

ProjectsAbroad™

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Volunteer Story by Etienne De Lean

It all started on New Year's Eve with my wish to discover a foreign country through humanitarian work. My first idea was to teach my own mother language, French, in an Asian country. I also contacted Projects Abroad after some research on the Internet. We discussed the availabilities, and rapidly I choose to come to Ulaanbaatar as I was very interested to discover Mongolian culture and people, which is not very well known in France. Sadly nobody there seemed to want to learn French (maybe things will change after my departure), but my English was judged sufficiently fluent to become an English teacher. Therefore four months later I was travelling to Ulaanbaatar.

There, I discovered the boiling capital city of Mongolia under the last snowy days of winter. I was picked up at the airport by the staff of Projects Abroad and lead to my host family, a nice couple of pediatrics and their 11 year old son. Then I started the day after with a pleasant introduction to my placement and to the city by my project manager. We were two volunteers teaching English to the children of four kindergartens.

Work was actually very simple as the schools follow a well-adapted English method with pictures, stories, CDs and DVDs. Children from 3 to 6 listen to English for at least 1 hour per day. During the rest of the day I tried to do my best helping the teachers with drawings, games and stories or taking care of the kids during the meal times.

During my free time I had the chance to discover the city and its museums, or the countryside with my host family, especially during a family weekend at the grandparents, sleeping under the ger and partying for two days.



I also participated in the social events organized by Projects Abroad with the other volunteers as an English course with disabled children, a traditional dance course with a local choreographer, a game afternoon with students or a renovation day, painting the classroom for disabled students of one of the schools. We were around twelve volunteers from all around the world during this month and I had great time discussing with them about their personal projects and impressions.



Ulaanbaatar is an incredible city, everywhere under construction, where local citizens from the whole country converge for studies or work. Brand new fashioned young people also meet here the old ones wearing traditional clothes or travelers looking for adventures by taking the bus by themselves. People here are very nice and welcoming and they rapidly discovered that I was a huge fan of their wonderful cooking. That's how I became during a month in my life a "barcha" (teacher) in Ulaanbaatar.

Professional social worker makes a difference as a volunteer in Mongolia.

Hilde Kuipers, a 23-year-old social pedagogic worker from Eindhoven, Netherlands, wanted to work in her profession as a volunteer abroad. By choosing the PRO Program with Projects Abroad Mongolia, she fulfilled her plan to work with women and children who have been violated and make a difference in the social work field in Mongolia.

As a professional social worker she wanted to make her own contribution in this field when she was volunteering somewhere. Pretty much everywhere in the world she couldn't find the job that she liked best, but she never would have envisioned herself fulfilling her dream and gaining the valuable experience in a faraway land.

Hilde's first placement was at the shelter house for women and children who have been violated against. "I did practically everything that I wanted to do. I spent much time on trying to become friends by teaching children English, through games, and organizing drawing time with them. I noticed that all these creative therapies helped the children to be open instead of being shy and express what was bothering them. I was very happy that my attempt was successful to implement the creative therapy mode in the shelter house."



“My second placement was at the “Onol Arga” NGO, a social work group. At first I started to write a paper about drug addiction, how to treat drug problems and if somebody was addicted how to get them clean. The aim of my paper was to introduce how we work in the Netherlands with that kind of problem and give some proposals for social work groups and NGOs that can help to get the company bigger and start new projects by implementing them into their work,” she explained.

explained.

She got a chance to visit different social work organizations and get to know how they work. Based on her visits at different places and her work experience at both shelter house and Onol Arga NGO, she wrote a paper about differences between social work in the Netherlands and social work in Mongolia.

After she finished those papers she was asked to teach at two different Universities. She had three lessons in a week and taught about addictions and the ways they cope with these problems in the Netherlands. She said that this was the most rewarding experience for her.

“I feel like I am a heroine here. In the Netherlands, I never could have dreamed about teaching at the University, because it is impossible for people my age to do. It was a really valuable and helpful experience for my future career. I did so many things that I wouldn’t be able to do back home.

Hilde found her time in Mongolia to be mutually beneficial and recommends the programme to other professional social workers. “I feel really appreciated for everything that I have done and hope that I gave something back. All the things I’ve done and experienced were not only helpful to me, but also for Mongolia,” she mentioned.

Moreover, Hilde organized cooking lesson for the women at the shelter house. “Activities like cooking, playing and drawing together helped build friendships with them. If you can convince yourself that you are there to help them through those creative therapies, they will be easily connected with you. I am so happy with my volunteer service in Mongolia and to be a social worker.”

Hilde advises people that they can make a difference in social work in Mongolia as a volunteer. “You can be a great help through your work and the knowledge that you have, it doesn’t matter, just bring what you have and take every opportunity you get. Then you can make great contribution.”



“Besides my work, I experienced a totally new culture, while I was living with my Mongolian host family. They were really generous to me and treated me as their own family member and I learned to love Mongolian food.”

After her 3 months' worthwhile experience in Mongolia, Hilde says, “The smallest things you accomplish can be the biggest.”

We hope great stories like this inspire others to help Projects Abroad continue to make difference and by doing so, learn themselves along the way.



Korean gap year student Moon Jee Kim gains a unique experience volunteering with disabled children in Mongolia.

22-year-old media student Moon Jee Kim, from Seoul, South Korea, decided to take time off during her holiday to volunteer. After having already worked with disabled people, Moon Jee wanted to help disabled children in Mongolia. Eager to fulfill her plan she signed up with Projects Abroad, one of the world's largest volunteer abroad organizations, and was placed at the Kindergarten and Nursing Complex for Disabled Children #10.

The Kindergarten and Nursing Complex for Disabled Children is a home for children suffering from a wide range of disabilities for children aged two to seven years old. Monday to Friday, Moon Jee worked from 9:00am to 5:00pm in a class of children aged two to three years old. Some of her tasks included playing with children, feeding them, as well as helping teachers organize art class. “We didn't have any lesson curriculum compared with other classes due to the age of children in our class. We just tried to help the children get used to holding pens or learning how to stick colored papers with glue,” explained Moon Jee.



There are not many care takers, only two teachers for 10 children in one class. Therefore, volunteers are really appreciated and they are able to give children the individual attention that they need, while providing them with new knowledge. "When I began my project, I was so surprised! I was worried that they wouldn't like me and didn't expect the children to love me and be happy to have me. I tried to care for all the children individually and be next to them every time they hit their heads or fell down."

"One of the most rewarding experiences for me was the time we organized the sport contests between all the children in the kindergarten. It was really nice to see they were having a great time with their parents, family members and teachers. Also, I taught a dance routine for the competition and we all performed a Gangnam style dance. It was so impressive to see how much they enjoyed it when they participated in this activity, even though they were hindered by their disabilities-

whether it was walking or speaking impairments. All those things have been such valuable experiences for me and will be very helpful for my future."

Now at the end of her project, Moon Jee encourages others to come to Mongolia and make a difference for the children. "Most of the children have speech impairments. They need more classes to



improve their speaking abilities and education. Before I began my project, many people said: "You are not a professional teacher or nurse. So you can learn from them more than you help. But there were a lot more things that I could help them with to improve. As I said, there is no lesson curriculum (i.e.: Monday- Origami, Tuesday- Cooking). If volunteers want to organize some classes, it will be appreciated and will be a great help for the children,"

Moon Jee had found the little things the most rewarding: when the children wanted to play with her or asked to have a hug from her all the time. There was a little boy in my class and he was a bit of a trouble maker and always fought with other kids. After working with him to improve his behavior, things got better. The children are very smart and have much potential to grow, something which can be seen through this little boy's example,"



After having spent one month in Mongolia, Moon Jee says: "Because of my time here, I now have motivation to travel all over the world and learn more things. I am so honored to have had this opportunity to work with teachers at the kindergarten and show my passion for helping kids. I already miss them and will keep helping as much as I can, no matter where in the world I may be."

"Planting Trees" Dirty Day Activity

Last Friday, in 15th of May, all the Projects Abroad volunteers participated in the Planting Trees Dirty Day activity. We hope that we did a good deal for the children at the local kindergarten through this activity. There is a saying; "Planting one tree increases your age to hundred years," it shows the importance of planting trees and make contributions in our environment. Projects Abroad Mongolia Team is grateful for all of the Volunteer's hard work.

We all met in front of the State Department Store at 10am and headed to the Kindergarten by bus, the main public transportation in Mongolia. Everybody was so excited that we were doing a good deal for the environment and turned to the work energetically.

I thought digging the holes was the most difficult part of our work and it took almost half the day. As we were not professional gardeners, it was bit hard to make perfect tree holes firstly. However, we did great with the help of a lady who was a professional gardener.

Everybody was so into it and tried to plant the trees accurately which was so impressive. Some of the volunteers gave the name for the tree that they planted and it was clear that they were happy to do this.

We all hope those trees that we planted will grow beautifully and strongly in the future.



