

Mithuna K.

During the summer of 2018, I spent a week volunteering at a school near my father's hometown in Tamil Nadu. I was initially apprehensive about instructing a class of middle school students, not much younger than me. However, with my parents' encouragement and support from North South Foundation, I agreed. I taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade students grammar and spelling and in return the students offered to teach me Tamil script. The students were always welcoming, respectful, and enthusiastic. Although I do not fluently speak the native language, the students beautifully accepted me into their community, dissolving the language barriers I had anticipated. I was amazed by how the students collaborated on assignments, shared a passion to learn, and were willing to stay after class to learn more English words. They brought me homegrown fruits and invited me to eat their traditional lunch of rice and sambar. During lunch, we practiced yoga, planted a Neem tree, and participated in activities such as bird watching. My family and I also donated Foldsopes, compact paper microscopes, to the classroom and helped start a book club. On the day I left, we exchanged addresses along with a tearful farewell.

My favorite part of my trip was engaging with the students and learning more about our shared culture. A tip for future ambassadors would be to assess the level of students before you arrive or on the first day so that difficult grammar concepts can be simplified and adapted accordingly. In addition, I would encourage volunteers to incorporate interactive spelling games in between lessons. My experience in India has been extremely rewarding and I look forward to participating in the APNA program once again next summer!





