

Note from *people and places*: this volunteer's placement was designed specifically for them – they went through our full matching process, as we've been doing with you. The placement report indicates their particular skills and experience – yours may be similar or completely different – your own placement will make best use of **your** experience and skills. Every volunteer is different – in what they give and what they gain. Reports from previous volunteers serve to give you as good a picture as possible about the project. If you have any questions about any of the detail in this report please do not hesitate to contact me at dianne@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

EVA MENCHEN – VOLUNTEER REPORT

22nd February - 20th May 2022

Empowerment and Education Support for Girls in Morocco

Sharing Mindfulness and Meditation tools and techniques with girls and housemothers in Asni 1, Asni 2 and Asni 3. And giving introduction sessions both in Talaat n'Yacoub and in Dar Ouirgane.



WHAT WAS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING?

Many years ago I started volunteering (intermittently) both in Spain and abroad. Volunteering is an essential part of my way of being and seeing life.

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My main motivations for volunteering are:

- My desire to be useful and to somehow contribute with what I have/know to give back at least something of all I have received and still receive in my life.
- My idea of a society in which we can all share and enrich each other.

Added motivations to do international volunteering:

- My love for travel and knowledge of other people and cultures.
- Need for expansion in every way after a time of isolation among other reasons due to covid.

Specific motivations for the project in Morocco with People and Places and Education for All:

- The opportunity to discover the Atlas region.
- The fact that the project is about support and empowerment of girls, and young women.
- The opportunity for me to provide this support through something I believe in (mindfulness and meditation).

Last but not least:

- All the previous gives me personal and professional development.
- Enjoy all the previous.

PRE DEPARTURE PREPARATION - WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE INFORMATION WE SHARED WITH YOU DURING YOUR PREPARATION FOR THIS PLACEMENT? WHAT INFORMATION DID YOU CONSIDER MOST USEFUL?

I got plenty of useful information during my preparation for the placement. It was very useful in general to have information from different perspectives (People and Places, Education for All and former volunteers).

It was also a nice coincidence that one of the people and places online gatherings was celebrated when I was preparing to go to Morocco. **Note from people and places – we hold online volunteer socials where volunteers can meet other volunteers and local partners and project leaders every three or four months**

ORIENTATION AND PREPARATION AT THE START OF THE PLACEMENT

When I arrived at the airport, Latifa was there waiting for me with the taxi driver. We went to the riad, where I was introduced to Mr and Mrs Ramoun, the owners, who welcomed us with mint tea and homemade cookies on the terrace viewing the Atlas mountains. Who can ask for anything more?

On my next day I was given a guided tour of the town which I consider more than enough because the town is really small. Also, I visited the three boarding houses in Asni, and I was introduced to housemothers, staff and some of the girls.

The following days I remained each day in a different house. The idea was to get acquainted with them so that afterwards I could decide how I wanted to work in agreement with housemothers. I think that was a great idea.

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

My work was about teaching Mindfulness and Meditation skills to girls and housemothers in Asni 1, Asni 2 and Asni 3. And giving one introduction session both in Dar Tinmel 1 and in Dar Ouirgane.

ASNI 1 (younger girls): different ways of focusing on the breath, body scan, walking meditation and slow movements, paying attention to the 5 senses (including eating meditation), loving kindness, smiling meditation, affirmations and laughter yoga.

ASNI 2 & 3: different ways of focusing on the breath, body scan, walking meditation and slow movements, paying attention to the 5 senses (including eating meditation), loving kindness meditation, intention meditation, gratitude, smiling meditation, savouring, self-compassion, visualisation, affirmations, tips for studying and exams, and awareness of personal strengths. In my last session we did laughter yoga (only with one of the groups because the following day I was leaving, so no time to do it with all of them).

HOUSEMOTHERS: same as Asni 2 and Asni 3, and then addressing stress management in general (instead of stress for exams).



DAR TINMEL AND DAR OUIRGANE: I had the chance to go one day to Dar Tinmel and another one to Dar Ouirgane. Over there, I gave an introduction to mindfulness and meditation session to 4 groups of girls (two groups in Dar Tinmel and two groups in Dar Ouirgane).

It's my hope to have left some kind of "Mindfulness and Meditation app installed in every girl's and house mother's personal operative system". Talking about physical resources related to my Mindfulness and Meditation sessions, I didn't leave anything behind, but I hope to work on a summary of what we worked together on, so that they can have a reminder to keep practising on their own

Apart from my M&M sessions, I tried to get involved in everyday leisure activities with the girls whenever they had some free time, such as playing sports in the street (mainly football, a few times basketball and volley), riding a bike, jump rope, going for a walk, playing cards, dancing, singing, playing games such as steal the flingsock, musical chairs, hide and seek, water balloon fight... informal conversation in English, being taught some words in Darija and Berber...

Occasionally I did other activities like helping a little bit with cleaning and the preparation of meals or helping a housemother writing an email in English.

During International Women's Day, I was invited to go to the school, and had the chance to watch different activities (sports, poetry, Koran reciting...), had the chance to meet some teachers, staff and the director, was invited to milk, tea and cookies, and I even got a diploma!

During my three months there, I had the chance to join some activities for the girls like yoga and painting with another volunteer.

I also met and accompanied some visitors, and had the chance to meet Sonia and Juanita, members of EFA.

SUCSESSES, DISAPPOINTMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF YOUR PLACEMENT

SUCSESSES:

I feel the whole placement was a great success. I gave my best, I enjoyed a lot and I received positive feedback from what I did, which feels really good. I am very grateful and happy.

DISAPPOINTMENTS:

it took a while to get timetables. (Note from people and places – whilst the house mothers try very hard to get school time tables as soon as they can – they are at the mercy of state school administrators – who may not be able to provide these as early as we would like them – and they are sometimes subject to change – a frustration we know – but a reality)

CHALLENGES:

It was my first time working with teenagers, and it was a beautiful challenge for me.

Speaking clearly, providing proper and timely information, answering questions (instead of not answering at all or answering something else that was not asked), saying no from the very beginning when something is not possible... looks somehow difficult for many people I met. They may think things are obvious. But being obvious for them doesn't mean they are obvious for others. So communication was a bit hard for me sometimes.

WHAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF YOUR VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE?

It's really difficult to pick just one because the whole experience was absolutely amazing.

That said, and if I am allowed to choose two, I would say:

Being able to get to know the girls to some extent and to see how great they are.

And the opportunity to discover and experience the real sense of Moroccan hospitality, where they share with you not just some of "the leftovers" as many of us do in western countries, but they share what they have, whatever that is.

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

I would definitely recommend volunteering. It's a very enriching experience. Basically I could repeat here all my motivations. I was so lucky all of them were fulfilled. Even the difficulties I had served me very well to learn and grow. Looking forward to coming back.

HOW DID YOU SPEND YOUR LEISURE TIME?

From Monday to Friday I hardly had leisure time, leaving home after breakfast (or a bit later if I stayed home preparing the sessions, once per week) and arriving home for dinner (unless I stayed at the boarding houses for dinner). I sometimes had some dead time during the day but not really free time.

During the holidays I went to Taghazout Beach, in Agadir.

Every weekend was different:

For a couple of weekends I went to Marrakech.

And last weekend I climbed Mount Toubkal.

During the weekends in Asni I used to go for a walk, there are many nice natural places around (river, mountain, more mountain, Moulay Brahim...), go to the Saturday market, prepare the sessions, and just relax.

While in Asni you can also go to hammam, visit Tamgounssi Weaving Centre and Atlas Mineraux shop. In the shop, Mohammed will be happy to talk to you regardless if you buy precious minerals and pottery or not.

You can also go to nearby villages like Imlil, Ouirgane, Moulay Brahim... If you want to go further, you can visit Talat Yacoub, not so easy to get there from Asni, but the mosque it's worth the visit.

HOW WAS YOUR ACCOMMODATION?

I was staying in Riad Villa de l'Atlas. The place was very nice, comfortable and quiet, just what I needed after a good, long busy day. The views of the mountain and the village were spectacular. The food was always plenty and delicious. And, above all, the owners were really friendly, kind... I can't praise them enough. We became family!



ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH FUTURE VOLUNTEERS ABOUT YOUR PLACEMENT

Having a sense of humour, being flexible and patient it's always helpful.

If you are invited to a (private) house, you may find it useful to put bottled water and toilet paper in your bag. (Note from people and places -it is also polite to take a small gift such as sweet pastries or chocolates)

You don't need to eat all they tell you to eat. Eat what you feel like and stop even if they keep telling you ish ish (eat, eat). They will always keep telling you that, so you better say thank you and stop whenever you want ;)

Volunteering during Ramadan? I suggest to take into account two ideas: On one hand for me it was very interesting to see how everything changes, how they live differently and to understand the meaning of this sacred month. And I liked to live this experience a lot. But on the other hand there will be timetable changes (so it may take a while until you get a new timetable and start working with normality) and you may find the girls are very tired and literally falling asleep, so any intended activity with them becomes understandably

hard. Not to mention that the village looks a bit dead... After all, for me it was worth it anyway! But I think it's good to consider that before you decide when to go.

I have to choose one word to describe how you (People and Places) work, I would pick engagement!!! This is not just a matching process and then once the volunteer arrives that's it. You treat the whole process, projects, contact with people... as a dear craft, taking care of so many things, details, and with the clear object of helping everyone succeed, get better, improve, be more efficient, practical... putting all your experience, knowledge, know-how in action, with a perfect blend of brain and heart. You work very efficiently and always answer fast. I had the chance to meet Dianne, and I could see her in action, and I saw how committed she is in doing her best for the sake of the development of the project, and for helping volunteers in whatever we may need. If

Thank you again People and Places, thank you EFA, thank you Hajj and Hajja (riad). Thank you Dianne, I really liked meeting you.



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