

Name: Aurelia Haas (via Volunta)

Country: Germany

Volunteering period: August 2017 – July 2018



Final Impression, July 2018

In August 2017 I began a life changing travel to Jodhpur, India where I worked for one year in the rural area Setrawa for a women empowerment organization called Sambhali Trust. In this year I became a teacher for English, general knowlegde, Computer and women empowerment topics but I also became a student for a new thinking and way of life, a friend and a family member. Strangers became my friends and a strange place became my home.

During my volunteer year I lived in a local family who shared their home with me. Very special was the relationship to my hostmother, who always gave me the feeling to be loved. Every morning started with a cup of very sweet chai which she made for me. After I made me ready for work, which means I took a bath, I ate breakfast, cleaned my room and washed my clothes by hand. At 11 am my Computer Class for girls in the age of 11 to 15 started. Two hours I taught them how to use programs like word or excel but also how to use the internet for informing and entertainment. Once a week we did a funny day what means that we played, danced and just enjoyed our time freely together. After the Class I cleaned the Centre and went home for my lunch. At home I prepared the next lesson and relaxed a bit. From 4pm to 6pm I was teaching in the English Class for children which is called the Peacock Class. After half our praying, singing and playing everybody went into the classes for the lesson. With the help of a local teacher I taught a group of children some basic English like the animals, colours, numbers, family members, body parts and how to say the name, origin and age. As much it was possible I tried to teach them in a fun way what means that we played a lot educational games. Every Saturday I hold a workshop with another volunteer about general topics like the five senses, hygiene, children rights, no bad touch and many more. After the class I went home or to a friend's home. After the dinner and hanging together with the family I went for sleeping.

This daily routine changed always a bit but all in all this was what I mostly did in my time in Setrawa. Sometimes I organisated some special events like for example a project week for girls and women from 17 to 25. I hold workshops about feminism and equality for every sex, gender, cast and sexuality, about menstruation and pregnancy, violence against women, self-defense and self-love. Some weeks after I hold again some workshops for younger girls of the age 10 to 15 about self-discovery, future plans, role models and inner happiness.

Because of a friend of the dalit community I got in touch with some uneducated and unprivileged children. I began to spend more time with them and opened together with the other volunteer a special class for them where they should learn some hindi basics and do their daily hygiene. After some weeks me and the other volunteer decided that she will take this class alone and I should concentrate on the Computer Class. In the begin it was very hard because they even did not know their names or how to hold a pencil in the hand but they grewed and learned much in the last half year. Proudly we can say, that we could bring them to the best private school in the village where they will get after some discussion with the principal at least eight years of free education.

Another very happy moment was when a woman came to me and told me that she started to believe in herself because of that what I taught her. She has a very hard familiar background and is depressed. She said that she is coming out of her depression step by step and that she feels more powerful since I support and listen to her.

But I do not just want to talk about the positive things: In Setrawa exists a high inequality between men and women and the castsystem is still active. It was very hard for me to accept this and sometimes it was hard to respect the culture. In Setrawa you have to follow some rules about correct covering the body, being at home before dark and not talking to the boys. This were the easy ones but it was very hard for me to respect it if somebody said that he*she do not eat from the same plate as an member of the dalit cast or that women are the weak sex and just should be silent, get children and do the housework. I met girls who are uneducated but their brothers are going to school or university and I went to a childs marrige of a fifteen years old girl. I talked to women who get beaten and raped by their husbands and to girls who will get married against their will. I saw how the people exclude the dalits. I had to remember that I am not there for changing something but I was there for supporting girls and women to get more confident and powerful so that they can change something if they like it. A change will take a lot of time and will go trough many generations but the change already started.

I hope that I could left some of my ideas in the women's mind and I can say for sure that they left so many ideas and memories in my mind. I felt completly in love with the girls and women even it was hard sometimes. But everybody who is going with an open heart and mind in the project will find his*her luck.

All the best and thank you for a wonderful time.

Aurelia, 19 years old, from Germany