

## 6. “A Piece of Home” at Projekt DA-SEIN

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Projekt DA-SEIN was founded in 2014 to offer a “piece of home” to asylum-seekers who arrive in Basel by providing them support that goes beyond offering basic necessities.<sup>1</sup> Projekt DA-SEIN emphasizes showing up and being together, in the spirit of conviviality, with a focus on presence over programs. In addition, the program embraces ambivalent experiences, provides welcome to those arriving in a new country, and helps asylum-seekers learn German and other local skills. By providing a space to be together with asylum-seekers, there is an emphasis on relationships over outcomes. A theology of conviviality also centers ordinary activities of living together and generates relationships built on mutuality and interdependence, instead of offering programs that teach and direct. Projekt DA-SEIN’s focus on these relationships, especially between asylum-seekers and local volunteers, furthers its convivial emphasis and provides welcome through shared spaces and everyday activities. Convivial encounters as well as the social and theological commitments of the OKE shape the “piece of home” that is provided at Projekt DA-SEIN.

Despite the focus on conviviality and “being there” together, the relationships at Projekt DA-SEIN are often between people with very different social, political, and economic resources. In addition, asylum-seekers and volunteers participate in the program for different reasons. Asylum-seekers often come to Projekt DA-SEIN to meet people, to pass the time, for a meal, to learn German, or for access to resources. Volunteers often came to Projekt DA-SEIN to help those in the asylum system, to make a local impact on a large-scale issue, and to get to know people outside of their usual social circles. While many interactions at the program were convivial – for example, playing games and sharing meals – at other times relationships were structured around different motivations – for example, volunteers teaching German or asylum-seekers learning about Swiss social expectations. The unevenness of relationships sometimes impacts aspects of the program and creates more of a focus on teaching and learning than perhaps intended. This focus on helping sometimes took precedence over convivial goals of being together and learning together. In this way, the sense of home cultivated at Projekt DA-SEIN is also shaped by Swiss values,

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1     Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 3; Offene Kirche Elisabethen, “Die Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE).”

language, and asylum requirements, even when these are sometimes at odds with the openness and conviviality promoted by Projekt DA-SEIN.

In this chapter, I show how Projekt DA-SEIN cultivates specific aspects of conviviality and welcome as well as how teaching and helping shape the home offered to asylum-seekers. In exploring the OKE's approach to home and asylum-seeking, I draw on my ethnographic research, including interviews and participant observations, as well as on program documents, to tease out how the social location of Basel and the theology of the OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN reveal aspects of home. I will describe the history of the program's founding as well as its goals and structure, which begin to shed light on the significance of both the social and theological motivations of the program and the quality of experiences cultivated at Projekt DA-SEIN. I will then share volunteer motivations and connections to the program, how the OKE's theologies of openness and conviviality shape the program, and how Projekt DA-SEIN incorporates an emphasis on integration, with special attention to the role of language as a marker of home and belonging. This chapter explores how qualities of home are complicated by the realities of asylum-seeking, the social and religious systems at play, and the diverse motivations of volunteers and participants. The "piece of home" offered by Projekt DA-SEIN may be understood in its focus on openness, its welcome of diverse experiences, and its cultivation of convivial spaces, as well as in the ways it reflects local cultural values and social expectations about home. Finally, the chapter offers reflections on the risks, possibilities, and limitations of the relational focus on home that is cultivated at Projekt DA-SEIN.

## 6.1 Welcome at Projekt DA-SEIN

Welcome at Projekt DA-SEIN is cultivated by the church's theology of openness, by volunteers and staff who participate in the program, and through a focus on ambivalence and presence. The structure of Projekt DA-SEIN, as a drop-in space with few programmatic elements, creates less of a focus on tasks and more of a relational emphasis. Projekt DA-SEIN prioritizes showing up and being present. This creates the feeling of a social club or family event, with activities embedded within a broader focus on being together. This familial feeling emerges through the welcome offered by staff and volunteers and the regularity of seemingly mundane activities, such as playing games, helping with meals and chores, and sharing stories of one's history, family, and interests. Both asylum-seekers and volunteers reflected that playing games, laughing together despite speaking different languages, and sharing meals created a sense of family and belonging. These convivial interactions can become associated with other places where these experiences had previously occurred, often in contexts of family and home. As a volunteer explained, reflecting on her experience at Projekt DA-SEIN, "Sometimes, being there, it is like being at home,

or with a family. I think it has something to do with being part of a group. When you feel like you belong to this group, it is a little bit like being at home."<sup>2</sup> Affective associations at Projekt DA-SEIN sometimes developed in ways that mirrored previous associations with family, community, and safety, and therefore created a sense of home.

Home is often defined by affective associations of safety, warmth, and welcome. Hungerbühler, the OKE's former Catholic theologian, reflects this understanding when she explains that one way home is understood at Projekt DA-SEIN is by being known and being safe. "We define home as a place where you are welcome, where you feel understood, where you feel safe, where you are valued and loved, where you can open up [...] that they know there is a place here next to the church where they can come when they are happy or sad or hungry or so."<sup>3</sup> Projekt DA-SEIN hopes to provide a space that offers this safety and a sense of being welcomed amid difficult experiences of asylum-seeking. This is expressed in the OKE's motivations for establishing the program, in the church's theology of openness and convivence, and in the ways volunteers shape the program.

### 6.1.1 Projekt DA-SEIN: Motivations

The initial Projekt DA-SEIN program was sponsored by the Christoph Merian Stiftung (CMS), a Basel-based foundation established by Christoph Merian, the Basel aristocrat who sponsored the construction of the Elisabethenkirche.<sup>4</sup> The program description identifies the target audience for the program as asylum-seekers who arrive in Basel via the Reception and Processing Center (*Empfangs- und Verfahrenszentrum/EVZ*). It identifies this audience specifically as "all asylum seekers with residence permit N or F, refugees with permit B, rejected asylum seekers and asylum seekers (still) without a regulated (and official) residence (EVZ) who remain in Basel for a short or long period of time."<sup>5</sup> The description further defines this group as typically young men, children and youth, and families. These groups have continued to be the primary participants in the program. The two spin-off programs, Projekt JUNG-SEIN and Projekt FRAU-SEIN, developed more targeted programs for these audiences. Projekt DA-SEIN casts a wide net, and the majority of participants are young men, under the age of 30, who arrived in the last three

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2 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, October 25, 2018: 20181025\_4FW\_IN, Pos. 127.

3 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 67.

4 For more information, see: Christoph Merian Stiftung, "Christoph Merian Stiftung," accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.cms-basel.ch/>.

5 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 3.

years and are waiting for, or have recently received, results of their asylum applications. Asylum-seekers at the program had arrived from many different countries, including Afghanistan and Eritrea (these represented the two largest groups) as well as Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Tibet, Sudan, Nigeria, Turkey, and other countries.

The project description, written by Hungerbühler, the Catholic theologian serving the OKE at the time, and Annette Stade, the project consultant, acknowledges the diverse needs, beyond basic necessities, of those arriving in Basel as asylum-seekers. The document states, “Projekt DA-SEIN works to consciously create something beyond or in addition to ‘basic services’ for asylum-seekers.”<sup>6</sup> Projekt DA-SEIN hopes to address the broader needs of asylum-seekers, including emotional and spiritual needs. In contrasting the offerings of the OKE with those available elsewhere, the project description states, “Besides basic provision of food and lodging, the public has only offered very few options for coping with and structuring everyday life.”<sup>7</sup> By acknowledging the need for programs that provide emotional support, structure, and community, the OKE attends to the affective experiences of participants. It understands that asylum-seekers bring complex experiences such as loss, trauma, and dislocation, even as the program offers community, respite, and support.

The program is designed with few programmatic elements; instead the focus is on co-creating community and learning together, echoing the spirit of convivence. Without using the word “convivence,” the project description reflects this language by stating that Projekt DA-SEIN creates “room for experiences and knowledge to be exchanged and connections created between the (socio-)culture of the host country and the different (socio-)cultures of the asylum-seekers and refugees.”<sup>8</sup> The program provides a space to build community and share everyday experiences together with both Swiss volunteers and other asylum-seekers and refugees. In this context, convivial goals are supported by structures that attend to emotional and social experiences.

### 6.1.2 The Structure of Projekt DA-SEIN

The main program, Projekt DA-SEIN, was open three days a week during my time as a volunteer (though this has varied throughout the life of the program). During the open hours, the rooms in the basement of the church offices and the adjacent courtyard are open to asylum-seekers. Refugees and asylum-seekers can drop in at any time and attendance may vary. Some asylum-seekers show up every week while

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6 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 3.

7 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 3.

8 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 5.

others attend only sporadically or for special events. When Projekt DA-SEIN was established, an effort was made to advertise the program at refugee centers, at asylum homes, and through the word-of-mouth of other asylum-seekers. These efforts continued during my time at the program. When a new group of women from Eritrea arrived in Basel, they were picked up by a staff member and brought to the program as a group. Asylum-seekers and refugees were often referred to as guests (*Gäste*) at the program and were considered partners in building the community.

The physical space of the program in the basement of the church administrative building is accessed from a lower courtyard, where many activities occur in the warmer months. Inside the basement, the first room one enters is the kitchen, which has a large circular table. To the right is a smaller room referred to as "the chapel." It is most often used for group gatherings, for learning German in larger groups, for playing music, or for events such as watching the World Cup soccer tournament. From the kitchen, the next room is a large hallway with a foosball table, a storage area and coat rack, a bulletin board with relevant information such as contacts to relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, a locker for volunteers to store their belongings, and a prayer book where participants are encouraged to write prayers and intentions. Further down a small hallway is the bathroom. To the right is a larger main room with long tables and benches, a computer, children's toys, cabinets for storing supplies and games, a sewing machine, and cushioned benches along two walls. Especially in colder months, this room is where most activities take place, including small group conversations, playing games, and learning German together. In addition, meals and occasional workshops take place in this room. The spaces were renovated for the purpose of the program – the original program was located entirely outdoors.

The heart of the program is found in the open hours, when the space can be used as participants desire. Often people sit at the tables, drink coffee, play games, work on German homework, share food, and converse. Sharing stories, cooking, playing games, and learning skills occupy most of the time at the program. Upon arriving, each person checks in on a clipboard and retrieves their name tag (or makes one if it is their first visit). There is a coat rack anyone could use and a small locker where volunteers can store and lock up their personal items. Each day a meal is cooked and shared at the program. The ingredients for the meal come from the food share program, also housed at the church, and additional items are purchased from the program budget. Meals are cooked by volunteers, asylum-seekers, and program staff. Occasionally, and more often during the summer months, special activities might be planned, such as hikes or outings to a museum or a cultural event. Infrequent Input Sessions cover a range of cultural and social topics, including Swiss holidays, religious celebrations, Swiss cultural practices, or skills such as cooking or personal health. There are occasional opportunities to participate in a choir or dance performance, join an art class, receive acupuncture, or attend theater or cultural events.

The program lists four basic values that are displayed in the kitchen: respect, gratitude, and appreciation as well as a commitment to being in community (*Respekt, Dankbarkeit, Wertschätzung, und Gemeinschaftsein*). These are in addition to the house rules that call for respect and mutual participation within the program; prohibit violence, drugs, and alcohol; and allow smoking only if one is over 18 years old. In addition, all participants are required to wear name tags, speak Standard German, and help with daily chores such as cooking and cleaning, as assigned by a staff member.

### 6.1.3 Welcome as Openness to Asylum-Seekers

The OKE's commitment to openness means welcoming diverse populations, as is seen in the choices the church has made to keep the church building open, to create diverse religious and spiritual offerings that are not tied to membership or affiliation, and to center social and cultural concerns alongside the religious and spiritual. This welcome is also seen in the OKE's outreach to asylum-seekers, which acknowledges the many experiences of unwelcome during the asylum journey. As the program description states, those "who have left their homelands due to social, political, religious, or economic reason, already have a difficult path behind them. Arriving in Switzerland, they feel foreign, disoriented, and lost in a new country."<sup>9</sup> Projekt DA-SEIN hopes to provide a different experience for asylum-seekers now that they have arrived in Basel.

This welcome is cultivated at Projekt DA-SEIN through intentional practices such as greeting people when they arrive by shaking hands and exchanging names and pausing to say good-bye when someone leaves.<sup>10</sup> Greeting and leave-taking, while also cultural practices found in Switzerland (see discussion in section 6.3), became a defining feature of the program, and one that often engendered a sense of welcome. These moments of greeting, though simple and ritualized, created affective connections that built over time and generated feelings of being known and welcome at the program. Hungerbühler shares that Projekt DA-SEIN's hope is for asylum-seekers "to be welcome downstairs, be called by name, be heard and seen, and be shown real interest."<sup>11</sup> This welcome begins by using a person's name

9 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 3.

10 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 27, 2018: 20180927\_DA-SEIN\_v1\_PO, Pos. 2. For example, one day I described arriving and entering the courtyard outside of the program. There were small groups of 2–3 people at different tables doing homework, often with one volunteer helping one or two asylum-seekers with German. As I walked past one group, both people, an asylum-seeker and a volunteer, paused and said hello to me and reached out to shake my hand. I shook their hands and greeted them back, then continued into the building.

11 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 27.

and creating time and space to talk and sit together. A volunteer reflected on this experience of welcome, especially in a diverse community.

It really makes an impression that people from different origins and different religions and different languages are simply together in one place. And there are nice experiences, like when you arrive and people greet you and call your name from across the room. It gives you a kind of sense of home, because, how should I say it, you are recognized and probably also a little valued.<sup>12</sup>

Being recognized and valued creates a sense of belonging and occurs with simple actions of saying hello and shaking hands. Other practices at the program that cultivate a sense of welcome and generate community include wearing name tags and extending intentional invitations for asylum-seekers to join in activities.<sup>13</sup> Name tags and being known by name can provide a greater level of connection and generate a sense of family, as the volunteer above articulated. Name tags also encourage people to use each other's names and often facilitate conversations about the origins of names, how to pronounce them, what they mean, and how people received them. These exchanges can lead to talking about language and family. These conversations helped to build relationships, generate affectivity, and create a shared environment by bringing divergent experiences, including the use of different languages, into conversation. While this echoes basic hospitality, Projekt DA-SEIN aspires to go beyond hospitality by building a more mutual community across difference.

### 6.1.3.1 Volunteers and Openness

The welcome offered to asylum-seekers, the OKE's emphasis on openness, and a desire to have an impact on the political issue of asylum-seeking were reasons many volunteers were drawn to Projekt DA-SEIN. In a 2018 volunteer survey, as well as in my interviews, volunteers described being attracted to the OKE because of its openness. The volunteer survey summarized, "For many volunteers at the OKE, 'open' is a key word for their engagement and self-understanding. One said, 'For me, it is an attitude of openness and respect, which one pays to and owes one another.'"<sup>14</sup> For this volunteer, openness was a value they respected and felt reciprocated in, which gave them an entry point into volunteering at Projekt DA-SEIN. As Lorenz emphasized, "Last year we interviewed our volunteers about their motivation and [...] they all emphasized the word 'open,' 99.5% emphasized the word 'open.'"<sup>15</sup>

12 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 26, 2018: 20180926\_3FW\_IN, Pos. 91.

13 Not everyone wore a name tag, but volunteers and staff were instructed to ask people to put on name tags if they were not wearing them.

14 Projekt DA-SEIN, *DA-SEIN Interview*.

15 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EL\_IN, Pos. 215.

Another volunteer experienced openness at Projekt DA-SEIN in contrast to previous experiences of religious organizations being closed and rigid. After a lifetime of distance from the church, she felt connected to the OKE because of her participation in Projekt DA-SEIN as a volunteer and the openness of the church.<sup>16</sup> For another volunteer, openness translated into the experience of being together across differences at Projekt DA-SEIN. The volunteer told me:

I think it is wonderful and impressive that people from different backgrounds and religions, different languages, are simply together in one place and get along so well. So it's that experience that I keep having, and for me it is the most wonderful experience, that in this place, we are all humans in the end, no matter where we come from. That's what I love so much.<sup>17</sup>

The space of difference found at Projekt DA-SEIN is not experienced as a space of exclusion, instead it is seen as a space of possibility. Most volunteers are not church members but are instead attracted to the church because of its cultural and social activities. This openness to non-members provides Projekt DA-SEIN with a diversity of volunteers who then provide welcome to asylum-seekers and who share their own visions and connections to home.

### 6.1.3.2 Welcome as Affective Experiences

Convivial experiences, such as those facilitated by greeting practices and by using one another's names, can generate affective experiences that build community and even generate feelings of home and family. The experience of arriving at Projekt DA-SEIN is less about showing up at a formal program and more about arriving at home or joining a social group of close friends. One is greeted, settles in, and is open to what might happen – participating in a conversation, chopping vegetables, listening to someone play music, playing with a child, helping with homework, participating in a sewing or art project, playing a game, or drinking a cup of a tea while observing the goings-on. There are limited requirements as to what someone is expected to do, except to engage with one another in some way.

This focus on presence and being together prioritizes relationships. This priority can create the feeling of a gathering with friends or family, with activities embedded within a broader focus of being together. This familial feeling emerges through the regularity of seemingly mundane activities that characterize conviviality, such as showing up, playing games, having conversations, and helping with meals and chores. In addition, feelings of safety and familiarity can be built through these activities.

16 Freiwilligensitzung Protocol, May 22, 2018: 20180522\_Freiwilligensitzung\_DO, Pos. 10.

17 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 26, 2018: 20180926\_3FW\_IN, 91.

Being part of everyday activities and sharing stories came to define the moments where I also felt a sense of belonging at the program and, in turn, where I experienced moments of home. One day I helped another volunteer and an asylum-seeker with a sewing project. The volunteer had brought a bag of clothes for hemming and the participant, who had worked for a time as a tailor before immigrating, was helping to alter them. I started chatting with them and then joined in, helping to cut, pin, and sew. During this time, we shared stories of work we had done, work we wished we had done, and work we hoped to do. While we collaborated, we talked and joked.<sup>18</sup> I reflected in my notes at the end of the day, "I had a sense, while sitting there, of being part of a community. I knew a lot of the people who came in and out of the room. I also know the rituals and ways of the program to some degree. This sense of familiarity gives me a sense of home."<sup>19</sup> Knowing people and being known, familiarity with systems and rituals, and engaging in shared practices, as well as laughing and talking, contributed to my own feelings of being at home at Projekt DA-SEIN.

Meals and chores also added to the convivial and familial associations of the program. On my first day of helping to prepare dinner, asylum-seekers and staff helped orient me by pointing out cutting boards and other kitchen tools I needed. I recorded the following observation about this experience: "Being in the kitchen was like being part of a family. There was a lot of working together but also assigning tasks [...] It gave me a family feeling of community and work."<sup>20</sup> As I learned where the cutting boards were stored and as I chatted with participants, I became more familiar with and to the program, while deepening my knowledge of how the program operates, interacting with others, and establishing my own place within systems and relationships.

Feeling valued, being recognized, and sharing experiences with others can generate affective associations that translate to feelings of being at home or with family. An asylum-seeker from Eritrea reflected on his experience at Projekt DA-SEIN: "I feel that when you are also open with some people [...] like when you joke each other [...] you feel like brothers and sisters."<sup>21</sup> The welcome cultivated at Projekt DA-SEIN, along with the activities of being together, playing games, sharing a meal, and helping with projects, creates a feeling of connection and even feelings of home in some interactions. Echoing this sentiment, Renate Gäumann, Coordinator of Asylum and

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18 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 6, 2018: 20180906\_DA-SEIN\_v2\_PO, Pos. 13–21.

19 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 6, 2018: 20180906\_DA-SEIN\_v2\_PO, Pos. 11–12.

20 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 27, 2018: 20180927\_DA-SEIN\_v1\_PO, Pos. 18.

21 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 13, 2018: 20180713\_3AS\_IN, Pos. 386.

Refugee Services for Basel-Stadt, spoke at the program's *Sommerfest* and lauded Projekt DA-SEIN, saying the program provides connections to home by offering opportunities to be together, to share stories, and to build relationships.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, despite the emphasis on showing up and being together, there are also intentional ways that the program hopes to help asylum-seekers. These include cultivating relationships, assisting with the asylum process and the integration process, and sharing cultural resources and information. These aspects of helping are reflective both of the church's theological commitments to service and *Diakonia* and of the ways the OKE is embedded in Swiss political and social systems.

Home at Projekt DA-SEIN is also shaped within a social location and is culturally and spatially informed by Basel's distinct characteristics, geography, politics, and culture. Through its organizational structure, funding, language, customs, and physical location, the church is embedded in local social systems. At the same time, the OKE's theologies of openness and conviviality encourage individual and collective connections at the program that can generate meaningful experiences and "social existential feelings," to use Fuchs' words.<sup>23</sup> These feelings are connected to particular engagements with the world that can generate (or not generate) a "sense of place."<sup>24</sup> An openness to the diversity of experiences asylum-seekers bring cultivates a "piece of home" that is shaped by convivial and affective experiences, not just by the social and cultural norms of a place. Both aspects shape the home that participants encounter at the program. The OKE is embedded both in Switzerland and in the asylum system and, at the same time, it is creating new ways of being together across difficulty and difference.

### 6.1.3.3 Seasonal Festivals

One of these ways of being together is through seasonal festivals. These festivals make up a major programmatic element of Projekt DA-SEIN. These regular, non-religious festivals occur up to four times a year and are open to the public. In the original program description, seasonal festivals are described as a way to extend the program's goals of celebrating life and creating community. These festivals are also designed to invite the Basel community to get to know the program by visiting the church, enjoying food cooked by the asylum-seekers and volunteers, and experiencing aspects of the program, often through artistic performances or exhibits that are curated by members of the Projekt DA-SEIN community. The festivals feature art, music, culture, food, and dancing, much of it created by and with asylum-seekers. The original program description describes the participation of asylum-seekers as

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22 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, August 11, 2018: 20180811\_Sommerfest\_v1\_PO, Pos. 37.

23 Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Affectivity," 612.

24 Convery, Corsane, and Davis, *Making Sense of Place*, 2.

both hosts and guests. "The meal should be prepared in advance by or with the help of the participants and the decisions, music, etc. will be organized or created by the participants. At the festival itself, however, the participants are guests."<sup>25</sup> This mixing of guest and host hopes to cultivate mutuality, break down one-sided hospitality, and extend welcome to asylum-seekers who have recently arrived in Basel.

The program description defines these festivals, not as parties focused on fun but, instead, as "a celebration of life."<sup>26</sup> The festivals acknowledge the tension between celebration and grief, reflected in the OKE's embrace of ambivalence. Ambivalence describes the complexity of human experience – the grief and joy, laughter and tears, that are often experienced through emotions, feelings, or affective associations.<sup>27</sup> This ambivalence is often heightened in the difficult situations many asylum-seekers have had and continue to experience.<sup>28</sup> The original Projekt DA-SEIN project description reads:

Asylum-seekers and refugees who arrive in Switzerland have often been forced to leave family, relatives, and friends, who are threatened by war or economic insecurity. These circumstances, and their own insecure and difficult situations, mean many of these people are not thinking about festivals and celebrations.<sup>29</sup>

These seasonal celebrations are intended to provide a way to ritualize the year and provide welcome and celebration amid the difficulties many asylum-seekers face. They also offer a chance for other members of the Basel community to be hosted by the OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN participants and offers a chance to bridge the gap between asylum-seekers and the broader community.

### 6.1.4 Program Leadership

From 2016 to 2019, Projekt DA-SEIN was directed by Hungerbühler and managed by Ils van Looven. The program staff who run the daily operations of the program consist of young men completing their civil service (*Zivildienst*) and other interns. Switzerland has compulsory military service for all men.<sup>30</sup> Men who object to military conscription for reasons of conscience can participate in an alternative program of civil service, called *Zivildienst*, where they work in social service programs.<sup>31</sup>

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25 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 6.

26 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 6.

27 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier*.

28 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 4.

29 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 4.

30 Women may also volunteer to participate in military service, but they are not required to.

31 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Bundesgesetz über den zivilen Ersatzdienst (Zivildienstgesetz, ZDG)*, 824.0 (Fedlex, 1995), [https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1996/1445\\_1445\\_1445/de](https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1996/1445_1445_1445/de).

Projekt DA-SEIN is one such program that benefits from this civil service program. Those completing their Zivildienst at Projekt DA-SEIN are responsible for the daily operations and are present on-site during open hours. There is high turn-over in these positions, as their service postings last only a few months. During my time at Projekt DA-SEIN there were at least eight different people responsible for the daily operation of the program. Yet, the Zivildienst participants also provided consistency through their daily presence and were aided by volunteers during open hours. The presence of these young Swiss people also brings the context of Switzerland to the program. Conversations about heritage, language, and distinct Swiss practices occurred with those completing their Zivildienst as well as with volunteers. Volunteers and staff shape the experience of the program in significant ways, including by bringing their own experiences, motivations, and understandings of home to bear on their interactions.

### 6.1.5 Program Volunteers and Welcome

Volunteers are essential contributors to the interactions at the program, since they help facilitate opportunities for mutual learning and offer welcome to refugees and asylum-seekers at Projekt DA-SEIN. Creating connections between asylum-seekers and the local Swiss population has always been an important goal of the program and is reflected in the original project description:

For many asylum-seekers and refugees who have lived in Basel for a long time, contact with locals is usually limited to necessary administrative procedures, a small circle of people who provide support, and advice organizations. DA-SEIN places great value on maintaining and expanding the existing networks for asylum seekers and refugees as well as their advocates and confidants.<sup>32</sup>

These networks are primarily made up of volunteers from the Swiss community, though not all volunteers are Swiss citizens or long-term residents. There are a large number of non-Swiss residents in Basel, and the volunteer group reflects this diversity. For instance, I had recently arrived in Basel from the United States for my year of research and doctoral studies. While I spoke German, I did not speak or understand Swiss German. Two of the first volunteers I met were another American and a woman from Peru who were both in Switzerland due to work and family commitments.<sup>33</sup> Volunteers also include refugees or asylum-seekers who are now permanent residents, citizens of other countries working in Basel (ex-pats), and resi-

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32 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 4.

33 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, February 8, 2018: 20180208\_DA-SEIN\_PO.

dents of neighboring countries (France and Germany) who travel across the border to volunteer. Volunteers included those with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian identities, and those who attend church regularly, sporadically, and never at all. While some volunteers have a history of church affiliation, many do not. The division of participant and volunteer was sometimes even less clear, as asylum-seekers become volunteers, sometimes taking on this role in the parallel program, Projekt JUNG-SEIN. This diversity of volunteer affiliations creates a unique mix of populations, where asylum-seekers, ex-pats, permanent residents, and citizens all show up with the goal of being and learning together. These convivial encounters facilitate many aspects of home. Volunteers are highly valued at the program. They are viewed as important participants in the Projekt DA-SEIN community, and they help create the sense of home that Projekt DA-SEIN cultivates.

Volunteers sign up for weekly shifts of around three hours and, while they commit to regular shifts, their attendance can vary and they come and go over time.<sup>34</sup> Volunteers interact with participants where there is need and interest.<sup>35</sup> This might occur through conversation, playing games, helping with German homework, cooking, or sharing tea. Some volunteers have a special interest that they offer to asylum-seekers at the program, whether helping with introductory German, reviewing resumes, or teaching new games. Yet most volunteers expect to simply show up and hang out with whoever is there. Becoming a program volunteer is less about facilitating the program and more about becoming part of the program. The daily, unscripted interactions of program participants, volunteers, asylum-seekers, and refugees are the heart of the program. Showing up, having conversations, playing games, or practicing German are not tangential but central to the volunteer description. The presence of volunteers shapes the atmosphere of welcome and being together that is at the heart of the program. In this way the program's emphasis on convivial interactions becomes more than an abstract goal; it is embodied through the presence of volunteers.

Volunteers are often thanked, and this message of gratitude, including the acknowledgment that the program would not be able to run without volunteers, is repeated. Volunteers attend monthly meetings led by the Projekt DA-SEIN leadership team and are kept abreast of upcoming events and relevant activities in the community via a weekly email. Regular "supervision" meetings are also offered. This is an opportunity for volunteers to meet together with a psychotherapist and discuss any issues that might arise for them through the volunteer work. Topics could include feelings about the volunteer work, setting boundaries, or reviewing specific encounters or situations.

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34 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 7.

35 Visitors can also drop in when invited by volunteers or program leadership.

Volunteers are an important source of support and connection to the local population for asylum-seekers, and this is a defining feature of Projekt DA-SEIN. The initial program description states: “At Projekt DA-SEIN, volunteers not only support project management and program offerings but are also a cultural and integrative bridge for asylum-seekers to a new home.”<sup>36</sup> Volunteers are seen as key to creating connections to Basel for asylum-seekers, and this includes supporting their integration into Swiss life. This support might include helping asylum-seekers understand the local social, cultural, and political norms and expectations, learn the local language, or navigate the infrastructure and bureaucracy of the city and state. This dual role of providing support and companionship as well as education and social integration reflects the situation of Projekt DA-SEIN as both a theologically and a socially informed program.

## 6.2 Ambivalence and “Being There”

In addition to welcome and hospitality, two other beliefs motivate the program’s engagement with asylum-seekers: a desire for each person to be known and seen in their fullness, which is a reflection of the church’s focus on “ambivalence,” and a focus on being present, or “being there,” over specific activities or outcomes. The focus on ambivalence extends welcome to the diversity of experiences that asylum-seekers bring to the program. And “being there” refers to an aspect of presence that is fundamental to the program and that is embodied through volunteers, staff, and asylum-seekers by showing up and being together.

Projekt DA-SEIN’s welcome extends beyond opening the church doors for meals, German lessons, or festivals. Projekt DA-SEIN seeks to welcome the fullness of asylum-seekers, embracing both the positive as well as the more difficult, or even negative, aspects of their lives. Hungerbühler shares,

Yes, it is important to us, as a social project, that we don’t just see those who have fled only as persecuted or sad or existentially broken. Instead, they are also precious people who bring something with them. They have experienced something, maybe really terrible things. Yet there is still something indestructible, that is our belief, like the mystics say: “There is the spark of God in every heart.”<sup>37</sup>

This welcoming of the diversity of human experience and a willingness to embrace its complexity is captured in the OKE’s understanding of “ambivalence,” which involves welcoming and accepting the fullness of life, including positive and negative

36 Stade, *DA-SEIN*, 7.

37 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 51.

experiences and emotions, even if they are contradictory. The good and the bad, grief and joy, mourning and celebration are welcomed as part of the fullness of human experience.<sup>38</sup> This is especially significant for people, such as asylum-seekers, who are often primarily identified by characteristics of their flight and need for asylum.

Projekt DA-SEIN attempts to step outside of these dominant narratives and include all sides of the asylum-seeker's experience. The program recognizes the difficult situation of many asylum-seekers, but also that they are whole people with skills, talents, families, hopes, and dreams. During my time at Projekt DA-SEIN, I spoke with a person who had a computer science degree, a physicist, a beautician, a tailor, and many teachers, artists, and accomplished athletes. These parts of themselves, hidden in the broader community and within the asylum process, were witnessed and sometimes actualized at the program. At Projekt DA-SEIN asylum-seekers could show other parts of themselves, including professional and personal capacities, and be defined beyond the characteristics that also oppress them.

Hungerbühler describes this focus on seeing the whole person, beyond their most pressing needs: "I see you as you are. I see you as a person, as I am a person, with fears and suffering, with a history, perhaps with scars, but I also see your hope, your potential, and that you are created by God."<sup>39</sup> In contrast to narratives about good or bad asylum-seekers, Projekt DA-SEIN acknowledges that all people are complex and that there is power in being seen through the lens of one's greater humanity. From a theological aspect, Hungerbühler shares that being seen by God is one powerful way of being in relationship with the divine. "Another name for God is not only 'da-sein' but also 'El Roi,' God sees. Many people want to simply be seen and not simply be invisible."<sup>40</sup> Projekt DA-SEIN, by being a place designed for asylum-seekers, brings this focus and visibility to the lives of its participants.

The name of the program, DA-SEIN, also emphasizes "being there" over direct assistance or programs. As Hungerbühler explains, one meaning of DA-SEIN is taken from the biblical story in Exodus where Moses encounters God in the burning bush. Yet, the meaning of "being there" also provides non-religious meaning and motivation for the program. "[DA-SEIN] is the name of God, 'I am there,' or 'I am with you,' or 'I will be there,' as in the passage where God reveals himself in the bush to Moses. And on the other hand, in everyday language, it is simply, 'we are here, we want to be here for you and with you.'"<sup>41</sup> This commitment to "being there" creates convivial spaces to be with difficult experiences, even across differences in migration status. In a program report from 2018, a staff member describes an experience of being together with the uncertainty that asylum-seeking creates. The

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38 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier*.

39 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 27.

40 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 55.

41 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 134.

report describes when an asylum-seeker received a deportation notice. The staff member explains,

He came to us with the notice and cried, and we were aware that despite this great friendship and our closeness, we have two different fates, and we listened and encouraged him. And then we prayed together. That doesn't happen every day! But it was important! [...] There were maybe ten of us there and suddenly one of them started to tell about his flight. And then others told their stories of fleeing and suddenly it was a very open-hearted, empathetic space. That's why this experience didn't pull the floor out from under us. Instead, it was the opposite, it strengthened us to continue on.<sup>42</sup>

In this example the community was not able to change the outcome of the asylum decision directly. Yet, being in community, without being able to fix the situation, nonetheless generated connection, support, and empathy. This coming together in difficult circumstances reflects the dual context of Projekt DA-SEIN as providing both emotional and social connection. This social and spiritual support includes an acknowledgement of the spiritual needs of asylum-seekers. Religion plays a minor role at Projekt DA-SEIN. There is no evangelizing, and everyone is free to practice their faith and follow their own beliefs. Hungerbühler says, "Downstairs religiosity, in an explicit sense, does not play a role. Rather, downstairs, everything must be very free [...] that is very, very important to us, so it is not an issue. Downstairs people can feel at home with their religiosity and traditions."<sup>43</sup> Yet attention to asylum-seekers as "created by God" and as having equal worth as others informs the program. There is also an effort to cultivate reciprocity and openness by welcoming diverse religious practices while also offering Christian practices that may support asylum-seekers.

For example, there is a prayer book (*Gebetbuch*) that sits on top of the locker used by volunteers in the middle hallway of the program. There is a sign in front of it that reads: "Every Monday and Thursday at 12:00 we pray for you in the church. You are welcome to write your wishes, concerns, and prayers or simply your name or the names of your friends and family in this book. We take these concerns and prayers to the City Prayer and pray for them."<sup>44</sup> Volunteers are encouraged to use the prayer book as a resource with asylum-seekers when a difficult issue arises, though it is usually a passive presence. It was sometimes used one-on-one with asylum-seekers, and it was used in one instance during an Input Session when all attendees were gathered together. This Input Session addressed changes to E.U. and Swiss migration policies that occurred in April 2018 and directly impacted program participants. Specifically, these changes dictated how and when asylum applicants had to leave

42 Projekt DA-SEIN, *DA-SEIN Interview*.

43 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 25.

44 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 31.

Switzerland in the case of a negative decision on an asylum application. For asylum-seekers from Ethiopia and Afghanistan, the official government policy, in cases of a negative decision, changed from voluntary return to involuntary deportation. One asylum-seeker who was a frequent participant at Projekt DA-SEIN had been arrested the previous day and, it was feared, would soon be deported under these new agreements.<sup>45</sup> An Input Session was held, and these changes were explained, with the aid of flip charts and diagrams. At the end of this presentation, the program manager brought out the prayer book. She wrote the name of a Projekt DA-SEIN participant, who had been arrested under these new laws, in the book. She then asked everyone to take a moment to think of this man, wish him the best, and send him thoughts. Then she invited people to speak out loud what they would like to say to him and what they would like to wish for him. She wrote down the things people said out loud in the prayer book. Asylum-seekers and volunteers offered wishes for security amid the uncertainty and for perseverance, strength, peace, hope, health, and support; they also offered wishes that he would be able to live where he wants to live.<sup>46</sup> This relational action engaged all members of the Projekt DA-SEIN community in being together in the face of inhospitable migration policies. The opportunity to incorporate concrete ways of being together in difficulties is a unique aspect of Projekt DA-SEIN. Though little direct action could be taken in the face of these new laws, praying and being together acknowledged and witnessed their impact on the community.

This focus on presence, on "being there," and on convivial interactions straddles religious and non-religious understandings of the importance of being with people in their struggles without the objective to fix, teach, or direct. In this vein, Hungerbühler describes Projekt DA-SEIN as moving away from the hierarchal thinking of "we give you something." Instead, the intention is "we are here together, and we learn from one another." She goes on to say, "Of course we remain in a privileged situation, that is undisputed and cannot be discussed away."<sup>47</sup> Yet there is a focus not just on serving asylum-seekers' needs, but also on their active participation in and contribution to the program. In this way, conviviality seeks to move away from hierarchical structures where those with more privilege serve those with less privilege. This relational focus underpins Projekt DA-SEIN's approach to home: being together in the joy and grief, amid the political advantages and disadvantages. There is a goal of interdependence and of mutual support, even while acknowledging the discrepancies in structural access and legal and social standing.

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45 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 25, 2018: 20180425\_DA-SEIN\_Input\_v2\_PO.

46 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 25, 2018: 20180425\_DA-SEIN\_Input\_v2\_PO, Pos. 37.

47 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 19.

Hungerbühler describes her response to hearing about the difficult situations many people encounter, whether asylum-seekers or others. “I try to show that I have great empathy for these people. I cannot take away their sadness, but I can see and hear.” This presence with another person is a central activity of Projekt DA-SEIN and a primary way the program believes it can assist asylum-seekers. In presence, helping is defined by being connected to and in relationship with one another. Presence is an aspect of conviviality, where being together is intentional even if, at the same time, it is ordinary. This interdependence necessitates shared spaces, such as those created by the OKE. In this way, conviviality creates opportunities for interdependence, working together, relying on each other, and impacting one another.

At the same time, Projekt DA-SEIN acknowledges the limits of the program’s staff and volunteers in helping program participants. Instead, the leadership structure emphasizes showing up for people even while acknowledging that staff and volunteers often have little power to change peoples’ situations, whether physical, economic, emotional, or spiritual. As Hungerbühler explains, “You cannot help most people. You can assist or give advice or you can say to yourself, ‘Yes, ok, that was helping someone.’ But we are actually convinced that each person can only help themselves, you can only be like a midwife. But you can’t do anything in place of them doing it themselves.”<sup>48</sup> This outlook acknowledges the difficult and marginal situations of asylum-seekers while being frank about the structural challenges that exist. The program wants both to help asylum-seekers and refugees make a home in Switzerland and to acknowledge the complexity embedded in this desire to help. Hungerbühler explains this tension saying, “No, you cannot save anyone. They must take the step themselves. But you can maybe simply strengthen their trust in that path.”<sup>49</sup> Hungerbühler goes on to explain that supporting asylum-seekers in this way means being in contact with them and wading into the difficult waters they might face.<sup>50</sup> This focus on being together embraces showing up, not fixing. As Hungerbühler says, “We cannot change their situations, but we can be there and accompany them for a part of the journey.”<sup>51</sup> A theology of convivence focuses on accompaniment over concrete outcomes, partly due to the acknowledgement that changing

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48 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 51.

49 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 53.

50 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 53. Hungerbühler says: “I read this once: ‘The path reveals itself when you walk it, it is not already there.’ [...] There is a wonderful Jewish midrash about the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea. The people had to first go in the water, and then it rolled aside and was passable. [...] So, you have to get wet, and that means, in relation to DA-SEIN, to really be in contact with these people.”

51 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20180520\_Yodelmesse\_1EI\_II, Pos. 3.

systems is often out of the hands of either person. Yet, a singular focus on the individual can also obscure the larger systems at play in creating the need for asylum, and this limits the impact of convivence.

### 6.3 Helping at Projekt DA-SEIN

Projekt DA-SEIN is an outreach program designed to connect asylum-seekers with Swiss volunteers and the broader Basel community. The program hopes to help asylum-seekers establish a new home in Switzerland by offering spaces for them to gather, opportunities for them to access tools and resources, and assistance in meeting Swiss asylum and integration requirements. It also supports refugees and asylum-seekers by providing opportunities to meet other asylum-seekers and Swiss volunteers, to learn local customs and practices, to get assistance with job and school applications, and to become familiar with Basel, as well as to utilize the space of Projekt DA-SEIN for their own purposes, such as cooking, organizing events, playing games, and using equipment, for example, a sewing machine.

At a more substantive level, Projekt DA-SEIN seeks to help asylum-seekers who arrive in Basel to bridge the social, political, and economic barriers they encounter and to navigate the many practical aspects of applying for asylum. This helping, while not identified as the primary motivation of the program, remains a significant part of Projekt DA-SEIN. Helping is complex, as are its motivations and impacts. Sometimes helping at Projekt DA-SEIN focuses on the explicit goals related to meeting asylum requirements and integrating into Swiss society. Other times helping responds to a particular need presented by an individual or group of asylum-seekers, such as childcare needs, or answers specific questions about rules and expectations related to employment or housing. Projekt DA-SEIN is motivated by the church's theology of providing welcome and assistance to asylum-seekers, yet, at the same time, it is embedded in Swiss social and political systems. The structure of Projekt DA-SEIN reflects these political and social realities of Switzerland while at the same time it hopes to help asylum-seekers navigate the asylum requirements that these systems create.

#### 6.3.1 Customs and Practices

As a program located in Basel, Switzerland, Projekt DA-SEIN is shaped by local cultural practices, laws and systems, geographic features, language, and values. One of the ways the program cultivates a sense of home in Basel is by teaching Swiss cultural practices and values at the program, both directly and indirectly. These practices include meal practices, greetings, social expectations, and language. Cultural values are also taught at the program, including topics such as gender roles, fair-

ness, respect, and acceptance of difference. This teaching occurred both explicitly through Input Sessions and implicitly through expectations of how to be at the program. Many of these practices and values are embedded in everyday interactions and, in teaching them, the program hopes to help asylum-seekers adjust to life in Switzerland by becoming more familiar with Swiss life. Yet, these locally specific practices are also ways that normative systems are reinforced, often without reflection, in everyday practices.<sup>52</sup> Thus, this kind of helping can also reinforce hierarchies and discount knowledge and practices brought by asylum-seekers.

Rules at the program, both implicit and explicit, were usually implemented to cultivate welcome and build community. As described above, these practices are critical to cultivating the welcome that is central to the OKE and Projekt DA-SEIN. Yet these same practices can reinforce the social norms and cultural values of the context in which the program is located. Practices at Projekt DA-SEIN included greeting people who arrived with a verbal greeting and handshake, always wearing a name tag, and helping to clean up at the end of the day. In addition, chores were randomly assigned to groups of people before the daily meal ended and included doing the dishes, cleaning the bathroom, and sweeping or mopping the floors. During meal-times everyone was expected to sit at the tables, to not use cell phones, and to not leave the table until everyone was done with the meal. While these expectations facilitated convivial interactions, they were sometimes also enforced in ways that reflected more hierarchical relationships and reinforced Swiss social norms.

Staff reminded asylum-seekers to put on a name tag and asked volunteers to monitor and remind asylum-seekers to do this as well. Other rules, such as not using cell phones during dinner, were more consistently enforced. During one meal, a staff member reprimanded an asylum-seeker for getting up before the meal was finished. "Everyone has to stay at the table until the staff says so, it's for a good reason."<sup>53</sup> These interactions ranged from direct to casual reminders, sometimes interspersed with humor. At another meal an asylum-seeker was spotted using his phone under the table and the staff members on either side reminded him not to. They all laughed about it, saying he is monitored or watched from both sides.<sup>54</sup> While this was a casual comment, monitoring and being watched are often experiences closely linked to asylum-seeking and may have been experienced in more threatening ways in their country of origin or upon arriving in Switzerland.

In addition, rules were reviewed during volunteer meetings. At one meeting, systems for assigning kitchen tasks were reviewed as well as check-in procedures

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52 Bridge, "Pierre Bourdieu," 77.

53 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, June 21, 2018: 20180621\_DA-SEIN\_v2\_PO, Pos. 5–12.

54 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 13, 2018: 20180913\_DA-SEIN\_Museum\_v2\_PO, Pos. 18–19.

(for documenting who attended). At another meeting there was a long conversation about how to prevent games and game pieces from going missing. One idea from a volunteer was to have volunteers "check out" the game with an asylum-seeker.<sup>55</sup> Other culturally constructed concepts, such as time, punctuality, and follow-through revealed additional values at the program. During the daily program hours, these weren't often an issue, aside from daily chores and meal preparation, as people are free to drop in and leave as they like. Yet, for special events, such as attending a performance or exhibit, volunteers were often enlisted to encourage asylum-seekers to sign up and commit to attending events.<sup>56</sup> In addition, leaving for events such as a hike or a performance usually involved catching the correct tram on time or arriving in time for an event. These were times when staff specifically commented on the challenges of getting participants to be on time.<sup>57</sup>

Cultural practices and rules provide shape to the program and serve several functions. First, they give structure and common expectations to the program. By encouraging familiarity with names, an atmosphere of welcome is cultivated, and by setting common ground rules, the program creates reliable expectations for those who participate. Second, many of its practices and rules reflect the customs of the place where the program is located, namely Basel, Switzerland. Formal greetings with handshakes, eating meals in a group, and being on time are common practices in Switzerland. By modeling and teaching these practices, Projekt DA-SEIN also tries to help asylum-seekers learn about and adapt to the place where they find themselves.

### 6.3.1.1 Input Sessions

The sharing of local Swiss values also occurs during Input Sessions. These Input Sessions are organized by staff (and occasionally by volunteers or asylum-seekers, with the assistance of staff) and cover cultural, social, and religious topics. Sometimes the topics are related to current events, such as changes to migration laws or upcoming holidays and religious events. Input Sessions about political issues also offer opportunities for being with difficulties (see the example in section 6.2.1). Sometimes Input Sessions cover a social topic perceived as both important to know and different from perspectives asylum-seekers might bring, for example, relations between men and women or views on homosexuality. And sometimes they cover local religious holidays or practices. Because many religious holidays are also national holi-

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55 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 18, 2018: 20180918\_DA-SEIN\_Sitzung\_v1\_PO, Pos. 9.

56 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, May 30, 2018: 20180530\_DA-SEIN\_v2\_PO, Pos. 4.

57 I did not have issues with individuals not showing up for interviews or when we planned to meet.

days and schools and businesses are closed, these Input Sessions offer information about both the religious and social context of Switzerland.<sup>58</sup>

During my time at the program, Input Session topics included Easter, Ramadan, and other fasting holidays; Christmas and Pentecost; changes to migration laws; relations between men and women; homosexuality; and hygiene and health. These sessions were presented as informational and were not designed to tell people how to think. But they often modeled social expectations and values such as fairness, respect, and acceptance of difference. As Lorenz shared, there are tenets on which the program does not compromise, especially related to areas such as inclusion, equity, and gender identity.<sup>59</sup> In this case, navigating how to live and learn together erred on the side of teaching in order to protect rights viewed as critical by the church.

At another Input Session, focused on relationships between men and women, a staff member led the conversation and individuals in small groups were invited to reflect on cultural norms in their countries regarding how men and women interact. The Swiss cultural norms were also presented, setting up a contrast and compare model for the conversation. The Input Session ended with a strong emphasis on equal rights between genders as a value and right in Switzerland and one that had been fought for over the years. This was then extended to emphasize that anyone who is in Switzerland is subject to this gender equality, including women from asylum-seekers' countries of origin.<sup>60</sup> Several examples of how men at the program had not extended this right to women from their country of origin were described in order to emphasize that this value was expected at the program.

Yet, differences in values and backgrounds sometimes led to conflict. An asylum-seeker I spoke with expressed his frustration about a conversation he had with a volunteer who insisted that the burka should be outlawed in Switzerland.<sup>61</sup> And on my part, I had more than one conversation with asylum-seekers who voiced anti-Semitic views they had inherited from their countries of origin.<sup>62</sup> I was unabashed in my critique and insistence that anti-Semitism was illegitimate and unacceptable

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58 There are also Input Sessions about holidays from other religions and traditions, such as the Muslim celebrations of *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. These were presented by program participants, both refugees and volunteers, in conjunction with program staff. These Input Sessions depend on whether the refugees are interested in presenting parts of their traditions and cultures.

59 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EI\_DA-SEIN\_IN.

60 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 26, 2018: 20180726\_DA-SEIN\_Input\_v1\_PO, Pos. 59–71.

61 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 20, 2018: 20180920\_6AS\_DA-SEIN\_II, Pos. 7.

62 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 29, 2018: 20180929\_JUNG-SEIN\_v1\_PO, Pos. 9–11; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, November 15, 2018: 20180915\_14AS\_Rheinschwimm\_II, Pos. 11.

and built on a history of blaming Jews. Thus, learning and teaching sometimes appeared under the guise of paternalism, yet it can also be viewed as a shared responsibility to create livable societies and challenge destructive views.

At the same time, Projekt DA-SEIN does not always directly challenge external structures that impact asylum-seekers or explicitly work towards systemic change. When an undocumented asylum-seeker arrived who was unable to apply for asylum in Switzerland due to the Dublin accord, staff tried to find temporary housing for him but also understood their actions as a short-term solution. One staff member said, "We can't do anything about it, if he's out and gets caught, he is deported."<sup>63</sup> There is a desire to help asylum-seekers succeed in the asylum process, yet the very process is heavily stacked against asylum-seekers. While volunteers and church resources hope to help participants set up their lives in Switzerland, the ways to do this are inherently limited by the asylum system.

### 6.3.1.2 A Focus on Integration

There is a tension in the program between, on one hand, the goals of shared convivence and being with and, on the other hand, an emphasis on helping asylum-seekers integrate in Switzerland. As explored in Chapter 2, home can become identified with normative and rigid definitions of belonging that exclude diversity and alterity. Nation-states are particularly prone to creating singular definitions of home while excluding nuance and diversity. In Switzerland, national languages, geography, and the cultural imagination similarly define a Swiss vision of home. In significant ways, asylum-seekers are considered as being outside of Swiss definitions of home and belonging and as needing to adapt to Swiss values and perspectives.

In this way, the state's focus on integration places a high value on adopting Swiss viewpoints, customs, and values, as framed in the need to "be familiar with the Swiss way of life."<sup>64</sup> Familiarity with the "Swiss way of life" includes knowing the social customs, history, language, and norms that define Swiss society, all of which are things encouraged at Projekt DA-SEIN.<sup>65</sup> Integration is often viewed in a positive light, as providing avenues for asylum-seekers and other migrants to be more fully part of the local society and to take advantage of more opportunities. Yet, integration also

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63 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 18, 2018: 20180918\_DA-SEIN\_Sitzung\_v1\_PO, Pos. 5

64 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Bundesgesetz über die Ausländerinnen und Ausländer*, 142.20.

65 Antonius Liedhegener, "Religion, Bürgergesellschaft und Pluralismus. Gesellschaftliche und politische Integration aus der Perspektive demokratischer politischer Systeme," in *Integration durch Religion? Geschichtliche Befunde, gesellschaftliche Analysen, rechtliche Perspektiven*, ed. Edmund Arens et al., Religion – Wirtschaft – Politik (Pano-Verl., 2014), 63.

carries highly normative expectations that neither account for the diversity implicit in a society nor take consider what newcomers contribute to the shared space.<sup>66</sup>

These assumptions and expectations about integrating into Swiss society are often adopted by non-profit organizations. At Projekt DA-SEIN, a focus on helping asylum-seekers adapt is found in the original program description. In addition, volunteers and staff support asylum-seekers in learning about Swiss life both directly and indirectly by teaching about Swiss cultural values, instituting social expectations such as speaking German and wearing name tags, creating guidelines for participating in meals, and teaching the importance of understanding and adhering to values such as equal gender roles, fairness, respect, and acceptance of difference.

During my time at Projekt DA-SEIN, there was an emphasis on increasing the program's support for integration goals. These integration goals focus on several criteria, many of which are reflected in the federal government's citizenship requirements, including participation in local political, educational, and economic activities; not posing a security risk; and achieving adequate proficiency in the local language.<sup>67</sup> At a volunteer meeting, suggestions were made by volunteers and staff to include more topics related to integration, including focusing German conversations on topics in the integration manual, having a specific conversation topic each month, preparing Input Sessions related to integration (such as learning about parks in Basel, trash collection, and cultural topics), and focusing on both written German homework assignments and conversation practice.<sup>68</sup>

Staff members told me that integration goals did not conflict with other goals of the program, such as convivence and being together. On the contrary, they were seen as critical to helping asylum-seekers gain a foothold in Switzerland and achieve milestones such as finding an apartment, securing education opportunities, and gaining employment.<sup>69</sup> The desire to help asylum-seekers adapt to the Swiss culture informs many aspects of Projekt DA-SEIN, such as providing support in learning German, assisting with job and school applications, serving and preparing food, creating connections to legal aid non-profits and other support services, and organizing events and projects. Helping both bumps up against the convivial goals of Projekt DA-SEIN and is understood as a way of reaching these goals. Being together and showing up at the program often also meant teaching and helping asylum-seek-

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66 Mey and Strecken, "Integration von Ausländern."

67 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Bundesgesetz über die Ausländerinnen und Ausländer*, 142.20, 26.

68 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, May 22, 2018: 20180522\_Freiwilligensitzung\_DO, Pos. 27–33.

69 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, June 26, 2019: 20190626\_2EI\_II; 20190227\_3EI\_II.

ers in ways that are surprisingly similar to the requirements of integration (see further discussion in section 6.4).

This similarity reveals the overlap between the goals of convivence and goals of integration. They both hope to generate successful communities of co-existence with the other. They approach this goal differently in that convivence seeks to *recognize* difference while integration hopes to *reduce* difference. Yet, despite these contrasts, both systems operate by accepting and undergirding the civic and social orders. As David Congdon points out, while Sundermeier's "hermeneutic of difference" opens a space for encountering the other, it does not effectively acknowledge or work to change structural realities that reinforce systems of power.<sup>70</sup> By working to recognize the other within existing systems, the systems themselves often fall out of focus. At the program there was often little distinction between the goals of welcome and "being there," with an emphasis on convivial interactions, and a focus on supporting integration through learning German and other local practices. This blurring of motivations means that the ways Projekt DA-SEIN tacitly underscores the asylum system were sometimes obscured. Welcome, like hospitality, is consistently extended by those who have access and control of resources.

### 6.3.2 Volunteers and Helping

This blurring of welcome and integration was also reflected in the motivations of volunteers who participate at program. For volunteers and church staff, the reasons to help asylum-seekers were diverse but often focused on impacting individual lives by helping asylum-seekers adapt to life in Switzerland and navigate the requirements of the asylum system. Yet this desire, like Congdon argues above, does not always acknowledge larger structural realities. Instead, it operates inside of them. In addition, volunteers bring their own sense of what they can offer asylum-seekers and their own sense of home and belonging.

Some volunteers had a specific desire to give something to others in response to the privileges and opportunities they had been given. Others wanted to help asylum-seekers in Basel during a difficult period of transition. Some wanted to share familial aspects of home and to create deeper connections in the community. Others wanted to make an impact and help asylum-seekers with specific skills such as learning German or finding jobs. Others wanted an opportunity to have relevance in the world, to contribute, and to make a difference. One volunteer had been forced to retire early from work due to health challenges but still desired a place where she could share her gifts and make an impact.<sup>71</sup> Another volunteer, also retired, wanted a place to share his professional skills of career counseling. In addition, the staff at

70 Congdon, "Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics."

71 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 18, 2018: 20180718\_5FW\_II.

Projekt DA-SEIN had told him how delighted they were to have a male volunteer, when the majority of volunteers were female, as well as an older person, since many asylum-seekers were used to more intergenerational contexts.<sup>72</sup>

For many volunteers, being able to help was a primary motivation to volunteer at the program. Some volunteers wanted to create better circumstances for newly arrived asylum-seekers in order to share what they had received in their lives in Switzerland. In a 2018 volunteer survey, one respondent explained, “I have had such a good life. We are a very integrated Swiss family, original Swiss, and therefore, I particularly enjoy meeting these people and getting to know them and hearing from them.”<sup>73</sup> Helping and contributing can bring more fulfillment, even for those who are not retired or facing limited social access. Several younger volunteers also talked about how meaningful it was to participate in a program like Projekt DA-SEIN and be part of the lives of asylum-seekers.<sup>74</sup>

While a desire to help can easily reflect patterns of power and privilege, as well as othering impulses, helping and contributing are also related to meaningful work. Many volunteers connected with this aspect of work at Projekt DA-SEIN. The volunteer who had been forced to leave her professional life due to health challenges was still able to contribute to society and share her skills and experiences.<sup>75</sup> Lissa Malkki, in her book *The Need to Help*, explores the personal needs that are met for people who participate in humanitarian projects.<sup>76</sup> She found that those who engage in humanitarian outreach are people with diverse desires and needs who “sought to be part of something greater than themselves, to help, to be actors in the lively world.”<sup>77</sup> Making a contribution beyond the self is an important human endeavor. There are many needs that are met through altruism and service, including discovering oneself, generating feelings of making an impact, and connecting to people and causes that are bigger than oneself. These goals can have a positive personal impact in volunteers’ lives, such as finding greater meaning and building a sense of identity and belonging.

Several volunteers even expressed the ability to help and contribute at Projekt DA-SEIN as one way they experienced home at the program. It is not surprising that ideals of helping found resonance in a church setting, where service is tied to

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72 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 13, 2018: 20180913\_1FW\_IN, Pos. 136. This valuing of the contributions of elders is another way of creating alternative spaces at Projekt DA-SEIN that acknowledge wisdom, age, and diversity.

73 Projekt DA-SEIN, *DA-SEIN Interview*.

74 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 26, 2018: 20180926\_3FW\_IN; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, October 25, 2018: 20181025\_4FW\_IN.

75 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 18, 2018: 20180718\_5FW\_II, Pos. 5.

76 Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Duke University Press, 2015).

77 Malkki, *The Need to Help*, 7.

faithfulness to God. Christian theology implores followers to emulate the ways that Jesus attended to those in need and to look beyond themselves to a larger community. Some volunteers who had left the church found that participating in Projekt DA-SEIN reconnected them to their roots in the church. Contributing to the life of another person or to a larger community are often part of human meaning-making, socially and theologically.

Helping at Projekt DA-SEIN is often found in acts of showing up and being present in mundane ways, such as in games and sharing meals, as well as being present to the difficult realities of asylum-seeking, including the violence and injustices many have faced.<sup>78</sup> This focus on "being with" stands in contrast to some of the more overt motivations and actions designed to help asylum-seekers. I noticed that I also valued helping asylum-seekers and sharing my skills while volunteering at the program. One example was on a day I was asked to show someone how to operate the sewing machine. I spent the afternoon helping a woman make a traditional Eritrean house dress. She told me it was the kind of dress her mother made, but she had sewed them by hand. She spoke very little German, but we spent the afternoon collaborating on a project that was important to her, and became important to me.<sup>79</sup>

Yet acts of helping, especially across power differentials, can entrench the divide between those with access to resources and power and those without. Helping can become tied to paternalism and a focus on self-fulfillment over actions that make a real impact on the needs and lives of others. At Projekt DA-SEIN I noted at times paternalistic comments and behaviors. This became particularly obvious in situations of teaching or instruction. There were many teachable moments of telling asylum-seekers how things operate in Switzerland, sometimes concerning practical matters, such as punctuality and greeting practices. Other times teaching occurred in the areas of social mores and values, either formally at Input Sessions, such as about gender relations, or informally in conversations about practices in Switzerland, such as when discussing dating, social customs, and family practices (see the examples in section 6.3.1). Though these teachable moments are well-intentioned, they can act to maintain hierarchies and reinforce acceptable systems of knowledge.

As Russell argues in her in her book *Just Hospitality*, the goal of a hospitality grounded in justice is "to meet others as they are, not as objects of our charity, but persons in their own right, capable of making choices about their destiny. If we insist they dress as we do and follow the same manners, we are not exercising

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78 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EI\_IN, Pos. 239. Lorenz states: "Sometimes it's sad, but that's the way it is. To be there in the presence of sadness, of violence, of bad memories, that's it."

79 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 5, 2018: 20180405\_32AS\_II.

hospitality but ‘reforming’ others to match our expectations.”<sup>80</sup> At Projekt DA-SEIN, encouragement toward adapting Swiss ways of life often became enmeshed with hospitality in ways that echo Russell’s definition of “reforming.”<sup>81</sup> Though supporting asylum-seekers in adapting to life in Switzerland was motivated by the very real requirements of the asylum system, this focus also served to dilute hospitality into conforming, while the agency of asylum-seekers became secondary.

There were also comments about asylum-seeking that, while also well-intentioned, reinforced notions of who deserves to seek asylum or not. One volunteer lamented that an asylum-seeker’s application had been rejected, noting how diligently he had worked. “He is the kind of person we want,” she said.<sup>82</sup> Yet, qualifying for asylum is based not on personal characteristics, or even following local habits and practices, but on the need of a person to find a safe and livable place to build a life. This basic tenet of asylum was sometimes obscured by the pressure to fit into the Swiss community.

At the same time, some volunteers struggled with a sense of guilt for not being able to do more to help asylum-seekers or to be more available to volunteer at the program. The psychotherapist who led a supervision meeting encouraged volunteers to be present to people where they are and to also take care of their own needs when processing the difficult stories and situations they witnessed.<sup>83</sup> She also commented that confronting the powerlessness of asylum-seeking can reflect the lack of power in our own lives, which is often hidden from view (see more in section 9.2.3). For citizens of first-world countries, it is often unfamiliar to focus on this lack of agency and vulnerability and it can be uncomfortable to be confronted with it.<sup>84</sup> Vulnerability is a fact of all life (see the discussion in section 2.1.4), yet it is common to attempt to distance oneself from this reality. Volunteering at Projekt DA-SEIN brought one’s own vulnerability and dependency into view.<sup>85</sup>

The psychotherapist encouraged volunteers to recognize their powerlessness but also to step out of their role in the cycle of trauma. She presented a model called the “trauma triangle,” which identifies three roles that can reemerge in current relationships for those who have experienced trauma – victim, perpetrator, and savior. If volunteers continue to play the savior role, they can actually continue

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80 Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*, 81.

81 Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*, 81.

82 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, April 25, 2018: 20180425\_DA-SEIN\_Input\_v2\_PO, Pos. 68.

83 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, August 22, 2018: 20180822\_Supervision\_volunteer\_meeting\_v1\_PO, Pos. 18, 30–31.

84 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, August 22, 2018: 20180822\_Supervision\_volunteer\_meeting\_v1\_PO, Pos. 28.

85 This vulnerability and dependency are also conditions of creating home (see discussion in section 2.1.4).

the trauma cycle, instead of disrupting it. This reflects a pattern found in Western cultures: when entering new spaces Westerners can see themselves as the hosts, even in contexts where they are the newcomers. Taking on this assumed role of host can serve to perpetuate roles of dominance and impose an "organizing reality" on these spaces, superseding other ways of being (see more in 9.2.3).<sup>86</sup> In his book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, theologian Willie Jennings calls this tendency to take on the assumed role of host "inverted hospitality."<sup>87</sup> In the case of volunteers at Projekt DA-SEIN, automatically adopting the role of hosting and helping can serve to perpetuate a trauma cycle that maintains disempowering patterns in asylum-seekers' lives, instead of supporting their agency and autonomy.

### 6.3.3 Home and Safety

The desire to help is often related to another aspect of home that emerged in my conversations with volunteers and staff: the experience of safety and security and the desire to share this experience. Lorenz connected safety and security directly to his own understanding of home.

I don't think that we have a steady home here on earth. I was born in Germany and came here in 1989 and now I'm naturalized, I'm doing service in the Swiss Army. So "home" is where I share the same faith and the same values, that's home. And where I can rest and be safe; where I can give back what I brought with me.<sup>88</sup>

This sense of safety and security as home was reflected in his interactions with asylum-seekers. He mentioned that asylum-seekers have also thanked him for protecting them by protecting Switzerland, a place where they are safe. He relayed a conversation he had with an asylum-seeker who had served in the military in his country of origin and now thanked Lorenz for protecting Switzerland.<sup>89</sup> Lorenz reflects, "He thanks me for protecting the country where he is safe. That's home."<sup>90</sup> Here home is a shared experience of safety that is connected to a common place.

Another volunteer explained that his definition of home includes safety, and that this safety is connected to a specific place. "I think I would define home as, on one

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86 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2011), 58.

87 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 8.

88 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EI\_IN, Pos. 189.

89 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EI\_IN, Pos. 189.

90 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115\_1EI\_IN, Pos. 189.

hand, a feeling of safety and, on the other hand, also security.”<sup>91</sup> He went on to say: “Yes, home for me is a place where I feel safe, where I feel a certain security. That can be a closed space, like my grandparents’ house. But it can also be a mountain landscape where you have often hiked, or a lake where you regularly swim, for example. For me, that is home.”<sup>92</sup> Another volunteer mentioned physical security and comfort as hallmarks of home that they realized were not universally shared. “Home [...] is strongly connected with a feeling, which is also about eating, drinking, and other things that are critical. Things like having an apartment, everything that I take for granted, but I am made aware here that these things cannot be take for granted.”<sup>93</sup> These practical aspects of home were noted by this volunteer as missing from the lives of many asylum-seekers, who often did not have access, for example, to long-term housing or employment. This definition of home as safety echoes Hungerbühler’s understanding of home at Projekt DA-SEIN, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: “We define home as a place where you are welcome, where you feel understood, where you feel safe, where you are valued and loved, where you can open up.”<sup>94</sup> This security was often elusive for asylum-seekers, who have limited ability to influence asylum decisions or to help the families they left behind.

Yet, the connection between home and security can also reinforce barriers that designate who do or does not belong. The security of home often protects group identity and is defended by building borders, both physical and symbolic, as well as by arming armies, reinforcing ethnic and racial categories, and policing language and behaviors. This side of safety often comes at the expense of the safety and security of others. In the case of asylum-seeking, perceived safety is often defended from outsiders, including newcomers such as asylum-seekers. This tendency is often heightened when migrants arrive from countries with fewer economic resources.

### 6.3.4 Learning German at Projekt DA-SEIN

Another specific way Projekt DA-SEIN helps asylum-seekers is by supporting them in learning German. At a practical level, Projekt DA-SEIN puts a high value on learning German, and one of the most frequent activities at the program is doing German homework. Most often volunteers would help asylum-seekers with German homework, but asylum-seekers would also help each other, or work in groups.

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91 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 26, 2018: 20180926\_3FW\_IN, Pos. 56.

92 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 26, 2018: 20180926\_3FW\_IN, Pos. 55.

93 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 20, 2018: 20180920\_2FW\_IN, Pos. 193.

94 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116\_2EI\_IN, Pos. 67.

Learning German is critical for meeting Swiss integration requirements as well as for accessing schooling, work, and housing. The Swiss government emphasizes the importance of learning German for integration, and meeting this requirement was a strong focus for Projekt DA-SEIN. Finding German courses, completing homework, moving through the course levels, and passing exams occupied significant space and time at the program. The need to learn German in order to succeed in Switzerland (both by meeting integration requirements as well as by accessing schooling, housing, and work) was embraced by most people at the program, including volunteers, staff, and asylum-seekers.<sup>95</sup> Most asylum-seekers received at least one language class, and doing German homework and practicing speaking German was a focus of many afternoons at the program. Most often volunteers would help asylum-seekers with German homework, but asylum-seekers would also help each other, or work in groups.

I did not encounter ambivalence on the part of Projekt DA-SEIN leadership or volunteers on the centrality of learning German for new asylum-seekers. In fact, the requirement to speak Standard German was one of the few rules at the program.<sup>96</sup> Staff would remind groups to speak Standard German, and this point was reinforced at monthly volunteer meetings. This desire to support asylum-seekers in learning German emerged in other contexts, such as Input Sessions, where the interactions also included encouraging asylum-seekers to practice writing and speaking. This emphasis reflects an understanding of German proficiency as necessary for integrating into Swiss society.<sup>97</sup> Of course, the requirement to speak Standard German served a practical purpose as well. It is the most common language spoken among program participants, whether asylum-seekers, volunteers with varying language abilities, or local staff, and having a standard language fostered inclu-

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95 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, November 3, 2018: 20181103\_Herbstfest\_v2\_PO, Pos. 30. One volunteer, who was especially committed to German instruction, founded a small non-profit, raised money, and purchased a van. *Sprachmobil* offers a mobile German learning and meeting space for refugees around northwest Switzerland. The volunteer takes the mobile learning station to asylum homes, and to other places where refugees gather, and teaches German.

96 While the local language is Swiss German, most official business in Switzerland is conducted in Standard German, and refugees and asylum-seekers are required to learn and are taught Standard German.

97 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, July 26, 2018: 20180726\_DA-SEIN\_Input\_v1\_PO, Pos. 77–96. During an Input Session, when groups were asked to contribute answers to a question, a staff member repeatedly encouraged one of the participants to write the answers, to practice their writing, though the asylum-seeker was hesitant. In response, the staff member emphasized the importance of taking advantage of opportunities to learn and practice German. "You have to see it as practice. I can already write. You need to take advantage of everything possible here. Whenever you can, practice writing, talking, reading."

sivity and helped to prevent the group from dividing up based on languages spoken and country of origin. At the same time, other languages were spoken at the program, and not only by asylum-seekers speaking their first language. Volunteers might speak Swiss German among themselves, and English was sometimes spoken both by volunteers and asylum-seekers as another shared language.

In many ways, learning German reflects the high value many volunteers place on the need for security. If asylum-seekers learn German, the thinking goes, they have more opportunities to pursue education and employment and succeed at integration. This focus on German takes succeeding in the system as the highest goal, privileging it over other ways convivial interactions might unfold. These might include recognizing ways asylum-seekers show up at the program beyond their progress towards meeting milestones set by the Swiss government. While the fullness of asylum-seekers is embraced more readily at Projekt DA-SEIN, a focus on integration can still dominate interactions with asylum-seekers.

For example, sometimes the best way to help an asylum-seeker was not language learning, but the presence cultivated by the program. One day I interacted with an asylum-seeker at the program who had already applied for asylum in another European country. He was unable to apply for asylum in Switzerland, to take advantage of government programs for asylum-seekers, or even to stay in Switzerland. He spoke very little German, but he did speak English, and I spoke with him at length on one of his first days.<sup>98</sup> At the time he was sleeping on the streets and expressed despair at his situation and the inability to create a new life in Europe. Being present to his story and pain, even in English, was a way to help him, and one that potentially exceeded the benefits of offering a lesson in German or helping him access educational resources. At a volunteer meeting I mentioned my conversation with this asylum-seeker and that we had spoken English. A staff member said, “No, Standard German is what everyone must speak. That is a ground rule.”<sup>99</sup> Despite the well-intentioned focus of this rule, it was misplaced in this context. Instead, the presence cultivated by the program was a more important avenue to supporting this asylum-seeker, as it was with others.

## 6.4 Possibilities and Limitations of a Relational Home

The asylum system, and the many political and social dynamics that cause people to flee, create the need for programs such as Projekt DA-SEIN. Projekt DA-SEIN offers welcome to all members of the Basel community and creates a space for convivial

98 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 6, 2018: 20180906\_15AS\_II.

99 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, September 18, 2018: 20180918\_DA-SEIN\_Sitzung\_v1\_PO, Pos. 5.

interactions – telling stories, learning together, sharing meals, and building community. The OKE recognizes that asylum-seekers have endured loss, trauma, and threats to life during their flight and that they arrive far from their families, homes, and communities. Projekt DA-SEIN hopes to counteract the lack of local connections many asylum-seekers experience by extending welcome and opportunities to “be there” together. Yet, this welcome is extended in a particular context and with particular social and theological underpinnings. Theologies of conviviality and ambivalence operate alongside local Swiss customs and values.

Convivial interactions at Projekt DA-SEIN and “being there” cultivate relationships between asylum-seekers and volunteers that deepen connections and build social networks and support systems. This relationality is a characteristic of the “piece of home” Projekt DA-SEIN offers (see section 7.4 for more on relationships and home). The social character of places, especially important places such as home, reinforces the central role of relationships in definitions of home. At Projekt DA-SEIN, being present in grief, acknowledging ambivalence, and embracing mutuality provides a “piece of home” to asylum-seekers that is relational, even amid the limits of the asylum system. At the same time, systems of asylum can shift the focus of these interactions to learning and meeting requirements and, in doing so, structure relationships in ways that reinforce hierarchies between haves and have-nots. One example of the complexity of this interplay is seen in the tension between welcoming and helping. This tension, especially when not acknowledged, can blur the motivations and goals of the program.

While political, economic, and social systems that operate in asylum-seeking are deeply entrenched, failing to acknowledge these can reinforce hierarchies even amid practices of welcome and hospitality. At Projekt DA-SEIN, a theology of convivence focuses on extending welcome rather than on achieving concrete outcomes, partly due to the acknowledgement that changing the system is often out of the hands of either the asylum-seeker or the volunteer. Yet, this acknowledgement of limited agency can also forestall Congdon’s “emancipatory hermeneutics.”<sup>100</sup> This hermeneutic engages in the struggle for liberation with the other, including working to change structural realities that reinforce systems of power. At Projekt DA-SEIN, this struggle could include exposing how integration is a coded endorsement of Swiss ways of being that exclude alternate frameworks.<sup>101</sup>

This “emancipatory hermeneutic” is another angle on Russell’s “just hospitality,” which hopes to cultivate and deepen convivial community by acknowledging the potential misuse of hospitality and welcome.<sup>102</sup> Welcome, within this hermeneutic, becomes more than one-sided hospitality; it is also a commitment to collaboration and

100 Congdon, “Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics.”

101 Congdon, “Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics.”

102 Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*, 121.

interdependence with asylum-seekers. As Russell reminds us, welcome is a two-way street that demands solidarity and partnership.<sup>103</sup> This solidarity demands risk and vulnerability on behalf all people involved, otherwise welcome reverts to one-sided comfort and charity.

Like the psychotherapist suggested at the supervision meeting (see section 6.3.2), helping is a response to the real risk and vulnerability that are part of each person's life, but that can remain hidden in more affluent countries and communities. Building relationships and welcoming those more visibly impacted by life's uncertainties exposes hidden vulnerabilities. In this way, feminist scholars argue, the trope of home as circumscribed and safe is problematic, especially given the violence that sometimes occurs in spaces of home.<sup>104</sup> Instead, a more relational understanding of home centers mutuality, risk, and connection. "[W]e need also to move beyond the dichotomy of home/not home, of safety and risk, to imagine an alternative: I want to argue for an ideal of home as a site of the risk of connection, of sustaining relationship through conflict."<sup>105</sup> A focus on security can obscure the real risk in relationship, in welcome, and in hospitality. At Projekt DA-SEIN, the groundwork for this connection has been laid, even if it operates within systems that further entrench the divides that make the program necessary. Relationality at Projekt DA-SEIN, that is centered in welcome and convivence, provides a foundation for further work toward justice and hope for asylum-seekers. In the next chapter, I further explore the connections and complications of home by focusing on places and relationships within definitions of home, particularly as these are revealed in the lives of asylum-seekers.

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103 Russell, Clarkson, and Ott, *Just Hospitality*, 121.

104 Weir, "Home and Identity."

105 Weir, "Home and Identity," 8.