

Name: Tabea Linzbach (via Volunta)

Country: Germany

Volunteering period: August 2015 – June 2016



Final Impression, June 2016

Thank you for the great time I had at Sambhali !

My 11 month of working for Sambhali as a German Red Cross volunteer are nearly over now and it is so hard to say good-bye. The boardinghome girls became my 22 younger sisters and all the girls and women from my Empowerment Center including the staff members really close friends.

During my voluntary service I have worked for two different projects. In the mornings I taught English and Maths at the Shakti Empowerment Center, I prepared and held creative as well as educational workshops for the women and gave them the support they needed whenever there was something to talk about. We had constantly changes concerning our classes, but in general I taught the English Medium/Advanced class and did Mathematics with them as well. I always had between 4 and 12 girls attending my class but just like the attendance also the average age of my students varied from time to time. At the beginning I had predominantly women between 20 and 30 years who also brought their children to my lesson. However during the last months my class limited itself rather to young girls who had partially also the school and their age is between 15 and 23 years. If there is one thing I learned it's that family duties are first priority for the women and girls. That was sometimes a bit hard to accept, because when a few students were missing my class, there was no continuity and I had to repeat topics with other girls had already known about. Even if they promise you to attend your class at the next day, you can't take this as a serious statement. But this was for me the first point where I could feel the difference when I decided to take things more relaxed and I stopped worrying about these small things. It's simply India!

Since I was the only long term volunteer at Shakti I worked quite close with the staff members. In my center we always had a nice atmosphere and together we tried to optimize timetables and class subdivisions and we supported each other as well with the reports every four weeks. For Shakti we always had to make around nine reports, which wasn't really easy for the ones who were involved. It was a lot of additional work at the end of each month which has simply taken up a lot of time, but luckily I had the support of different short term volunteers. I can say that it always took a lot of my energy to prepare classes, think about new teaching methods and try to concentrate on each girl individually especially during the hot month in summer, but I wouldn't have stayed here the past 11 months if it wouldn't have seen the changes.

Since I arrived in India I spend my afternoons from 2.30pm to 6 pm at the boardinghouse with the 22 Girls from the desert. The youngest one of the girls is 7 years and the oldest is about 15 years old. Each of the girls is so different concerning their characteristics, their individual qualities and their wether more or less ambitious learning-motivation. From day to day they warmed my heart up, I would speak about them as my second family during my stay here. I saw them every day, I noticed quite fast whenever they had bad days and these girls are really good in reading your face as well. So I wasn't only there to support them during their homework and test preparation time, I would also see myself also as a role model for them and an emotional support. With the other volunteers who worked with me at the Boardinghome we prepared workshops and worked out a plan for each week with a daily program. Within the first and a half hour every day we had to study with the girls, learn with them for their exams and practice english reading and writing. The last hour we had time to spend playful, spray and creative moments with the girls. We had the music day for example, where we danced together to Rajasthani and Bollywood music, the story day were we read english stories and had fun doing some theatre or the Yoga-day where always one of the volunteers thought about a Yogasession with good stretching exercises for the girls. After I accompanied the girls for one year, where we laughed together, cried together and shared stories, I really don't want to think about leaving them and possibly seeing them never again.

For me it wasn't easy to adjust to the Indian food during my past 11 month, not just because of the spiciness, but also because it is quite oily. I have clearly noticed that I suffered more from the food than other volunteers, however, my body and my stomach also simply did not want to get used to the food. I was grateful for the offer to be allowed to use the kitchen from time to time to cook something on my own, because I pretty much limited myself to fruits and boiled vegetables. So Mukta and the whole staff members of the house were always very obliging and they sometimes also just cooked a mild soup/meals for me. I found my own way to look after my stomach and my digestive system. Being sick in India just isn't a really nice experience, fortunately we were always able to call a doctor, who knows the family and the guesthouse quite well.

The life at the guesthouse has been really pleasant. Mukta, the staff members as well as Govinds cousin Bunty were always surrounding us, free to help us with any of our requests, specially when we had problems with our rooms. I enjoyed living with the other volunteers and guests, some became close friends of mine, who I will visit at their homes for sure. This was one thing I am quite happy about, to meet people who live all over the world. Since everyone is working in different projects during the day-time everyone gets together in the evening at the dinner table, to talk about the day or just to enjoy some quiet moments together. You always have someone to share your thoughts or problems with. And even if it is not always easy to work and live at the same place, or to get along with every other volunteer, I think that there always was a way do deal with it or to solve a problem. From time to time I would say that we were nearly too many volunteers in the guesthouse. All the centers were crowded

and it was hard to find some privacy or free time just for yourself. Like most of the other volunteers I shared a room for the last 11 months and you kind of have to get used to the fact that privacy is not really possible, apart from the time when your roommate is working at her/his center. Sometimes I wished there would have been better communication on upcoming events or changes of the normal schedule. Things changed so spontaneously and maybe this is a German thing but I am normally used to fixing dates and arrangements. But it is India - a different country, a different culture and different habits. It's all about getting a little bit out of your comfort zone and trying to adjust to new things. I am really thankful for the last 11 months in India. I learned to make my own decisions and argue my opinion. I tried to give the women and girls as much as I could, during my stay but they have given me so much more. I was able to get to know their world and this feeling I felt during all my classes was probably the most amazing feeling I have ever had. I was able to learn so much about the Indian culture, could really feel things happening and let's say it like this „An open heart is the key for so many doors!“