



*Helping Others  
To Help Themselves*

## **Being a Teaching Volunteer**

### **My expectations**

I went to Nepal not sure what to expect. I knew I wanted to experience something totally different from the normal humdrum of work and study. I wanted a challenge. Something different to a holiday, partying around Europe, from sitting on beaches in Thailand. I wanted the real deal, to change my perspectives and get a reality check.

### **The challenges**

I saw a very important sign when arriving at Tribhuvan Airport, which said something on the lines of 'If you're here to do something, relax and adopt Nepali timing, no rush'

You must realize that you are not going to walk away having taught the kids perfect and complete English and life skills. If they take 10 things away from your stay, then that is success. The key is to focus in on little areas of knowledge and do them in detail.

For example in English classes, I focused on capitals. In the Nepali language there is no such thing as capitals so it was a very hard concept for the children to get their heads around. In social, we looked at countries and figured out capital cities and geography skills including reading maps and looking up things in indexes.

In terms of community development, we focused on basic need, mainly on smokeless stoves, soakpits and teeth hygiene. There are a million things that you could see might be different from your normal community, but remember you are not a super hero, and this is not a Hollywood movie - you are not going to be able to 'fix' everything in the space of a few short weeks.

Don't expect to be laughing and having a jolly old time every day. It is challenging and to be really putting in significant differences and teaching well, you will be working hard and long hours. But the reward is well worth the effort, namely the dal bhaat and delicious chiyya on arrival home – who would have thought a cup of tea would be so damn good.

I suggest taking a book or a laptop/ipad and putting a comedy series on it. Every night, considering bed time is so early, I would watch an episode or two of Community. It provided some light comedic relief – seeing as the Nepali people in the village know only basic English, making them telling jokes a stretch – it can take your mind off the job at hand and give a nice reminder of home.

### **The triumphs**

On my first day, in a computer class, I asked the students to write an introduction piece about themselves. I asked them to write their name, how many people were in their family,



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the names of their family members, the name of their school and their class level and what animals they had.

The first time, the writing was littered with mistakes, there was not a capital in sight and took each child at least half an hour to write. On my second last day, after 5 weeks of learning about capitals and me constantly ringing out across the class 'CAPITALSSSSS!', I got the children to re-do the activity. Sure there was still the same mistakes, but the number and frequency was markedly reduced. Perfection is not what a teaching placement is about, I would say that improvement and progress are what you want to see and look for.

Before we started the Hygiene Report, the kids only brushed their teeth once or twice a week – they didn't realize that it was a daily job. After I brought a heap of toothbrushes and toothpaste and instructed the kids on how to actually brush their teeth, we could see a marked difference in the cleanliness of their teeth. The real satisfaction came when we were carrying out household visits after this, and the parents would excitedly tell us that their children were now brushing their teeth morning and night, and they are so relieved and happy now.

Flexibility is key – the worksheets given are talking about 'skiing holidays in Austria' or 'We drove our car out of the garage to take Amelia to singing lessons'. It makes it that much harder for you to try and teach anything to do with grammar or spelling, when the students are struggling on the initial concepts of the statement. Make it within their context and their understanding will be increased i.e. 'We left Bhimpokhara to go on a family holiday to Pokhara for the street festival' or 'My brother is in India to go to university'. This comes with another trap of limiting their knowledge base and not opening their horizons, but for new, challenging concepts it is much easier understood by keeping the environment you are talking about local and familiar. If an activity is going all wrong, don't be scared to change it up, take a different direction and adapt it to what will work – worksheets are but a guide – the real improvements can come when the activity evolves itself

### **What I got from it**

A sense of achievement and fulfillment, a great story, and a greater sense of independence and adventure. I think when you are pushed out of your comfort zone of comfy couches, TV, internet and lattes at cafes, you grow as a person and realize there is more to it. You go back to basics and get the best kind of reality check, especially about needs versus wants.

### **What I think the kids and the school/teachers got from it.**

I think the children get a re-motivation in school. It breaks up their hum drum day to day life and when someone comes over who is keen to get them doing things in the classroom – any kind of activity – I think makes the kids realize that what they do in the classroom is actually important, if we are putting an emphasis on it and are working to help them in that domain.

The teachers can see different ways to do things and evolve their practice to more updated and current ways. I think they also up their level of commitment, because they want to



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'impress' you in the classroom. Hopefully it also reinspires them to take classes more promptly and give a lot of effort.

### **The overall experience**

The overall experience was so much more than I expected. To be so fully immersed in another culture was such an interesting and unforgettable experience. Everyone is always wanting to help you, because they can see the positive change and good practices that volunteers can instill on the community. Taking the leap and venturing out to rural Bhimpokhara was a great choice – it is here that you could see the real Nepal, how the majority of the population lives. Volunteering in Nepal changed my life and has inspired me to head my study path at uni in the way of development and human rights. I can honestly say I had the time of my life in Nepal – can I go back now?

**Gabi McMullen, AUS (19)**  
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