

**Name: Gracie Sutton**

**Country: UK**

**Volunteering period: June 2015 – May 2016**



### **Final Impression, June 2016**

#### Volunteering

I have been volunteering at Sambhali for almost a year as a sewing volunteer. My role, unlike other volunteer teaching positions, has varied from day to day and has required a lot of self-management and self-initiative in terms of how I prioritised and completed my tasks. My role involved a lot of hands on work; I have been responsible for product development for Sambhali's boutique, overseas orders to foreign clients, teaching sewing skills to manufacturers and generally overseeing the running of two sewing centres and the boutique.

Initially, I found this work challenging, however there have been many benefits and as I grew into the role I became familiar with each centres and what was required of me. I now feel as though I am able to balance my work load and deal with any problems that may arise calmly and responsibly. Overall, this year has been such a great experience and this position has really allowed me to develop my design skills, both personally and professionally.

Working in the sewing centres has also been extremely rewarding and has given me a lot of freedom to be creative within my role. Daily tasks included market research, designing products, fabric sourcing and sampling in and around Jodhpur, training and instructing female employees in garment manufacturing. In terms of overseas clients, I have had to work in coordination with their briefs, source specific fabrics, pattern cut garments, sample and teach the women how to make these garments and then quality control products to ensure they meet international standards.

Overall, this role has involved coordinating the production of boutique products and orders between the two centres whilst also managing the flow of manufacture.

This position has also required a fair amount of administrative work; creating cost lists of products and finalising the women's wages on excel, liaising with clients and emailing other members of the team. This has also been extremely beneficial from a professional perspective and has been equally if not more important for the organisation in terms of making the projects sustainable and supporting the women financially.

This role has given me the ability to personally create products for sale and utilise my fashion knowledge. I have thoroughly enjoyed many of the processes involved with production from sourcing fabrics and trims in the vibrant markets to designing and producing garments and bags.

Working with overseas clients, designing and making products and teaching the manufacturing of products to the women has been such a great experience, although it has come with many responsibilities and at times when I have been under a lot of pressure. However, this has really allowed me to expand my own skills not only in terms of designing but in problem solving, teaching, working with clients and balancing a work load. The advantages of staying long term means I've also seen first-hand how much the women have improved in their production abilities, what they've produced and how each woman's individual skills and particular talents have been utilised through this work.

I would recommend a role like this to any design students wishing to intern or further their experience in the fashion or production sector; it's great for people interested in designing, product development, garment technology, overseas manufacturing and ethical production.

I feel a volunteer would achieve the best results if they were to stay for a longer period of time, as you could accomplish a lot more for both the NGO and on personally. It takes time to learn how and where to source all the materials, how the centres run, their strengths and weaknesses, what they can and can't produce, estimated time brackets and how to figure out the costing.

I would recommend that anyone considering this role be proactive, efficient, independent and motivated in their personality. It requires a 'what you sew, you will reap' attitude.

The sewing centres themselves are great, I really admire and appreciate what Sambhali has done; employing women and allowing them to gain an income. It has been really great to be a part of this and to be able to use my creative skills to make a difference and hopefully generate more income for these wonderful talented women.

Working alongside the women, getting to know them, their lives, their hardships, their sense of humour and their skills and talents, has been such a wonderful experience. Seeing how their wages impact their life and what a positive effect this work has had on them and their families has been truly enlightening.

I've come to realise the necessity of an ethical supply chain and can now identify with all the work that is involved with producing clothing.

## The Guest House and Social Life

I would advise anyone coming for a long time to consider the differences between life back home and life here. There is less to do here in terms of what we may consider doing with our social lives back home and I struggled a little with missing my family and home comforts. I managed by focusing on my work and spent a lot of my free time making garments for myself- If you're creative and love textiles then Jodhpur is a haven. Of course the benefits of being here outweigh any personal struggles I have had and in hindsight, it has been good for me to experience the strains too.

The guest house is very welcoming and a safe place to stay. Meeting and living with like-minded individuals has been great; you have a support system here and I've made friends for life. The local staff here can never do enough for you, are always smiling and will always try to help you in any way they can.

Living here as a long term volunteer has given me an insight into what life is like in India as a women; what they experience, the restrictions etc. Although frustrating at times, it's been good for me to see this first hand and has definitely shaped my feelings towards women's rights and my own privileges.

I understand much better now how the country works and its assets and constraints. It's given me a greater appreciation and understanding, which I don't believe I would have gained with a short term placement.

It also allows you to create close bonds with the women who attend Sambhali centres which has of course been the highlight and something I will remember and cherish forever.

Overall this experience has been very rewarding and I'm so glad I made the choice to come here for one year, it has definitely impacted me in so many ways.

I would like to thank Govind and Corinne for this opportunity, it has been really amazing in so many ways and has definitely shaped my future endeavors.