

## KANIKA THAKUR NSF APNA VOLUNTEER

I would have never dreamed of stepping foot in a school in another country let alone teaching there. However, this summer I conquered my fears and found myself teaching English to a class full of exclusively Hindi speaking kids. I was skeptical in the beginning when my mother told me about the North South Foundation program (NSF), which encourages high schoolers in the US to help out at public schools in India by volunteering to teach the kids during vacation. Under the guidance of Mr. Gade and Mrs. Puttaraju, the support of my grandfather, and the school staff of Janata high school(Nagpur, Maharashtra), I taught English spelling words to a bunch of very excited seventh graders. This golden opportunity helped the kids learn English and enhanced my confidence.



No way was I going back to any school in my summer vacation. However, reading the testimonials of others encouraged me to volunteer. Overcoming my anxiety, I made lesson plans for all five days that I was going to teach. Elaborate

planning included agenda to approach the school principal and staff about my plans, seeking their permission, teaching prefixes and suffixes to the students and concluding with a special spelling bee. Introducing me to the kids and learning about them was the fun part, teaching them was challenging. After the first day of cooperation, the kids became very comfortable becoming too difficult to teach. It helped when I introduce a small break after 30 minutes of the lesson. I showed them pictures of my vacation to have them freshen up. My fluency in Hindi came in handy during explaining them the meaning of base words, prefixes and suffixes as well as just having a friendly conversation with them.



Amazingly, the learning took place both ways. I learned more about India, Indian education and culture. These children came from impoverished homes, their education, uniform and meals were free. Some of the kids were not able to afford a pair of slippers, let alone a book or backpack. Nevertheless, they were a smart, energetic and most importantly the most curious bunch of kids. Having

fewer enrollments at the whole school, most classes were combined and I had to learn to accommodate 50 kids of ages 9 to 11. Questions came both ways about daily life, school life, hobbies, interests and goals of life. Learning about the financial and social difficulties these kids face while enrolling to school, left me heartbroken and made me feel thankful for everything I have. On the other hand, learning about the scholarships NSF can provide for their future education, made their eyes twinkle with hope. The little ones always enjoyed looking at pictures of Europe during break time. By the end of five days, I emerged as a successful teacher and they succeeded in learning new vocabulary. Holding a spelling bee and appreciating the winners while congratulating each participant was the icing on the cake of a wonderful experience. All of us took away the experience of cultural immersion, fun of working together and confidence of a lifetime. The school was kind to hand me a letter of recommendation and asked me to visit them on my next India trip.



I will never forget my little friends and this experience I have shared with them. I am astonished by the excitement they had, the efforts they put in learning a fairly new language and the cooperation they gave me in teaching them. Heartfelt thanks to my grandfather, NSF, the school principal and staff as well as my special bunch of new friends who enabled me to have this opportunity of a lifetime.

