

Annual Report 2018

'What we need are people who have skills that computers don't have... social-emotional skills.'

*Esther Wojcicki, *1941*

There was a report in one of our leading newspapers a couple of weeks ago, stating that nowadays fewer and fewer students were choosing humanities for their studies, in favor of economics and technical subjects. But, especially in today's world, we need people who have studied history, languages, philosophy, sociology: studies that enable them to critically assess ideas, to counter arguments, to unmask fake news, and to expose dogmas and ideologies.

We AFSers strive to become true Global Citizens who are able to analyze our changing and often confusing world through an interdisciplinary lens. We are with C. JoyBell C, the oft-quoted female thinker and author, who urges: *'Open your mind to the world and the many different ways that can be found in it, before making hasty judgments of others.'*

It encourages me in my work for AFS to know that we aim at being open-minded ourselves and at enabling our participants and volunteers to acquire intercultural expertise, aspiring to a more just and peaceful world.

Board Priorities 2018

There is no way around stating it bluntly: Last year was a tough one, with challenges for both Board and staff. But I'm relieved to say that the outlook for this year is already promising; it appears that our efforts to achieve more stability will finally take effect in 2019.

The Board had identified four main focus areas for our strategic priorities for 2018:

- **Stability** in finances and staff
- **Volunteering:** To be a more volunteer-driven organization again
- **ICL*:** - Increase the number of volunteers with either Level W* or a GCC*
- Work out and implement an education concept for volunteers
- **Growth with Quality:** Increase the Sending School Programs* and sentio*, by more effective traditional and online marketing

Stability

We have only partly achieved the first focus, mainly because participant numbers in the Sending dropped, or, in the case of sentio, didn't increase as expected, which had a negative impact on our income (for more details, please consult the Financial Report 2018).

Thanks to a big effort by the staff and some volunteers, we were able to increase the hosting numbers, though. Nevertheless, the Board felt compelled to react, in order to pursue our goal to gradually reach a balanced budget by 2019. Some of the measures taken meant a reduction in staff, because the lower participant numbers didn't allow us to maintain a higher staff ratio.

Thanks to the Staff

I would like to express our great thanks to the remaining staff members for their outstanding loyalty; for the flexibility of some of them to reduce their workload, or for their willingness to take on tasks from others. Our staff works hard, and often in the evenings or on weekends, especially when dealing with parents or volunteers. Those who work in Support* have to have good nerves, a lot of patience and excellent social skills. Working with and relying on volunteers requires a different approach, coupled with patience, empathy and perseverance. We recognize and appreciate this and feel fortunate to have such dedicated people at the office. Thank you!

Volunteering

Our expressed goal to become more volunteer-driven still has a way to go; it's a slower process than anticipated. We would have liked to involve the volunteers in the host family search already in 2018, because finding host families is still a major challenge in AFS Switzerland. This year, we have started to work with some chapters and volunteers, preparing them to engage in host family search and participant recruitment. It is obvious that these recruitments are easier to achieve in the chapters, where the hosted students go to school and the families of our participants live; a centralized handling by the office is a lot more resource-consuming and inefficient. We are confident that our volunteers will see the logic of this and will actively help AFS Switzerland to exchange as many young people as possible, thus working towards our mission!

We have also started to recognize the potential of our host families. Host families, especially if they have hosted several times, are experts of intercultural learning; they are as much AFSers as our returnees*! Accordingly, we consider them to be part of the chapters and are encouraging host siblings and host parents to engage in volunteering.

Our investments into the volunteer development are showing results. Here are a few highlights:

- A new handbook for chapter chairpersons is ready: 'Tips & Tricks for Chapter Chairs'. It will be introduced to the chapter chairpersons at the chairpersons' meeting before the GA.
- There is an excellent, self-explanatory induction video for PCPs* available now, created by volunteers. And guidelines for FCPs* and PCPs for all their functions.
- Workplace has been introduced as the new intranet for the volunteers and a majority is already using it in various applications.
- Volunteers have successfully initiated two crowdfunding: One for the production of a new AFS sweater, where the participants were also included in the choosing of design and color of the sweater. The second crowdfunding managed to pay for the studio production of a modernized version of the well-loved AFS song "Walk Together, Talk Together", initiated and executed by two volunteers and an ad-hoc choir of AFSers. We hope that the song will be ready for the GA.



ICL

- We have adapted the standardized workshop Level W to the needs of AFS Switzerland. A complete set of slides and flipchart templates are ready for use, and the first pilot workshops were successful.
- We have started to conduct a Level W workshop with all the returnees attending the Reorientation* camps. So far, we've been able to train 125 individuals.
- The section concerning ICL in the handbook for camp leaders has been revised, up-dated and extended. Volunteers will also find links to further literature about ICL and related topics.
- Our new training concept consists of several tiers, the first one being a basic training for all, with structural themes and including ICL content. The implementation of the new basic training has taken place during the two major volunteer training weekends in 2018. A multi-tiered qualification system and further trainings will be introduced.

Growth with Quality

I have already discussed the part of this strategic priority in the stability paragraph, which deals with the participant numbers. Although we didn't reach the numbers for the aspired growth, we have invested into marketing again – and hope to see a return of investment by the end of 2019.

2018 Highlights

- As we have already reported in an ACROSS article, our key volunteer Lisa Marti has won the prestigious **AFS International Galatti Award** for her outstanding commitment as a volunteer for us and to the mission and goals of AFS. She has proven to be an exemplary Global Citizen*, especially with her founding and engaging in voCHabular. Congratulations to Lisa!
- **Program diversity:** Although we at AFS Switzerland have been focusing on Year or Semester School programs in Sending and Hosting, we still offer sentio programs to young adults, and we continue our efforts of various kinds of collaborations with businesses. We are also diverse in the countries we exchange with: in 2018, we sent students to 38, and hosted from 41 countries; two departure times in late summer or February. The demand for 'school languages', especially English, is higher than in former decades; the ratio of traditional English speaking placements is at about 50%.
- In a highly competitive market environment, we have to come up with new ways of reaching out to potential costumers. The informal **info sessions for prospective sending students** and their parents at the office (twice monthly) are a success and are now institutionalized.
- Our **online visibility** is enhanced due to a more appealing, modernized homepage (in effect since 2017), and the efforts of one of our Board members who helped to improve our web presence with an optimization in regard of search engines.

We are also expanding our **online activities**, e.g. with a new content-concept for social media; Snapchat; Instagram and WhatsApp; the volunteers are interlinked and communicate via Workplace.

- **Open Your Mind Campaign:** The short video by volunteer David Nguyen, who visualized this AFS slogan in a creative way was propagated via Instagram, Instagram Story and Facebook and reached more than 40'000 people. We are happy that David is working on a new video concerning Hosting, again with a low budget and hopefully a high impact. Thank you, David!
- We are very grateful to the **Mercator Foundation** for funding a (partly outsourced) **Marketing Campaign** with the generous amount of CHF 250'000 distributed over a period of three years. The targets are apprentices, their employers and parents, with the goal to sensitize and recruit apprentices for an AFS exchange year.
- A highlight on the international level: The **first Global Conference** took place in Budapest in September, along with our traditional Network Meeting for Partner Directors and Chairs. The Global Conference was titled: *Global Competence: Our Future, our Responsibility* and was open to

organizations with similar goals, but also to the interested public. It was inspiring to listen to committed speakers, interesting panel discussions and great questions from the audience; it was enriching to participate in workshops with like-minded people, but from different organizations.

- A second international highlight from the Swiss perspective is that our Partner Director* **Luc Estapé has been elected as PDR***: a group of six partner directors elected by the partners in a consulting function to the highest strategic decision making body, the International **Board of Trustees***. Congratulations to Luc, and thanks for your dedication and time investment!
- In spite of many staff changes and internal reallocations of job functions, we hear from the respective directors that the **team spirit and the working competence** in both the Sending and the Hosting teams are good.
- The Board had decided to hold our annual **Board Retreat at the office** instead of a conference hotel, in order to contribute to **saving expenses**. Although the surroundings are less comfortable and relaxing, and the time for team building is more limited, we managed to work well and have opted to repeat it this year.
- Last, but not least, the **General Assembly 2018** went smoothly. Thank you to the Chapter Zürich who organized the events around it with an interesting guided tour through the neighborhood by Myrta and an excellent dinner. The ensuing **Spring Party** in an adjacent bar was favored by a mild evening; so the GA event was a success all around.



Thank you for your interest and your support! Together, we will make a difference!

Suzanne Weigelt, Niederhasli, March 2019

* These terms are explained in the attached Glossary

If you have questions regarding this annual report, do not hesitate to contact Suzanne Weigelt, Chair of the Board (suzanne.weigelt@afs.ch) or Partner Director Luc Estapé (044 218 1919; luc.estape@afs.ch)

Glossary

*in the order of appearance; the expressions are marked with **

- **ICL** is the abbreviation of intercultural learning.
- **Level W** is a standardized ICL workshop designed by AFS International. It gives some basic knowledge about ICL and aims to build common ground on that subject for all AFSers
- **GCC** (Global Competence Certificate): a licensed certificate developed by sentio for their students.
- **School Programs** are our traditional exchange programs. The participant (15-18yrs old) stays in a host family and attends a local high school.
- **sentio**: Name for 18+ programs, formerly called Itero. Sentio is a subsidiary of AFS International with its own governance.
- **Support**: Office support team, as 'trouble shooters' and counsellors for parents (mostly in Sending) and exchange students (mostly in Hosting); they have to do all negotiations between concerned parties (partner offices, doctors, insurance, lawyers etc.) when a problem arises.
- **Returnees** are former participants; more or less newly returned. Afterwards, we call them Alumni.
- **PCPs** (Participant Contact Persons) are volunteers who support exchange students. Usually, they contact the student personally once a month; if need be they meet more frequently.
- **FCPs** (Family Contact Persons) are volunteers who support host families. Usually, they contact the family personally once a month; if need be they meet more frequently.
- **Reorientation Camp**: Before they leave, all our participants must attend an Orientation Camp, where they are prepared and trained to cope with cultural situations they may encounter in their host countries. After their stay, we invite them to attend our Reorientation camp, where we help them to mentally 'arrive back home'; they can reflect on their experience, exchange with others, and we can engage them to become volunteers.
- **Global Citizen**: To enable young people to become global citizens is our highest goal. Global citizens are equipped with intercultural competence, and go further: they engage in intercultural activities in their community, e.g. start or join humanitarian or environmental projects, and generally live according to the values of AFS.
- **Partner Director** (PD): Executive Director of an AFS Partner.
- **PDR**: Partner Director Representative: Represents the partners and is elected by them, as advisory board to the BoT.
- **BoT** (Board of Trustees) is the Board of AFS International and takes the strategic decisions on the worldwide level of AFS.
- **AFS International** (INT): The international administration in New York which coordinates and develops the network of all AFS partners, supervises and evaluates the quality of our programs and provides services to the partners. They are largely financed by the partner organizations. The President and CEO reports to the BoT.