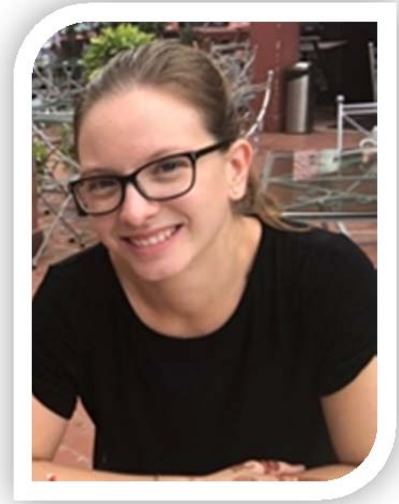


Name: Célia Charre (via Eurasia Net)
Country: France
Volunteering period: Dec. 2018 – August 2019



Final Impression, August 2019

My name is Célia, I come from France through a programme called Service Civic (I was sent by an association called Eurasia Net). I decided to take a break of one year after I finished my studies in Law to do some “ground” work and Sambhali Trust, fighting for women empowerment, children education and having the special status to the Economic and Social Council of the UN, was a perfect match.

I arrived in December 2018 for 9 months after three planes rides - 24h of travel - for the first time in India. From what I could learn through calls with Govind S. Rathore, my main task will be to teach English and/or maths in a centre all day which is actually what I did in Fatima Centre from January until the end. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depends how you see it), I arrived just before the winter break where most of centres were closed so my first week was composed of shopping for clothes, sim card (everything you need as a volunteer), getting use to my new environment, the guesthouse and little time in the only two centres opened (Abhaya and Fatima). But it allowed me to get acquainted with the work done here, how it is organised and what would be expected of me in the next 8 months.

Jodhpur, the blue city or sun city, what to tell you about it? Well, even if according to European standards it is a big city (more than 1 million people), it does feel like a medium sized city in France where everyone knows Sambhali Trust. Off course, I visited the main touristic attractions such as the Mehrangarh Fort, Jaswant Thada or Umaid Bhawan Palace and off course I did the zipline behind the fort. I like the city as it is quite peaceful (for India), you have lots of nice restaurants and rooftops to enjoy a dinner at sunset or just a cup of masala tea.

As a volunteer, you are living in Durag Niwas, Govind and Mukta’s guesthouse, with the family, other volunteers and sometimes tourists passing by. Mukta, Bunty (guesthouse manager) or Monica (assistant) will always help you if you need help or just someone to talk to. You will find that all the staff is nice and trying to make your experience as good as it could be.

I knew from the beginning that I might encounter problems adapting to my new environment (cultural choc) or the way everything is (dis)organized here but it turns out, I had none. People usually talk about the poverty, crime and filthiness of India but I discovered a country with a rich culture and traditions where as a guest you are always welcomed in a house and will find help if needed from total strangers. If I am being honest, it is a little annoying when an auto rickshaw driver ask for three times the price because you are “white” or people stop you in the street every 10m to take a selfie but at the end India is a wonderful country. If you want to avoid “tourist traps”, the best solution is simply to learn some basic Hindi. It also helped me in my work in the centre as women and children do not speak English, or very little, and they all love when you can say few Hindi words.

I started working in Fatima centre where I taught English to women in the morning and children in the afternoon. After some days, a new French volunteer arrived in the centre and I was asked to switch and teach maths as she did not feel she could do it. Honestly, at the beginning I struggled a little as I did not do any maths since I had left high school more than 7 years ago and there was not much teaching material related to maths. Luckily, everything came back quickly and I was able to continue in maths for the rest of my time in the centre. After a while, some volunteers left and other came but I found myself alone in the afternoon mid-April. That when we decided with the teachers that it would be better to continue teaching maths in the morning to women but switch to English in the afternoon with the children. All people coming to the centre are eager to learn, especially women who have children as they see it as an opportunity to help them after with school homework and to be able to pass on some knowledge to them (even if it is just how to write their names in English). As a volunteer, you are expected to teach them as much as possible in little time but something they do not tell you is how much you are going to learn yourself. When I was in primary school, I wanted to become a kindergarten teacher like my grandmother but my path changed course and I became a lawyer and thought I would never teach. My time at Sambhali made me realise my childhood dream and I met some amazing people (staff, teachers and students).

But teaching in a centre was not my only task as I was asked by the operation manager, Corinne Rose, to help her write a 500 words statement for the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council on inclusiveness and equality. As a former law student specialised in international and European law, I was more than happy to collaborate and it was rewarding to learn how an NGO will reply to such demand. Unfortunately, due to system failure, the statement could not be upload onto the UN website despite several emails sent to them. But nonetheless, understanding the cultural background of Sambhali and Rajasthan in general and being able to contribute in a small

way to such a big international event on behalf of the NGO was incredibly rewarding. In addition, I helped with other administrative tasks such as writing reports for donors or updating policies.

In conclusion, after such a long time you are bounded to have close relationships with your students, the staff and other volunteers and if I had to summarize my experience at Sambhali it would be: "meeting amazing people". This experience taught me a lot about myself, made me discover a new country and culture, but most importantly I am convinced to have made the right choice in my studies and want to continue working in the field of Human Rights (and who knows, maybe I will come back to Sambhali sooner than expected).

Thank you Govind, Mukta, all the staff (guesthouse and Sambhali), teachers at my centre and my student for making the last 9 months an extraordinary experience.