

## **Bighelp for Education Post Internship Report**

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**Date: June 29-30, 2017**

It was late June, in a small town called Basavanapalli, when I completed my Bighelp Youth Internship at Zilla Parishad High School (ZPHS). Little did I know it at the time, but this experience would prove to be eye-opening. During this internship, I was given the opportunity to engage in conversation with Indian kids my age about school, culture and life in general. I held three workshops with the kids where I taught them about the environment and pollution, how to make origami paper cranes, and how to create friendship bands. Before I get into further details, let me first set the scene by describing the school.

Zilla Parishad High School is a government school with grades 6-12. It is located in Basavanapalli, a small town in the district of Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh. There, it gets very hot during the summer and monsoon seasons and consequently it draws lots of mosquitoes. The village is known for its Lord Shiva temple and Nandi statue. The reason I chose to do my internship here is because my grandmother's family lives nearby. ZPHS starts off as Telugu medium and then switches to English medium by grade 10. Each grade has a different number of sections depending on the number of kids. In 10th grade, there are three sections: A, B and C. For my internship I was able to interact with section A of 10th graders, which consisted of around 40 kids. As for the campus of the school, as soon as you entered you would find yourself in front of the headmistress's office and the administration building of the school. Then, there was a huge open space where kids would gather to eat lunch, play and sometimes even listen to lectures. A long strip of classrooms surrounded this area, almost bordering it. The school started to grow on me: it was quaint, welcoming, and charming with so many smiling faces dressed in uniforms.

When we, my mom, uncle and I, first entered through the school gates in a bright orange Nissan car, I remember every kid in the school had their eyes on us. It was as if everything they were doing just stopped and

they all turned to look at us. I saw a wide spectrum of emotions ranging from curiosity to excitement. I will admit at first I was a bit nervous to come to the school; I didn't know how the kids would react to an American girl. The uncertainty plagued me, but after seeing them anxiously waiting for me all my doubts melted away. Soon, we were greeted and ushered into the headmistress's office.

The headmistress explained the logistics of the internship briefly and mentioned how all the kids were so eager to meet me. She proposed that I give my introduction speech to the whole 10th grade instead of one section. All the nervousness came rushing back. I had to speak in front of around 150 kids that were my age. Nevertheless, I agreed and found myself speaking for two hours to these kids about my life and their life. I don't regret it one bit. I enjoyed hearing about how, like me, these kids also liked playing outside and watching tv. I learned how the government provides them with food, books and uniforms. Even though I go to a public (government) school, I do not get free food, books and clothes, so I found this quite intriguing. Another difference I found was that students don't have to switch classrooms between classes, the teachers do. At most schools in America, the kids are tasked with moving around the building to get to their next class, which can be very difficult when the weather is harsh or classrooms are far away. I was surprised to hear these kids stayed in the same classroom all day. They have basically the same classes I do: English, Math, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Social. Through talking with them, I realized we have so much more in common than I would have ever imagined. I mean, they live halfway across the world from me, speak a different language, and yet they are more similar to me than some people in America. In the two and half hours that ended up flying by, we discussed many topics like currency, government, school, leisure activities, sports, seasons and festivals. Since there wasn't enough room for everyone in one classroom, we all were conversing outside. With me at the front was my mom, uncle and a couple other teachers who wanted to listen too. I spoke mostly English with some Telugu mixed in. Although sometimes language became an issue, the teachers and my family were willing to

reiterate what I said so the kids could understand. The kids explained to me how they grew up speaking Telugu just like everyone else in the town, so they never felt the need to speak in English with their peers. I could relate to this because for me it was just the opposite. I had grown up speaking English and on a daily basis there was no real necessity for me to speak Telugu, so I didn't. That is just another way we were more alike than I thought.

After I had given my two and half hour introductory speech, the sections split off and I would host workshops with the section 10A. The kids were so kind; they brought chairs to the front of the room, they taped my banner behind me and placed a desk in front of me without even being asked! When I entered, all of the kids stood up and said, "Good Morning" with big smiles on their faces. I was stunned by the gesture of respect. I told them to sit down and to treat me like a friend, not a teacher. For the rest of the day I led the class in making an origami crane. Origami is the Japanese art form of paper folding. Legend has it that if you make one thousand paper cranes, you can make any wish you truly desire and it will come true. I started off by handing out instruction sheets so that the kids could make more at home. Later, I passed out the origami sheets. Then, I showed them step by step how to make the crane, stopping if anyone had doubts or questions. All kids tried eagerly and made sincere efforts to follow my instructions and I could see everyone holding beautiful different colored cranes at the end of the session! I handed out the remaining origami sheets to anyone that wanted them and I also gave them instructions on how to make an origami ninja star. The next day I was pleasantly surprised to see almost everybody had attempted it and wanted to show me.

The next morning kids came up to me with gifts from home like earrings, paper crafts, bracelets, flowers, keychains and more. I was moved by their kind gestures. They were all so sweet and I thanked them endlessly! I talked to the kids about our environment, pollution, the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) etc. We talked about the three types of pollution, why it is important to save our environment and what we can do to end

pollution. The kids all told me that most of them bike to school, not many kids in America I know bike to school. Following my 30 minute lecture about this, I had a short 10 question quiz. I told them that at the end I would collect and grade the quizzes and give prizes to the top 3 scores. I allowed them 30 minutes to take the quiz, during this time I was preparing for the next activity, friendship bracelets. Starting the activity, I explained that friendship bracelets are a way to show you care about the other person and that they are your friend. Many kids in America like to make these bands and distribute them to their friends. Making friendship bands took a very long time for most of the kids to understand, which was inevitable because it is quite a complicated process. I started by explaining and demonstrating to small clusters of kids how to make them; I moved around the classroom doing this. I also handed out instructions with pictures so kids could understand. Even then, some kids were still confused, but other kids picked it up very quickly and then taught it to more kids. Eventually most people understood how to make them. It felt great to teach these kids and they were so happy when they figured out how to make these bands. At the end of the activity, I handed out chocolates and the remaining strings. One girl worked very hard to complete her band and insisted that I have it and she tied it on my wrist. I told her to keep and treasure it but she remained adamant, I thanked her for her compassion as she tied the knot to secure it. To this day, I still wear the band to remind me of this experience.

Unfortunately the day had to come to a close. We donated \$300 for the school to develop. I handed out 40 backpacks to all of the kids and gave prizes to the top scorers from the environment quiz. On the quiz the majority of the kids scored a 6.5/10 or above. The top scores were 10/10, 9.5/10 and 9/10. Next, some teachers and the headmistress spoke very kind words about me. Then, I thanked them and the school for this wonderful opportunity and handed them American flags for them to keep. After all the speeches, kids rushed up to me asking me for my email, phone number, whatsapp, facebook etc. I was filled with happiness; these kids wanted to stay in contact with me and I had only known them for two days. Now, some of them are friends with me on Facebook. Their compassion

never failed to surprise me! Eventually, kids started asking for my autographs and to take pictures with me. I felt like a celebrity.

This experience was truly amazing. These kids have so much more in common with me than I thought. They may come from poorer backgrounds than me, but they still have the same capacity to love and learn. The kids were nothing but supportive and sweet. The kids taught me that all humans may not be born into the same circumstances, but all humans have the ability and potential to be caring, kind and compassionate. I learned about India's schooling system and how to effectively get your point across to a large group of people. I got a sense, firsthand, of how many schools around India are run. I could see the love and sense of community the school has built for these kids and it is something I will always cherish. It felt great to teach these kids and talk about our lives, whether it be differences or similarities. I hope they will remember this experience for the rest of their lives just like I know I will.

This internship would not have been possible without my parents who arranged this whole trip and helped me with my scripts and my uncle who drove us all the way from Bengaluru to ZPHS. Anjani aunty, Rekha aunty, Anitha aunty and Madhavi aunty who edited all my material and tirelessly listened to all my speeches. I would like to thank Chand uncle, the founder of Bighelp, for this opportunity. Also, I would like to thank the headmistress and guide teachers of the school for allowing me to come in and spend time with the students. Last but not least I want to thank all the students for being so enthusiastic about this project!

## Pictures









