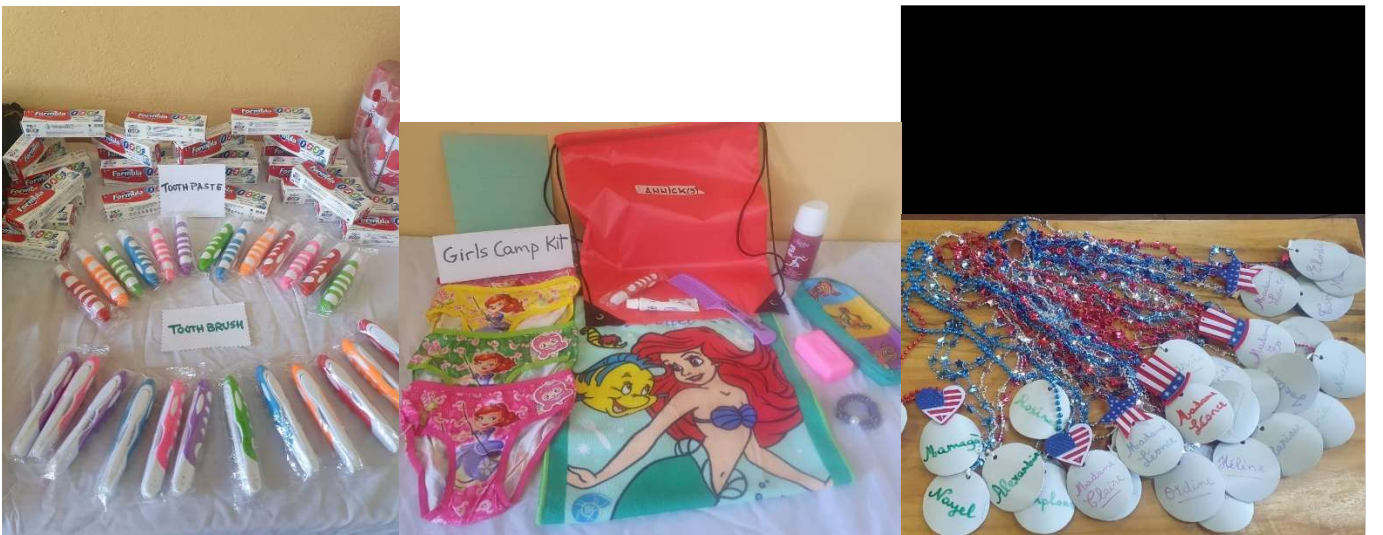
- Seeing / visiting locations including universities and schools, the World War II memorial monument, the airport, the city, the Queen's Palace, the Stadium, and market places
- Doing arts and crafts with different types of supplies
- Learning English prayers, songs, and dances
- Listening to female professionals' testimonies and lived experiences
- Expressing their favorites, dreams, and wishes in English

♠ Day 0 - Part 1: Preparation and Arrival of the campers ♠

All the campers traveled by bus we called "taxi-brousse", meaning "rural cab". The group from the furthest location started their trip with a cart pulled by bulls. Then, it took the canoe with another group for three hours to get into the closest town where they rode the taxi-brousse for 6 hours and then for 26 hours. One group of girls and their teachers had to walk for 2 hours before taking two different taxi-brousse with another group that crossed a small stream by canoe. The three remaining groups rode the taxi-brousse for 15, 17, and 19 hours. All the girls but two came to the capital city for the first time. They are all excited about the camp and are appreciative of the adventure. Their teachers accompany them and assist them closely during the camp. The camp team directed by me and Kikao did the prep shown on the pictures below. No pictures of the trip because rural teachers only have a basic cell phone.



Colorful backpacks bought from the US, the girls camp kit, and the sign inside the classroom.





I came to pick up the girls and their teachers at the bus station



After picking up the girls, I led the provided useful information about the camp. I called it an Orientation session.





▲Day 1 - Part 1: Seeing historic places and making necklaces and bracelets with beads ▲

On Day 1, the campers went to see some historic places such as the Queen's Palace, the Barea Stadium, the First Medical School of Madagascar, the Second World War Memorial Monument, and the Senate. Those places were chosen because either they are part of the Curriculum or they are in the news. Yet, students have no clear idea of their details. So, I used the following approach to "teach" the campers as we walked by or visited the places. First, I asked them questions about what they see around them until someone mentioned the place (They are mesmerized by everything surrounding them since they are from the villages). Second, I asked them what they know about the place (they learned some of the information from school). Third, I ask them to read and explain the information written on the signs (Literacy skills and critical thinking need improvement because they struggle to read words with more than two syllables in both Malagasy and French, and have difficulty giving opinionson things). Fourth, I quiz them (I wanted to make sure they are focused). Lastly, before leaving the area visited, I asked them to say one thing they learned or surprised them or they would always remember.



The Queen's Palace is not pictured here but it is seen on our left. The campers learned that the Palace is placed on a hill where the Queen can see the whole city. The Queen's ricefield used to be where we stood that's why the location is called Antanimbarinandriana, meaning the royal rice field. There is a middle school under that name right behind us and we even stopped by to read the sign.



This is the Barea Stadium, and also the biggest soccer field in Madagascar. Barea is the National Soccer Team who made history by making to the Quarter Final of the African Cup in 2019. Since then, Malagasy people all over the country including children know the Barea players, whose pictures are painted in big format on that Stadium. Even if the campers could not get into the Stadium, they could see it and made the connection with what they already knew 🏆 🇲🇵

The Senate is the building behind us and I asked the campers to read the sign on it and tell what they know about it. Since Senators in Madagascar are by provinces and not district, so the campers were not able to name any of the Senators. They know the Representatives though. So, we just say that people who work there are elected and public figures.





This is the World War I memorial site. This Monument is normally closed to the public but the responsible there saw that our campers are from out of town and he made us a favor by allowing us there. So, we took pictures and enjoy the view. It is surrounded by water, like a lake. It is called Anosy Lake, meaning Island Lake. The entrance fees at Anosy Lake allowed the campers to play at the playground there afterwards.



After doing arts and crafts, the campers had an English practice session. They have not learned any English before. So, it is just basic knowledge like name, age, teacher's name, school name, favorite color, food, and subject, and most of all what they want to be when they grow up. The last one is very important because the girls camp is about exploring possibilities. So, having the girls to say and write their future job in English would be unique and important to them.

▲ Day 1 - Part 2: Enjoying the playground and learning dances ▲

The Girls Camp is not only about learning, but it is also about discovering different ways of having fun. During our visit of the Anosy Lake which is at the city centre and after learning about the World War II Memorial Monument, the girls and the teachers played at the playground. The entrance fees cover the unlimited use of the playground. All but three girls experienced fun at a playground for the first time in their life. In the afternoon at the camp site, they learned the Chicken Dance and Ram Sam Sam Dance.





Left: the girls gathered to get some snack at the park.

Right: The girls learned the “Chicken Dance” taught by Rojo.

●● Day 2 - Part 1: Visiting the University of Antananarivo campus ▲

The Girls visited the University of Antananarivo. I chose it because it is the first, the oldest, and the biggest University in Madagascar. The campers know that after high school, one can go to college, but none of them have ever been to a university campus and tour it. Even if the girls' teachers do not have a college degree, they talk about college options to the Girls to some extent. I shared with the campers that I attended that university at two campuses: I studied English for two years at the Department of Letters and Human Sciences, and I also pursued my studies at the Normal School at the other campus where I received my English Teaching Degree of CAPEN. It is good for children to know about college options in elementary school. It is better for them to visit a university at some point as a youth. It is best for them to tour a university campus and hear a testimony of someone who graduated at that university so that they get an inspiration and dream about their own college attendance and graduation 🎓



We are next to a big trash can with 4 compartments with signs: paper, plastic, organic (compost?), and other. I asked the girls to look into each compartment and figure out what each sign might mean. They learned about not only to put trashes in one place because littering is ethically and environmentally wrong, but they also explored information regarding recycling papers, food skins, and plastics. I started with pointing out the trees surrounding them and asked them about the different parts of a plant, the roles of the leaves, and why trees are crucial to the environment, especially in Madagascar where forests slowly disappear



The campers took a picture next to the University sign. Part of the Esplanade or the big space is the small pool or aquarium with some fish 🐟 . The Girls enjoyed watching the orange fishes there!



This is the big and famous space called "Esplanade" where strikes of students, faculty, and administrative / technical employees take place. On that day, August 15, a holiday since it is the Assomption Day, the security guy did not allow us to gather there even if the campus was closed. It is because of the people who are still grading the national high school exams at that campus. We explained that we are here to show the campus to those girls and not to lead a strike or something 😊😂😅

The Girls here read the sign of the Department of Letters and Human Sciences where they are asked to figure out the different majors there. Since we learned English phrases, dances, and songs, they know that English, like French, is a foreign language. I guided their mind to realize that the Department there is where one can study Foreign Languages. The human science majors there, some of which they also learn in school, are geography, history, philosophy, and communication. And of course, I proudly revealed that I studied there for 2 years before starting at the Teacher's College!





Top left: I pointed out the sign of the Department of Law, Economics, Management, and Sociology. The Girls read the sign, learned about the different major there, and the professions of graduates there.

Top right: The campers and I did not forget to take a picture in front of the "Trano Kintana", meaning the Star House due to its roof in the shape of a star. That is the Office of the University President. I explained to the Girls that the first person in charge of the University is called "President", and like our country leader, he or she is elected too.

●● Day 2 - Part 2: Bunny race, snacks at the food court, and crafts time ▲

After the visit of the University of Antananarivo, the girls deserved some fun activities. They played the bunny race with the bags I brought from the US. The two winners received a small souvenir to take home. Afterwards, they girls had snacks at the city's food court: tea and beignet. After that, the weather became warmer so we had frozen yogurt that helped us till lunch time. For lunch, we had rice with vegetables and meat. The arts and crafts of the day happened after lunch during which the girls made stuff out of pipe cleaners.





Top: Snack time at the City Food Court called "Zay Maika" meaning "Those who are in a hurry". This place is owned by the City of Antananarivo for over 60 years. Historically speaking, people ate there standing as its name indicates. It used to be a filthy place too. Nowadays, we can sit down and enjoy snacks and meals as the building was renovated. The campers' snacks are so far on the go due to the visits. The Girls had snacks at different sellers because of the limited seats at each café of the Food Court. **Bottom:** Enjoying ice-cream on a warmer weather. Looking at images before making crafts out of pipe cleaners.





Top left: lunch time. Here, the vegetable soup with beef is on the menu. The girls did not like it as it is not the food that they are used to. Since then, we asked them what they wanted to have for lunch. Their response surprised us: meatball in tomato sauce, which we did twice, and beef with greens.

Top right: a camper showing off her crafts made out of pipe cleaners: flowers, rings, and a bird with eyes and feather tail. I bought all the arts and crafts supplies from the Camp funds at Hobby Lobby.

Bottom left: I gave a girl the supplies for her craft project after she decided which one she wanted to make first.

Bottom right: A camper is making a chameleon out of pipe cleaners by getting inspiration from the image there.



●● Day 3 - Part 1: Visit of the Main Street of the Capital City and the Ivato International Airport ●●

The campers had the opportunity to walk on the Main Street of Antananarivo where the Town Hall is the main landmark. There, the girls learned about the Mayor and were asked to name their respective municipal leader. After that, we took the city bus to visit the airport, which is an important part of the Girls Camp because in addition to giving the girls an opportunity to see a new place, it also promotes travel possibilities. At the airport, the girls learned about National and International terminals and the different flights that land at Ivato Airport. Since the Indian Ocean Island Games will take place in Madagascar this year, the girls also learned about those foreign countries and were able to read those countries on the electronic boards at the airports. Details on each picture below.



The Jeux des Iles de L Ocean Indien or the Indian Ocean Island Games will take place in Madagascar from August 25 till September 3rd, the airport has the sign and the campers by school took picture next to it. Here is the girls and the teacher with her 2.5 year-old daughter proudly posed there for a picture. Each of the camper received a printed copy of their picture at that spot in their photo album for them to keep!



Left: The airport terminals are now separated so at the spot pictured here is the small path that connects the national to the international terminal. **Right:** The campers are walking from the national to the international terminal, which is about 7 minutes in duration.



Left: The Girls are amazed by the glass on the airport building because in their village, houses are made either out of dirt, leaves, or tins.



Right: The Girls stopped to see a small plane parked at the airport and a big plane whose tail can be noticed. This is their first time to see planes that close.



Mr Patrick, one the Girls Camp team, is distributing water to the Girls during snack time. No tea is available nearby and the weather was not that cold so drinking room temperature water was possible that day. (Our cold temperature is 50 😊)



Right: Campers reading the electronic boards as I ask them questions such as "What time is the flight from Addis Abbaba land?", "From what country is the flight that arrives at 1:15 pm", and "What is the number of the flight from Johannesburg?".

♥ Day 3 - Part 2: Arts and Crafts on fabric ♥

One of the activities that marks the Girls camp is the arts and crafts. The campers did a painting on a plastic plate, made a bracelet out of beads, animals and rings out of pipe cleaners, and on Day 3 they decorated a fuzzy fabric. All of the arts and crafts supplies were purchased in the US from the Girls Camp funds during my visit in May. The girls enjoyed doing those activities that opened their imagination and creativity. They will take back home with them their art and craft work 🙌



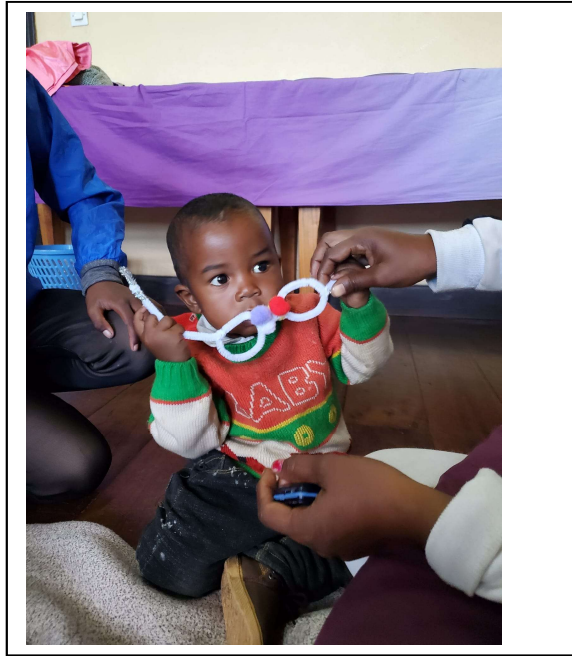
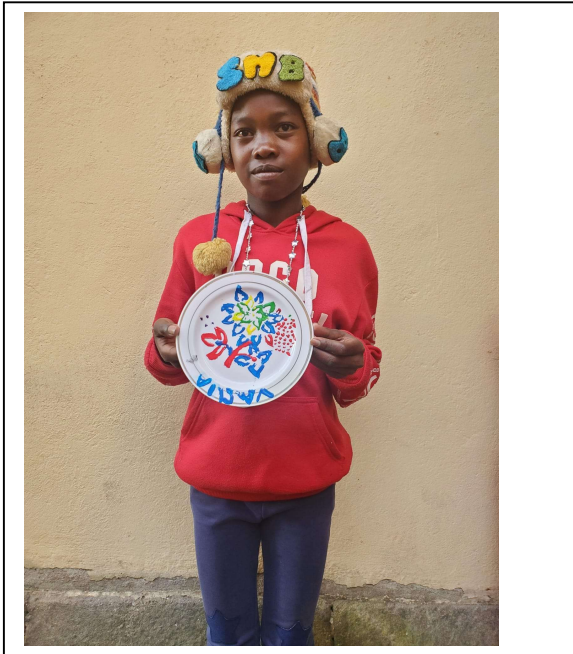
Arts and crafts on a fuzzy fabric. The campers enjoy sticking the colorful flowers 🌸 😊 😊



Left: Remasone, a girl from the Mikea tribe, an indigenous group in the forest of Madagascar, is showing off her work 🙌 🙌 ! This girl is the first student from her school and family to travel out of their community. She is among the campers who need to travel for 4 days to get to her place of living. **Right:** This girl, named Fandresena (= Victory) is among the youngest campers as she is only 5. She is very creative and curious ♥ She wanted to be a police officer



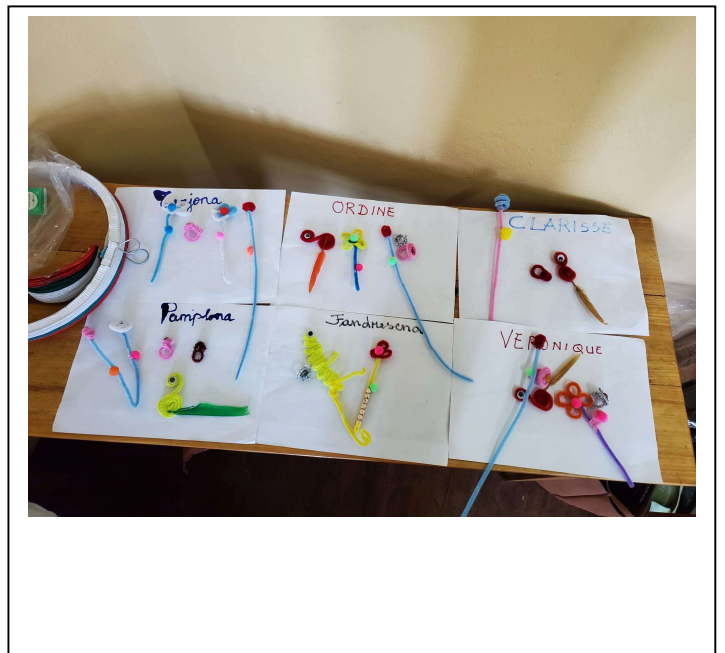
This girl is among the 4 campers who got sick at the camp. Three of them have malaria because their villages are among the red zones of that tropical disease. The other one has urinary infection as she complained about pains in both sides of her stomach. Fortunately the Lutheran Hospital is not far from the camp site so Mr Patrick, our dedicated staff, and her teacher took her there. She and the other three campers received treatment and are in good shape now. Thanks be to God Almighty 🙏 🙌 ♥



Top left: This girl painted a beautiful flower with acrylic on a plastic plate 🌻 ✨ 😊

Top right: One of the teachers' baby is holding glasses made of pipe cleaners that a camp counselor made for him. Isn't he cute?

Bottom left and right: The campers did crafts out of pipe cleaners, one piece at a time. Meaning, they need to choose to do one thing first. Once it is done, they can choose to do another one that is different. They can do up to 3 things. That way, they learn various tips and techniques of putting things together.



💙 Day 4: Listening to testimonies and lived experiences by female professionals 💜

🌸🌸 On Day 4, the campers got the opportunity to meet and listen to four female professionals: a customs inspector, a veterinarian, a Lutheran theologian, and a military force member. Those 4 women shared about what they do, how they came to choose their profession, and what steps they followed. The girls asked questions and got inspirations as well. By learning about those 4 professions that are traditionally occupied by males, the girls hopefully will consider one of them at some point. For now, most of them would like to become either a teacher, a doctor, or a midwife later! 🌸🌸



The first guest speaker was Dannick, my old classmate She is a customs inspector, the highest rank in Customs in Madagascar. She explained to the Girls her background and described the responsibilities in customs. When talking to the campers, Inspector Dannick encouraged the girls to have a goal and keep working toward it in order to succeed in life. Inspector Dannick is a childhood friend as we went to elementary and middle schools together. Now our children are friends too. She shared about our friendship to the Girls at the camp and our respective university studies to inspire the girls 🙏💜



This is **Volahasina Narijaona**, a friend and a sister in Christ because she is a Lutheran Theologian. She explained to the Girls that she is not a Pastor since within the Lutheran Church in Madagascar, women are not yet ordained. On this picture, she led a prayer before starting her testimony. Theologian Volahasina also shared with the girls that she is married to a Lutheran Pastor and has 3 kids. She primarily works as the chaplain at a Lutheran school in a small town, but she also has a small business that promotes Christian fashion.

During her talk, Theologian Volahasina encouraged the girls to learn multiple things because she now learns culinary arts and can make money by catering food at events. She testifies that being a theologian is a call, and not a job to choose.



The other guest speaker is Dr Mamisoa, a veterinarian and an adjunct faculty at the Protestant University under my leadership. She shared with the Girls that studied abroad for 6 years to get her degree because each type of animal must be well understood. For some reasons, the girls are not much interested in becoming a veterinarian. Yet, Dr Mamisoa encouraged them to consider it as animals need people to take care of them. There are two veterinarian schools in Madagascar now. Before, during Dr Mamisoa's time, people had to study that major abroad.

This is Chef A, a member of the military force. That specific force has hired women only in the last 10 years or so. Therefore, there are still few of them so it is great for the girls to actually meet one. Chef A explained the different steps she followed to become a military officer called "Gendarme". She reassured the girls that she is safe to talk with and not someone the girls are afraid of. (In rural areas, people are scared of military force members). She asked not to show her face when her pictures are shared to others. Chef A encouraged the girls to consider serving in the military because females can work in offices and do not travel in the jungles to chase the bandits.



💙 Day 5: Farewell and returning back home 💜

🌸🌻 The campers did activities such as different visits, learning English songs and dances, making crafts, and listening to guest speakers. Since I love music, I did not forget to enjoy dancing with the campers outside the camp site. In the span of 5 days, they have changed from showing a neutral face to making a smiling one, from being quiet to talking with others, from making no reactions to expressing feelings and opinions, and mostly from being unclear about future to claiming out loud their life goal. My hope is that they learned about themselves during the camp so that they always remember that there are possibilities of achieving their dream if they study hard. Praying for their safe trip back home. Hoping for another group of teachers and girls next year! Thanks so much for everyone's efforts to make this first initiative a success 🙏🌸🌻



Top left: Campers from Toliara, the far south, left first as they have to travel the longest. A teacher and a girl occupy the front seats of the bus. **Top right:** Walking inside the Premium taxi-brousse station called Cotisse. The campers have a long trip so those premium cars will give them enough space.



The girls and their teachers are pictured here inside the Cotisse Bus Station waiting for their departure. One of the privileges of taking the Premium Bus is the waiting area, indoor with comfortable chairs.



All campers took those premium cars but the rest do not have a picture. It is because they left at 8 am, had to come to the station at 7, and needed to leave the camp site at 5:30 to escape traffic. I was their chauffeur and I did 3 trips to transport 34 people with our SUV.

Highlighted pictures of the camp:



Official picture?



University tour



Girls taking notes during group discussions.



The girls in action during the camp