

- **PLACEMENT DATES AND PROJECT**

I – Linda Page - volunteered in Morocco at the Education For All boarding house Dar Asni 1, arriving on Monday, 7 October 2019 and returning home on Monday, 4 November 2019.

- **PRE DEPARTURE PREPARATION**

This was good. People and Places supplied me with lots of useful information and answered any questions promptly and fully.

- **ORIENTATION AND PREPARATION AT THE START OF THE PLACEMENT**

This could have been better. The taxi wasn't waiting when I arrived at the airport, so I had to telephone Latifa and eventually a taxi arrived to collect me. (**Note from people and places – we are so sorry that this happened – it is imperative that volunteers are met on time when they arrive – this is the first instance of this happening – but that does not mean that we and our partners do not take it very seriously – we have changed taxi drivers but please make sure you carry contact details with you so that you can immediately contact Latifa**)- Latifa then came to the riad a couple of hours after I had arrived there by taxi and we walked down to Dar Asni 1, then on to Dar Asni 2, where another P&P volunteer (Tina, who had arrived a week earlier) was working. On the way from Dar Asni 1 to Dar Asni 2, Latifa pointed out the taxi and bus stops, cash machine, pharmacy and bank, but that was really the extent of my orientation. I was told the opening hours of the bank, for example, but not warned that at lunch-time, which was really the only time I could go, although the bank remains open, most staff are out at lunch and I had a long wait before I could change money.

- **WHAT DID WE DO WELL?**

I felt I was given all the details I needed to prepare for my trip. My emails and phone-calls were answered/returned promptly before I went to Morocco, and it was nice to receive follow-up emails one week into my stay and on my return home. I was confident that if I had had any problems, P&P would be ready to help. I have previously used two other volunteering organisations when arranging to volunteer abroad and would not use either of them again; I would like to undertake another P&P placement in the future.

- **WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER? – AND PLEASE DON'T HOLD BACK: SURELY THERE'S SOMETHING WE CAN IMPROVE ON ...**

I have minor quibbles only. There was a slight delay on the part of P&P in requesting my DBS clearance. The original invoice I was sent referred to another project, not the one I had applied for, and the planned pre-departure 'Northern' (actually Midlands) P&P meeting for volunteers was cancelled at the last minute because of low numbers. (**Note from people and places – at the time of needing a DBS clearance for Linda there had been an announcement by HMGov that the process had changed – however we had real problems working out HOW it had changed and what process we were to follow – this led to annoying delays for a number of volunteers – this problem is – for now – resolved – we have no excuse for misquoting Linda's project – this was an error and we apologise – and now to the cancellation of the social – we at people and places love our socials – and we know how useful they are for future volunteers – as you can**

imagine – travel – room rental etc costs a lot of money – we do not expect to profit from these events – indeed we plan to cover most of the costs – however we know that an event with an attendance of less than 15 is not effective for future or indeed past volunteers – sadly on this occasion we did not reach this number and we made the decision to cancel)

- **YOUR EXPERIENCE AND WORK – INCLUDING WHAT RESOURCES YOU MAY HAVE LEFT BEHIND AND WITH WHOM – PLEASE ATTACH COPIES OF ANY WRITTEN RESOURCES YOU MAY HAVE LEFT BEHIND, AND LET US KNOW OF ANY OTHERS**

I worked with small groups of girls in Dar Asni 1, taking between 4 and 6 classes each day. I always spoke French with the girls; only the oldest had just started learning English in the 3rd year of the *collège* and they told me wanted to practise their French with me, not their English. I went through various topics, asking the girls to write a little in their exercise books, or complete a French worksheet (which they folded and stuck in their exercise books) most days, followed by playing games, again using French.

We looked at basic topics, such as numbers, use of capital letters, colours, telling the time, the family, describing people, the weather, a bit of geography etc. This was all revision for them, but I felt this was needed. The girls varied in their ability to communicate in French and all had some problems with writing accurately in French. The girls enjoyed making folded paper ‘fortune tellers’ with me, also using cardboard and stickers, which I supplied, to write out and decorate a proverb in French, or a phrase such ‘*J’aime ma famille.*’

At Latifa’s request, two full days were spent helping all the girls to write / decorate letters in French to send to an English primary school. Letters were then received back, written in French by the pupils of the English school, which I went through with the girls. The UK children all asked about pets and where the girls had been during the long summer holidays, listing the foreign countries they had visited, which made very clear the differences in life experiences and culture between these UK pupils and the Dar Asni girls. The girls had little or no understanding of where different countries were and I frequently used the atlases available in the boarding house to help them locate the UK, France and other places on a world map.

In my last week, Latifa cancelled some of my classes so that she, or usually her deputy Khadija, could ask the 12 new girls who had just joined the boarding house questions in Berber or Darija and translate their answers for me so that I could prepare an English profile about each girl to go on the wall of the entrance hall.

Latifa then asked me to adapt two of these profiles for ‘Dear Sponsor’ letters, which I did.

On several occasions I helped Latifa reply to English emails; I later sent her a list of useful phrases she could use in future emails, e.g. different ways to thank people for hospitality.

Deputy housemother Khadija attended some of my French classes and on many occasions I also gave her a bit of private tuition in English, at her request.

I put into simpler English some material that the house staff had been given to help them talk about the work of EFA to visitors.

One day I ate lunch with Latifa and English-speaking visitors, talking about my work for EFA. During Latifa's absence, an Intrepid tour group of international tourists turned up, so I talked to them at length and answered their questions about EFA in English, as requested by deputy housemother Khadija.

Latifa gave me a folder and I placed in it a copy of each of the worksheets etc I had used and left this in Dar Asni 1. These included two board games where the players threw the dice and on landing on a square the player had to answer a question in French, e.g. to practise daily routines or the perfect tense. I also left a Dorling Kindersley English- Arabic picture dictionary, a set of Usborne French picture flash cards, a 'Who's it? / Guess who?' game and a 'Yahtzee' game.

IN YOUR OPINION, ARE THERE ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES NEEDED IN THE INFORMATION WE SENT TO YOU DURING YOUR PREPARATION FOR THIS PLACEMENT?

I don't think so. Perhaps you could include the information that the Moroccan currency cannot be imported to or exported from Morocco, and that on leaving the country, any remaining dirhams need to be exchanged landside at the airport, as there are no exchange facilities airside.

- **YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INPUT OF FUTURE VOLUNTEERS – A PARTICULAR AREA OF YOUR WORK WHICH COULD BE CONTINUED BY OTHERS AND HOW WOULD YOU SUGGEST THIS COULD BE DONE?**

I didn't have the opportunity to use the boarding house computers with the girls. They are not particularly confident in using computers, a vital skill for 21st century living, in Morocco as elsewhere. I feel future volunteers could profitably work on this. Latifa showed me her new set of excellent French language textbooks, aimed at teaching basic IT to primary school pupils in France; these could be used by a future volunteer to improve the girls' computer skills.

Most of the girls had real difficulty in logical thinking. I had French worksheets based on Sudoku, using words not numbers, and one that described the inhabitants of 3 houses and their cats' names and colours: working out who lived in each house was beyond most of the girls. I talked them through the simple reasoning needed and some at least grasped the idea and were able to finish off the task on their own.

Many of the girls had difficulty with simple addition and multiplication, as required when playing Yahtzee.

Perhaps future volunteers might like to try to encourage computer and mathematical skills, also logical thinking and a more questioning attitude in the girls? Or use some simple visual IQ tests?

- **SUCSESSES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS OF YOUR PLACEMENT**

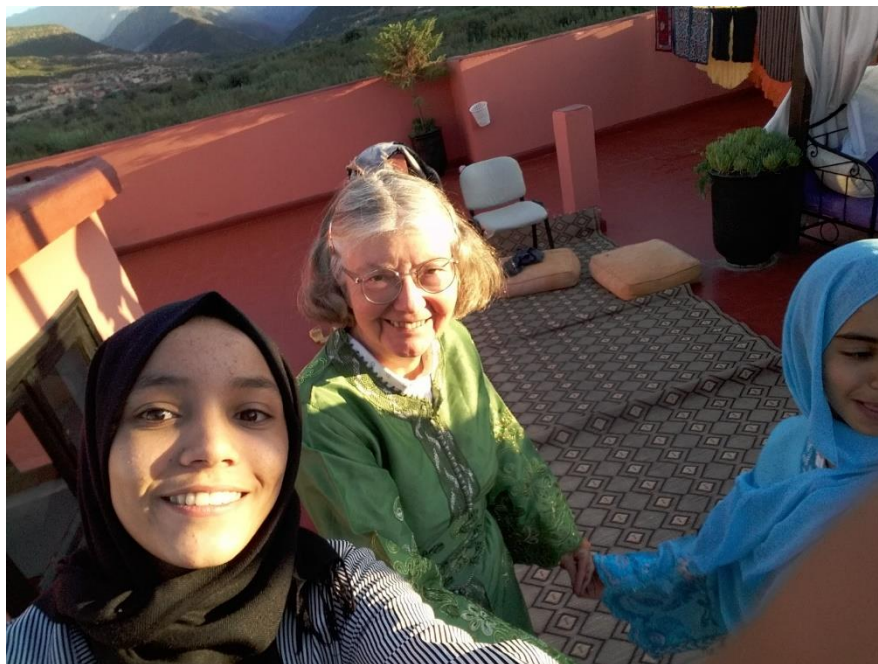
The girls were mostly really keen to come to the classes; I felt they liked having someone new to talk to and to play games with and often wanted to stay on beyond their allotted 45 minutes, having noted from the timetable that there was a 15 minute break before the next group arrived.

I would have liked to have been able to do much more with the girls and in different ways, e.g. using computers or taking some out for a walk, but I was only there for one month and communication problems, very busy EFA staff and changing timetables meant I didn't have the chance to do anything beyond hold basic French classes and play games with the girls.

- **WHAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF YOUR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE?**

Latifa, her deputy and the two cooking / cleaning staff all made me feel very welcome and I much enjoyed the month I spent in Asni. The food at Dar Asni 1 was very good; I had a delicious vegetarian lunch each day and the food served to the girls was also excellent.

Perhaps the highlight was the little farewell party the girls arranged for me at the end of my last day of work. They decorated my hand with henna, dressed me in three different borrowed djellabas, sang and chanted for me, and persuaded me to join them in a bit of Berber dancing on the roof terrace of Dar Asni 1.



- **WOULD YOU RECOMMEND VOLUNTEERING TO OTHER PEOPLE OR NOT? PLEASE TELL US WHY.**

YES, most definitely – but with provisos. This type of volunteer placement gives people the chance to get to know a country and its people and culture in a way an ordinary holiday trip could not. However, it is hard work and the living conditions may not suit everyone. I would recommend volunteering, perhaps particularly those who have retired from paid employment, who want to have a fascinating experience in a foreign country and be able offer a bit of friendship and help to the people of that country.

- **HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR LEISURE TIME?**

During the week I didn't really have any leisure time and there is nothing to do in Asni during the evenings.

I was usually in the boarding house from 9:00 until 17:30, so after walking back to the riad, before and after the evening meal at 19:30, there was only time for lesson planning for the next day plus sending a few emails home and perhaps reading for a brief time before falling asleep.

Each Saturday morning, I enjoyed looking round the Asni souk and also called briefly into one of more of the EFA houses. On Saturday afternoons I relaxed at the riad and did any necessary lesson planning for the coming week.

Each Sunday I went out; three times this was with Fatima, the young receptionist from the riad, who was keen to practise her English. Fatima accompanied me on trips, by bus or *grand taxi*, to Ouirgane, to Imlil, where I rode on a mule up to the waterfall and also looked round Kasbah Toubkal, and to Moulay Brahim, where after walking around the village and doing some souvenir shopping, we went down to the river and I rode on a camel. On the 4th Sunday, Latifa took Tina (the other P&P volunteer) and by *grand taxi* to Marrakech, where we were joined by Khadija, the housemother of Dar Asni 3 and we all enjoyed a day sightseeing together.

- **HOW WAS YOUR ACCOMMODATION?**

Tina, the other P&P volunteer, and I both stayed at Riad Vallée Verte. The riad's steep stairs, public rooms and bedrooms were very badly lit. Latifa kindly lent me a table lamp, without which I would not have been able to see to read or use my laptop in the evenings. (**Note from people and places – we have discussed this with EFA and they in turn have discussed it with the Riad – please if you feel you do not have sufficient light let the Riad staff and Latifa know**) The food was very limited: salad plus soup one night, same salad plus tagine the next, followed by sliced oranges with cinnamon or a yoghurt or, occasionally, an apple..... this was a tedious diet for a whole month.(**Note from people and places – the diet Linda refers to is a typical local diet – often wider choices are not available at the market – but if you find an item you would like to eat – please talk with your hosts and ask them to cook it for you – they will be more than happy to do so – as long as it does not include alcohol or pork**) Although there were plenty of blankets to keep me warm in bed, the dining and other public rooms were very cold for second half of my stay. Hot water and wifi were not always available. That said, the roof top terraces, and the swimming pool make this a pleasant place to stay, especially in hot weather; also, I am sure that P&P will address the issues I had with the accommodation before any other volunteers go to stay there.

- **ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT US TO KNOW**

I think I have covered everything I wanted to say. I had a great time in Morocco and am grateful to P&P for arranging for me to volunteer on such a worthwhile and enjoyable project.

LINDA