

Name: Léana Onno

Country: France

Volunteering period: December 2019 – May 2020

Final Impression, August 2020

My name is Léana and I had the chance to be volunteer 7 months for Sambhali. With 2 other volunteers, I was sent by Eurasia Net from Civic Services in France. I can still remember the landscape of India, especially the desert like it was yesterday. When we came on 6th December 2019, we had the opportunity to be a part of a new project in a desert village, 100km West from Jodhpur. We had to experience the lockdown in this place during spring/summer 2020 as well. It was physically and mentally a hard experience but also a good one. Sambhali reacted quickly to the international crisis for jobless people.



About my experiences in the desert: I experienced my volunteering in Dev Bag guesthouse in the village of Viramdeogarh. It was a “test project”, a new one that we had to experience first and build. We had to realize what was possible to do considering the situation of local people and education, environment and social entrepreneurship. I appreciated my work before the lockdown a lot. We could be a part of many different projects. We all taught English to the children in the government school. In the beginning, my English level was really low and I was a little bit anxious. It was a challenge for all of us but a good one. We had

to organise the lesson with the local teachers which was first a bit first difficult. All of them did not speak English. The second difficulty was to make the student trust us and give them self-confidence and a basic English. I felt lost sometimes because it was hard to find my place but we all realized that it was a part of the challenge. Thanks to my students, I also learned a little bit of Hindi. I miss them a lot. I will probably remember how strong those children are for the rest of my life. In we end, we had the feeling that we learn as they learn in term of life lessons. After sometime, when the lockdown was announced, we also learned about our limit. In the afternoons, I did some admin work and was responsible for the social media of Sambhali Trust. I really appreciated this part of my job. It gave me a lot of satisfaction to participate in many different things. We did not have a good internet connection in the desert so sometimes it was unsatisfying. But, the life in the desert is very incredible. I discovered myself and everything around be by visiting the dunes on the top of the Deg Bag horse, Shanti. The ride on the horse at the end of days at sunsets were one of the bests moments in my life. The landscape is very beautiful and peaceful. I will never forget all those moments.



About India: I had the chance to discover India and a lot of different landscapes which evaluated my mission, too. Indian people have a very different and interesting culture and they all have kindness in their hands and hearts. I am really choked about how strong those people are, especially the women. They are surviving. By volunteering with Sambhali, we knew that we could help a bit and give out time and energy. But in the end, we cannot change the world. It does not change the fact that sometimes it was also hard to feel unpowerful.

About Sambhali Trust: Sambhali does an incredible job. The centres, teachers and all staff and the mission are amazing. In addition to the access to education that Sambhali gives to the women and children they support, they also teach important values like self-thinking, self-confident and give them the opportunity to be more independent.

About the COVID-19 lockdown: I have to finish my report mentioning that crazy time. Nobody expected that it would be how it turned out to be. I can still remember how hard it was to wake up outside – early in the morning and 35 degrees already. We could not sleep inside or eat how we were used to for a long time. Sometimes, I lost my energy and reached my limits thanks to this experience. Without the family of Dev Bagh/Durag Niwas Guesthouse, Sambhali Trust and Mukta, the wife of the founder of Sambhali, Govind, all that could not have been possible. They continued to provide us with water, accommodation and food, even if it was hard for everybody to find their own place in this time. All the remaining volunteers from Jodhpur also came to the desert for their security. Sambhali created the “food distribution project” in this time and we had the opportunity to participated in it. That beautiful project was important for the local people who were jobless due to the long lockdown. I also have to thank the volunteer coordinator, Roxanne, who gave us emotional support and energy to continue to believe in our work even if we were in difficult condition. Thanks to Sambhali and everybody for this amazing little year. I am very grateful and will remember all those moments forever.

