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Pat Wilson – Dar Asni, Morocco - December 29th 2014 to January 24th 2015

The project was to help young Berber girls with English and French.

You sent me all the information that I needed for the project, the meeting at the airport and return to Marrakech was efficient. I was taken to the boarding house in Asni, introduced to Latifa and Souad, whilst I stayed with them for lunch my luggage was taken up to Villa d'Atlas al ready for me for when I went up there later in the afternoon.

Despite going prepared for the cold, taking a hot water bottle and warm clothing with me I found it extremely cold and if anyone else goes there in the winter would recommend thermals. There is meant to be an extra cold winter every 8-9 years and I hit it.

Unfortunately I was only able to take time off in January and I think this is not a particularly good time to go. The first week I arrived on Monday, New Year's Day on the Thursday was a holiday and the following week the Monday was also a public holiday. The girls were due to go on holiday on January 24th but school timetables are a bit fluid and change quite frequently and the holiday start time for the younger girls was brought forward by a week. The week before they went off there were exams so the girls' timetables changed.

Note from *people and places*: this flexibility and fluidity of school timetables may be surprising – but is not unusual and something we can't prepare for, except to alert volunteers to the possibilities ...

I enjoyed my time there, not sure that I did any good, not being used to working with groups of children I was probably a bit slow on the uptake and just as I was getting myself really organised the timetables went haywire.

Note: continue to read – you'll see that Pat achieved rather a lot.

Although I had times with the girls for English and French separately I tended to mix the two together, we played a lot of word games such as hangman and 20 questions using French or English to ask the questions.

There were some exercise books in the room which had been started last year and I followed on from there. I think I may have aimed a bit too low in what I was doing but it was difficult to tell as the groups were a bit mixed with some people finding it quite hard going.

I went over vocab with them, pretty basic stuff like family, colours, numbers, alphabet, fruit and vegetables, although they knew many of the words the pronunciation was not good, I made up word search games for

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them using the words we had been using in both English and French for the younger ones.



number fun – a la Sudoku !

I also made up cards with French and English words on them that they had to memorise where the cards were and match them up, first of all matching the French/English words with each other then matching the French word with its English translation. They had to pronounce the words as they turned the cards over and I gave points to the girls that paired the cards up.

The girls are all quite competitive and like to have games that they can win but there is no upset when someone loses and they are generous to each other, will help the younger ones. I did teach them how to play snap in the activity periods which was extremely popular, we also had some card making sessions and we did try our hand at origami.



a smile for the camera

I had my i Pad with me and we did do a few how to draw sessions from there, drawing a face and labelling it in both French and English.

I did find in some groups that a few of the girls, although enthusiastic about pronouncing words and speaking in either English or French they had to be asked a few times to write things down, most of the girls wrote beautifully and took pride in setting everything out neatly, the girls that had to be persuaded to write had scruffy and untidy writing and I think they are struggling with our letters and would greatly benefit from one on one or one on two extra sessions, I have mentioned it to Latifa

There are several text books there but I didn't find one that I thought I could use so I tried to follow on from what had been done in the girls' exercise books. There is a lot of craft bits and pieces that Latifa keeps in her office, I did ask her about what volunteers could bring with them by way of supplies but she said really everything is available in Marrakech and she would rather we just brought the money we were planning on spending and buy it in Marrakech.

Note: which we also recommend

My accommodation was good, the family Ramoun very hospitable, great food. I did return to the guest house every day around 6pm and although it is nice to have your own space I think in many ways it may have been better if I had stayed in the boarding house as the girls are relaxed and tend to chatter more which is better to get them really thinking in another language, also playing games on my ipad with them on a Saturday morning they spoke more. All the houses have a volunteer's room with ensuite, mostly on the roof terrace so it would be possible to get away if you wanted. If you are on your own the weekends could be a bit bleak so nice to have some company then and a chance to go for some walks.

Note: we offer accommodation in the boarding houses when we can – it's not always available.

I think the project, Education for All, is excellent. My last week I spent some time with the older girls in Asni 3 - they all without exception said how much they loved living in the house, being able to learn, have access to books that would normally be impossible and great opportunities for the future, also the great friendships they have made whilst in the house.

The weekends if you are on your own are a bit difficult, there is nothing really in Asni apart from the Saturday souk. Walking is not a good idea as the area is pretty desolate although I did do some walking, didn't go to Ouirgane until just before I left. Lots of places to stay there and would be a good place to go. I did have a lovely Saturday night at Kasbah Toubkal courtesy of Mike and Haj Maurice, it was a real treat, and many thanks. Latifa has a friend in Marrakech- an ex volunteer- who works in a travel agents in Marrakech, she arranged a nice Riad stay for me one weekend. You need little money in Asni, there is an ATM but can take quite a few days to fix if it goes wrong so recommend you get money before you go there

This is a good project although it has only been going for a relatively short time you can see it is already having an effect. The girls are enthusiastic, realise they have a great opportunity and even if they don't go on to even higher education what they have learnt will be put to good use. The house mothers and other staff in the houses are all great and work hard to give the girls this opportunity.

For myself I enjoyed it greatly, time spent with the girls as well as Latifa and Souad, I am disappointed with myself as I feel that I should have accomplished more however that is just in myself and I would certainly recommend it to any other volunteer, if you can possibly manage more than 4 weeks I think that both you and the girls would benefit from it

Many thanks for having me

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