

## **NSF Youth Ambassador- Prajna Sajjan**

### **Disability Awareness Workshop**

This summer I went on a trip to India and had the amazing opportunity to share my knowledge with kids who live in India with the help of the APNA Ambassador program. My parents heard about APNA through a family friend, as their son had held a workshop about pollution the last time he visited India. When my mom told me about APNA I was really excited to be able to participate and have the opportunity to hold a workshop of my own. After I wrote an essay and submitted my application, I was thrilled to learn that I had been accepted into the program. The next day I called up my uncle and asked if he knew of any schools that I could hold my workshop in. He told me about Pushpa Mahalingappa Residential School, a school near my grandparent's house in Davangere, Karnataka. My uncle suggested this school since it was English and Kannada medium and it would be easier for them to understand my heavy English accent. But they had never had an APNA Ambassador come and hold a workshop there before, so it would be a new experience for everyone. I spent night and days over the course of two-weeks, researching on the topic, preparing and fine tuning my presentation and workshop activities.

Upon reaching India, my uncle helped me to set a meeting with the principal of the school and around a week later, it was time for me to finally meet her. Before I went into the room to meet with the headmistress, I was extremely nervous and actually excited to meet her. During the meeting, I introduced myself to the headmistress and told her about where I had come from as well as explained what the North South Foundation and APNA is all about. I also explained why I was a good candidate for teaching and what my topic was as well as why it was important. The school that I choose went from nursery all the way to college, but the workshop I held was for those who were in 8th grade. They had never learned about disability awareness before so I was really excited to share with them something that they might be completely new to them. Before the meeting, I had prepared a slideshow for two sessions that were each three hour long that I could present to the students. After showing my presentation to the headmistress I was happy to find that she thought that the topic was really good and that she thought that the kids would find it interesting. As I set up the projector and all the supplies that I would need for the day, I started to get really nervous as the school was mainly Kannada medium and they might not be able to understand anything that I say. Even though I know Kannada I still have a heavy english accent that makes it hard for people to understand me and I started to get scared that they won't like me and won't get what I am teaching. However, I didn't let my fear control me and instead I just became even more determined to make sure that my class was great.

On my first day I taught them about what disabilities are, what types of laws there are in India and America, and how they can help to make a difference in people's lives. To start of the

workshop, I played multiple games with the class that were supposed to show what it might be like to have a certain disability and how it would affect your day to day life. The kids all really seemed to enjoy the games as it was easy for them to understand me and it was different from what they would do in all of their other classes. After all the games, I presented them my slideshow and a couple of videos that were related to the topic, at first it was hard for them to fully understand me but as I went on they started to pick up on what I was trying to say. To end off the first day I gave all of the kids a challenge to write down some things that they can do to help improve the lives of those who have a disability. At first, I was slightly worried that they wouldn't write anything down or would only come up with one thing. To my pleasant surprise they kept on asking for more sticky notes and really thought about what they would write. Something that I found slightly strange was that throughout the day the students kept on calling me ma'am and seemed to think that I was a lot older than they were. I told them that they should just call me 'Prajna', but most of the kids would still address me as ma'am. At the end of the class I asked them if they had any questions and they all asked what age I am and what grade I go to. When I told them that I was only in ninth grade and that I am only really their age, they were all super surprised that even though I was their age I spoke with such confidence. Before all of the kids left for the day, I handed out pencils and chocolate to give them a treat for listening to me, and they were all very happy that they could get a break from their normal classes and come to a fun and interactive learning environment.

The second and last day that I held my workshop I had a presentation and a Jeopardy prepared for the entire eighth grade. I started off by asking everyone how they are and that they should have hopefully been paying attention yesterday because at the end of the workshop I would be splitting them into multiple teams, and they would have to compete in a game. This got the kids all really excited and I noticed that as I showed them the rest of my presentation, they tended to ask more questions than before and everyone was really paying attention. They all participated in the discussion and contributed to what I was saying. After the slideshow was over, I split the class into five different groups and explained to them the rules of the game. Everyone was very excited to be there and were all super competitive when it came to who listened the most and who knew what. The game was going so well that I had accidentally crossed over the three-hour mark and it was now time for them to head to lunch. Sad and slightly disappointed, I told the class that it was late and that we would not be able to finish the rest of the game. To my great surprise and happiness, they started to ask if they could skip lunch and just stay here and finish the game, heading to lunch after. After that we were able to finish the entire game and I handed out prizes for all of the teams to take home as well as some bags for the teachers, which I had bought using some donations from my family and friends. Before saying bye to all of the kids I gave them my email address so that they could contact me if they had any questions. Something that the entire class said to me, was that I should come back next year and

teach ninth grade so that they could see me again. Overall this was an incredible experience and I hope that I can do it once again next year.

