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**SUSAN FREEMAN - January 17th-February 12th 2015.**

## **Education Development - Chitardai Primary School, Rajasthan, India**

### Pre-departure Preparation

Meeting up with Dianne Ashman, reading hers and Penny Wolfson's report was very helpful and encouraging. I was in communication with Yvonne Coulson a fellow volunteer so that helped also. Most of the teaching resources I took were useful as I was sent a Curriculum and Resources list from the school.

I tried doing my visa myself but had to go through Trailfinders in the end, (as Penny had advised!) I booked my flights with them also.

**Note: one of the many advantages of volunteers being in touch with each other and sharing information and experiences.**

I didn't pack enough warm clothing, as although the sun is hot in the day, the mornings and evenings are cold in Jan and cool in Feb. Yvonne had taken donated clothes for the children, so we borrowed a couple of sweatshirts.

I travelled from Heathrow to Delhi. There was no obvious organisation at the airport- security, immigration and baggage collection were absolutely chaotic. I was met by the driver for Ibex, the agents in India, and he took me to meet Anita at her mother's house for a lovely lunch and discussion about the project. We'd intended to get some cash and a Sim card, but the flight to Udaipur was brought forward 2 hours. I was taken back to Delhi Airport only to find the flight had been cancelled! More chaos! (fortunately I'd kept my suitcase instead of it being taken to Udaipur as planned.) I phoned Anita (**one of many reasons why volunteers are put in touch with local partners well before they travel**) who suggested I flew to Jaipur, from where I was driven for 3hrs to meet up with another driver, for another long journey to the hotel. I arrived at midnight and enjoyed a delicious meal prepared for me, sat up in bed. Things were looking up from then on!

### Orientation and Preparation

In the morning (Saturday) I met Yvonne and Mukesh (**co-volunteer & local teacher, respectively**) from the school. We went to school in a jeep. The journey through the town and countryside was amazing. True Indian life, which I loved every day.

We were introduced to each class. The children knew some English but were understandably shy.

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Mukesh introduced us to other teachers and then we looked at the resources and discussed the curriculum. We then went back to the Hotel, (to unpack!).

### My Experience and Work

I took classes 1/2, 3 & 4 with an average 25-30 in each. The classes started at 11.00 and finished at 3.00, so there was always time to organise resources and talk to staff, which they were keen to do at any opportunity.

My focus was on oral language development, as they have a good command of English, but the strong Indian accent and mispronunciation of some sounds made it difficult to understand. As soon as I went into class 1/2 they called out "One Pinger One Pum". (I'd sung "One Finger One Thumb" to them on Saturday!) My first challenge was to teach them the sounds "f, th. and v", by placing their top teeth over the bottom lip. My lips were very sore for the first 2 weeks! I also got them to move their whole mouth to form vowel sounds. There were some really funny faces, including mine. They did find it difficult because they were using different facial muscles. By the end of the placement they were speaking English more clearly, albeit with a Dorset accent!

I encouraged every child to answer and speak, often finding the quiet, reluctant ones very good, which impressed their more vocal classmates. Most lessons were interactive, where they had to leave their seats to select the correct card or object, whilst saying the words. The sets of picture and letter cards were well used. They involved good listening skills when I described the object and they had to select the appropriate picture or word. They did many action songs, again with focus on correct vocabulary. Often, if I was running out of time in the lesson, they'd spontaneously ask for a song at the end! For the Farewell Ceremony each class chose the song they wanted to perform. I kept their recording work to a minimum, usually toward the end of the lesson, for the diagrams and new vocabulary. I marked it with each child individually. This gave an opportunity for praise and plenty of repetition of sounds.

Looking through their books I could see that they had a good range of English vocabulary, so it was more important for them to be speaking and listening. There was another teacher with me for most of the time, plus visitors with Devender, taking photos, recordings and videos. We were featured in local and national newspapers.

Although I was prepared for a 6-day week, there were elections on and Republic Day, so no full weeks. This gave me the time to go through and organise all the donated resources. I put them in labeled folders and cleared shelves in Devender's office, with assurance they would be used!! I asked about other things that had been left, but I needed more time to sort everything.

In the time I was able to complete the set curriculum plus other spontaneous relevant topics. As Penny found, the children had difficulty with the floor jigsaw puzzles. They completed them in the end, so it would be good for them to do more. My work was classroom based, but we did see good teaching taking place with their playground 'Learning Circle' devised by staff.

Classroom furniture was very basic and old. Most of my lessons involved moving around, so that made it easy. I moved disruptive pupils so they were mixed, girls and boys. This was new for some but it was effective and gave the quiet girls an opportunity to be involved.

### What did People and Places do well?

All the preparation and contacts were good. Support given and appreciated when needed. Pre-travel contact with Ibex was good.

## Recommendations for future volunteers

Definitely more oral work, particularly with the younger children. Hopefully they will maintain the different techniques needed to form English phonics. Work with what you have and be spontaneous. If you see a gap in their understanding, fill it. Don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself and make it FUN!

## Successes

I'd like to think I made every child feel special and gave them confidence to try, especially the slower learners. Each child was listened to and encouraged to work independently and to speak out in front of the class.

Our teaching was well recorded and observed by Devender and representatives from other schools.

## Accommodation

The hotel was quirky and interesting, I loved it. You must make allowances for the fact that it is very old. The staff were so obliging and friendly. The food was fabulous. I wasn't used to Indian food, but I tried and enjoyed everything. My daily exercise involved walking up and down and around the Palace, discovering new parts and taking in all the views from the roof.

There were varied guests who generally stayed up to 3 nights. There was entertainment each night, with music and dancers. As it was set in the heart of the town the journey in and out of the Palace and on to school was always fascinating and fun, and we became a familiar part of the local life. Especially after our pictures were in the newspapers! There is an audio tour which tells the interesting story of the palace and the Royal family. We were invited for drinks around the fire pit with them.

## Leisure Time

After school Yvonne and I sat on our terrace in the sun to relax until the sun went. Then I went to my room for school prep etc. Contact with home was difficult as the connection was erratic. I couldn't get currency as the machines weren't performing foreign transactions, so I bought some from Yvonne. I went for a walk around the lake and locals were keen to speak to me. Yvonne and I came upon a new hotel being built for the family in the same decorative style as the Palace. We were shown around and chatted to the workers. It was the wedding season, so lots of music and celebrating. We went to a wedding gift ceremony and a reception party with Devender. We were also invited to the homes of Devender, Om and Arpita. I'll not forget my birthday, with whole school celebrations and cards from Yvonne's class, and greetings from the staff in the hotel.

We went on the old train trip, which was super. The mother of a family in our carriage asked if I'd like to take her daughter home to be my maid! I had a relaxing Ayurvedic massage and a hair cut in the spa. Usually, after dinner we'd just go to our rooms. I embraced the whole Indian experience; I didn't get any Western news, music or food and drink. The noise day and night, the chaos in the streets I took it all in and I loved it.

I agree with Dianne that we were treated undeservedly like royalty. They were really appreciative and the leaving ceremony was attended by families, local officials and the Rani from the palace.

## Teaching Aids

### Stationery items

Picture Lotto, Large Number-matching Puzzle, Picture-matching Cards, "I Can Spell" wordmaker,

Books: "Mr Wolf's Week", "I Wish I Were Big" "Big and Small", Weather Books- "Snow", "Sun", "Rain", "Wind". "Harry's Bucket of Dinosaurs" + model dinosaurs (from Yvonne)

### Finally.....

I'd never had a desire to visit India, but when I looked into this placement, I thought I'd give it a try. Well, I absolutely loved every day, from the hotel, the journey through the town, countryside and village, with locals going about their daily lives and waving as we passed, to the afternoons and evenings at the hotel with the friendly staff and interesting visitors. I really don't think I would have enjoyed India as a tourist, but I would definitely recommend it as a worthwhile and rewarding placement, (if you accept the frustrating Indian bureaucratic administration and chaotic lack of organisation in order to get there)

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