

Kitty Hardman – Volunteer Report

Hygiene project

The hygiene project is managed and run by the Gorkha Women's Association (GWA). The programme is 12 lessons long; each lesson covers a separate topic and there is an exam at the beginning and end of the course to see if the children have progressed and understood the key concepts. Before we began running the programme we held a meeting with all members of the GWA to discuss the course content and whether there was need to update to the existing course. The 12 lessons seem to provide a sound introduction to health and hygiene within the community and on a personal level. Lessons covered: basic sanitation, . I loved the delivery of the course. It was hands on, practical and engaging. For example, in the lesson on hand hygiene they first learnt about its importance, then the technique for correct hand washing and we then went outside and all washed our hands-practicing our new learnt skills. Another lesson on ___used flash cards. Children had to find their matching pair for each hygiene issue, for example there was a picture of a child going to the toilet in an open field, it's pair was the picture of a toilet. Children were also given nail clippers and bars of soap so they were able to keep up these practices and hopefully take the message home to their families.

I was really impressed by all the women's enthusiasm for the programme, in particular Sarita, Kalpana and Lila. I think it's a great programme and really does make a difference to the education of young kids, providing knowledge about a topic which is otherwise quite neglected by the school curriculum. I would like to see follow up lessons to make sure the children are continuing to practice the things they have learnt, this could be endorsed by the GWA or the schools own teachers. Additionally I would like to see more women from the GWA being taught how to run the programme because I think it is only Sarita and Kalpana who are able to lead lessons.

(I would also be interested in a separate programme or lesson specifically into women's hygiene and health. They seem to have their own traditionally practices and views on menstruation but it may be interesting and beneficial to have an open discussion about this.)

What it was like as a volunteer

I spent an incredible but all too brief 2 weeks in Gorkha. I volunteered for the first week at Balmandir School. The kids were amazing; so enthusiastic, so friendly and seemingly so excited about having me in their lesson. I couldn't help grinning every time they chanted "Good morning Kitty Miss. How are you?!"

I found I was most help in the English, I.T and P.E lessons but sat in on several other classes just to get an overall feeling of the school. It was very humbling to see a class of 30 split and huddled around 2 laptops, I thought how different I.T lessons were in England; each having use of a computer, printer and scanners at the ready if need be. P.E was great fun; we went out to the playground and I was asked to teach them a game, well I thought it only fitting to play British Bulldog! They loved it!

Because of exams at Balmandir my second week was split between a placement in the hospital and running a hygiene programme at Prithi Naryan School. The hygiene programme was great fun as I was able to meet and work alongside women from the Gorkha Women's Association, (GWA) as they organize and run the programme. I loved the way they delivered the lessons, so hands on and engaging; the children responded so well: eagerly reaching for the soap and carrying out the 6 steps of hand washing in the hand hygiene class; spreading their hands and bearing their teeth when doing teeth and nail checks; racing around the room to find their matching pair when we gave out paired cards on personal, environmental and home hygiene scenarios. It was awesome! ..and great to feel a little of my medical knowledge coming into use.

Without a doubt one of the best and most special parts of the experience was staying with Sarita and her wonderful family and getting to experience the Nepali and Hindu culture. I felt so incredibly lucky and humbled by the love and care I was shown. The Teej festival was fantastic. To be honest, in the beginning I felt like a bit of lemon, not understanding a word of the language, not having any idea how to conduct myself and periodically tripping over the beautiful red trail of the sari I had kindly been lent! But these feelings lasted moments as my hand was taken time and time again to join in the dancing and celebrations. All the women kept on asking if I was okay and by the end I too felt like I was part of this close knit of friends.

I loved my time in Gorkha but it was just that tiny bit too short! If I were to go again I think I would stay a minimum of 3 weeks, as Laxman (headmaster at a Mahindra Joyti Gorkha school) said: "when you stay 2 weeks you spend the first week settling in and getting to know everyone and the second week nostalgic about the first week and preparing for the sadness of leaving!" And it certainly felt a little like that but my Nepali foundations are laid now and I can't wait to return! Other advice I would give is to have a real think about what you want to offer as a volunteer when you go out there. When I arrived at the school one of the first questions I was asked was "so what are you going to do for us." This made me really reflect on my own purpose and the general purpose of western volunteers. I think at the core in just being there you achieve a culture and linguistic exchange which is beneficial to both volunteer and local community but I think to really feel purposeful and integrated it takes a longer time of sustained effort and care; I guess this is why I so wish I had had longer! I found though I really got stuck into the teaching; lesson plans made such a difference in getting the most out of the time and the children just loved it when they're were rewarded-stickers work wonderfully! I also made a bit of a pact with myself to say yes to every opportunity and invite, this defiantly worked out in my favour, I met so many wonderful people, was invited to so many wonderful meals and played so many games with all the kids but I would say sometimes be prepared to say no, just so you can give yourself some headspace and time for reflection. I would just like to end by saying thank you to the charity for giving me this fantastic opportunity and for putting me in touch with such a unique and caring community, from whom I have learnt so much.