

Projects Abroad

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Julie De Lazzer spends one of the greatest travels of her life with Projects Abroad at a teaching project in Mongolia

25-year-old Julie de Lazzer from Paris wanted to travel abroad, while at the same time experiencing new things through involving and integrating herself in a different culture. She thought volunteering would be the best way to do this as she could meet different people and experience local life first-hand rather than traveling simply as a tourist.

As she had always been interested in traveling to Mongolia, Julie decided to embark on a one month volunteer journey with the Projects Abroad Teaching Project in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Julie's placement was at School #13, a state school which provides education to children in the western part of the city including the 'ger' district of this area. As a volunteer, Julie had full responsibility for planning and teaching the lessons and for monitoring the progress of the students. Some of her duties consisted of preparing and planning lessons on a wide variety of topics, including grammar and conversation, teaching classes from Grades 6 - 11 and encouraging students to participate fully in the classes.

"I learned that it's really difficult to be a teacher but the experience with these children is really priceless because I laughed a lot and they are very enthusiastic. There was such a connection between us and I succeeded to catch their attention and we had so much fun."

Julie also was able to teach English to medical students in Etugen University twice a week. "I don't really know at the moment that how useful my experience will be in my future. But I am sure that it will be one of the most important travels of my life. Life here is so different. I think I'm going to see my own life in France with a new perspective and always keep a lot of memories of this trip. The benefit is more personal than professional for me."





A truly rewarding experience for Julie was when she was able to see her students' progress in their participation in her lessons: "I tried to organize a play performance with my 14-year-old students. At the beginning they were not really convinced, but after a few tries they really enjoyed it and asked me for another play during the next lesson. It was a big reward for me to see them performing and taking pictures and videos of themselves as it was their first experience on stage!"

After having spent one month in Mongolia, Julie advises future volunteers: "If it's for a teaching experience, I think that you don't have to come thinking that you are going to teach them perfect English and that they will remember it. But just enjoy it and share a great moment with them."

Aside from her volunteering work, Julie enjoyed living with a Mongolian host family and experiencing Mongolian culture: "There are a lot of differences between our cultures. People are really shy, but at the same time, strangers in the bus or in cafés, come to you and ask if they can practice their English

with you. It can be very funny but people are so kind." Other activities she participated in included spending time with other volunteers, visiting interesting places in UB city, traveling to the beautiful Mongolian countryside and attending events organized by Projects Abroad.

"It was really great to socialize with other volunteers. I think that it's really helpful to spend time with other volunteers; because you can compare and share your experience and feelings with people who're living in a same situation and understand what you're feeling."

"All in all, I think that volunteering is a different way to discover the world. You can see a lot of stuff in the world but you are always a kind of tourist, as if you stay on the right side of the gate while the locals are on the left. With this kind of project, you're involved in the routine and you experience the local life firsthand and that's the most exciting part of it."



Appleby College students from Ontario gain valuable life experience while volunteering in Mongolia



In March 2014, a group of 14 students from Appleby College in Ontario embarked on a 2 week service project with Projects Abroad in Mongolia.

As service work is a big part of the Appleby's program and participation in international service projects is highly encouraged, every year the school organizes travel tours to different countries around the world. Having already worked with Projects Abroad Mongolia in 2009, they thought it was time to return and experience another adventure.

The group of volunteers included 14 Appleby College students (all 16 years old) led by 2 teachers; and were placed at the State Orphanage, a home for over one hundred orphaned children ages from 6-18. Throughout their stay the students helped to teach English to the children at the orphanage and renovated a room to be used for carpentry and life skill lessons. They also helped to paint a fence outside the orphanage building and performed English and Mongolian songs, plays and dances with the local students. "I think that the work we did in Mongolia definitely met our expectations and there was a nice balance between English teaching and construction work. The project allowed students to step outside of their comfort zone and try things they've never done before," says Zeverey Harris, one of the teachers who chaperoned the students during their trip.

She continued: "I think it was brand new for everybody. Nobody plastered before or painted. So, it was definitely nice to see them trying activities that they would not usually be exposed to at home. The students truly started to appreciate where they come from and their family situation. For them to see and interact with children at the orphanage was a very different experience, especially as we don't have orphanages at home. It was great to interact with students and create those bonds with them."

Aside from their mission - teaching English and construction work at the orphanage, the Appleby students were eager to help not only at the orphanage but also within the local community too. They gave donations to families including a 54-year-old single mother with 5 children from a disadvantaged background living in a very rural area of Ulaanbaatar. They donated food, clothes and school supplies.

The Appleby students' contributions at the State Orphanage and to the Mongolian community certainly did not go unnoticed and Projects Abroad thanks them for their dedication and eagerness. Although only spending a short time in Mongolia, the students completed their service project with much to share:

"I learned the value of having family, friends and a group of good people supporting you; sometimes not all kids have that necessarily. I also learned the value of education, because they were so excited and eager to learn English. It was refreshing to see how the kids were so enthusiastic about it. Everything that I've learned I am going to carry with me for a very long time. It was so rewarding actually seeing the difference we have made for the children." Lauren Torrie



"I learned value of compassion and how little act can make like today the girls came up to me and they had made cards and little letters for me. It meant so much to me and I think it's the little acts of kindness that meant most. It was one of the meaningful, adventurous and impactful trips I've ever been on and it meant a lot to me." Lauren Brady

"I learned that there are a lot of different cultures and ways of life that are very different from each other and they all work or going at the same time. I learned there is many different ways to do things and there's not just the one way you know how to do it from where you from. It was the most fun but also rewarding experience that I've ever had and the interaction with my group and the people in Mongolia was something that I'll always remember." D'Arcy Cantlon

"I learned importance of having a mentor and how much I really owed to my mentor. Because, it's about of who you become and it is apparently because of them. The orphans relied so much on their friends for support and everything. I really took step back and looked at the friends I have and realized how important they really are in my life." It was a life changing and very valuable experience and I'm going to remember it for a long time. Now I can't to be a father. But I wish I was age of. So I could adopt some of the kids. Yes, I'm always going to look back at this trip and how great experience it was and how much fun it was." Breckon Young



"From this journey I learned that I should appreciate the people that have in my life more often. Because, I just have really busy life with tons of things to do. But I think I should take more moments and just remember and appreciate those things. Also I made so many memories such as interacting with the kids through the dance and performances we did together and I really don't want to leave right now. It was one of the best two weeks in my life." Sheyenne Chapman

"I learned that no matter and how much you contribute- something small, something big, it's always appreciated by the people. No matter what you do they will always be thankful what you have done. I'm really happy and glad that I joined this group. This journey encouraged me to be more appreciative of everything, take risks and try new things. There are no words to describe how amazing this trip was." Noor Alaali

"It was intense both working with the kids and the construction work. But it was also rewarding. This is my first service project and now I feel more be able to do this more. I really do think it will make a difference in my future." Aysegul Alpay

Apart from their service work, the students were also able to get involved in a lot of activities which gave them the opportunity to experience Mongolian culture first-hand such as making their own traditional felt slippers under the guidance of the life- skills teacher at the orphanage, learning Mongolian folktales by doing performances with the children, seeing a Mongolian traditional concert, visiting traditional markets, karaoke evenings, visiting museums and traveling to the Chinggis Khan statue and Terelj National Park.

"I definitely think that we met Appleby's goal coming to Mongolia through the interaction with children at the orphanage, through the team work that Appleby students had to develop while working construction and taking leadership positions and having to take initiative. I definitely think that the goal was met. They learned a lot about themselves and others through these types of educational experiences," said Ms. Zevery Harris.

After their 2 week adventure in Mongolia, the students' advice for future volunteers interested in coming to Mongolia would be to come with an open mind and not have too many expectations; just take things as they come, enjoy everything and don't hold back. If you worry too much, you're not going to fully experience trip to its potential.



"It was pretty impactful – just seeing how happy all those orphans were and sometimes I think to myself that I want something or I need something but I don't really need it. They don't really have much. But they're just happy with what they have. I felt that we're so much fortunate and we are always wanting more. But they don't really have anything and they are always happy. The individual relationship between me and two kids I taught were so impactful. I think they're going to keep with them and I know I'm gonna keep with myself. When I get back home I'll still remember our time in classroom." Gregory Bobesich

"I definitely think that it was something that I not only benefited from but I learned from. I feel like through pretty much everything we did I got either see something new, learn something new or speak to someone that I'd not ever got chance to speak with, if we're back in Canada." Brooke Arkell



"My most memorable moment was probably doing dance with kids. Because, they all were very excited and it's something that you both enjoyed and you had common ground. The friendship I made with a lot of kids was the best experience. Mongolia was a lot of fun and we learned a lot about the country and ourselves." Natalie Miller

"I learned how hard to be a teacher. Trying to teach kids and control them was sometimes really hard. I gained so much respect for teachers and my teachers at school. This trip was unimaginable and special for me. I will remember everything on this trip." Melanie Greenwood

"It was very memorable moment when the little girl gave me a bracelet and gave me really a big hug. That just meant a lot to me. It showed that we were here for two weeks but we made a difference in their lives." Benjamin Hurst

"This experience taught me to appreciate little things and gave me a whole different perspective of how other people live their lives. I learned so many skills like team work, to come out of my shell and to know more about whole community. One of the so many highlights of the trip is when we did Hoky Poky with the children. Because, it really showed the connection between Canadian side and Mongolian side and kids' enthusiasm and big smiles on their faces while doing the Hoky Poky was the best thing for me. This trip was an eye-opening and I wouldn't change anything." Emma Tomlinson

"I definitely proud of myself. I feel accomplished that I stepped out of my comfort zone. Keeping an open mind, I made a lot of friends here. I will definitely always remember this trip as positive thing in my life that helped to ship who I am in away and being more patient and open minded." Jessica Lobo



Professional social worker Celine Castel gains worthwhile experience in Journalism while volunteering in Mongolia

30-year-old Celine Castel from the Netherlands had always had a desire to work in the field of journalism. After working with people with mental illness in the social work industry for eight years, Celine decided that she wanted to finally discover more about journalism and experience a new challenge.

As she had always been fascinated by its rich history, unique culture and nomad lifestyle and gearing up to begin her studies in Journalism in the fall, Celine chose to travel to Mongolia and embarked on a 2 month long journey: volunteering with the Journalism Project in Mongolia.

"I have been working with people who have mental illness as a professional social worker for many years. Over the past few years I have not only experienced a lot but also dedicated so much of myself into my job. So I decided to learn about a different profession and challenge myself in a new field."

Celine's placement was at Royal HD TV, a socioeconomic television network that aims to support people who have talent but fewer opportunities. Some of her work included research on new achievements and technology solutions in the field of journalism and providing information that can be implemented into TV, helping to exchange content experience with TV stations in the Netherlands, preparing the world and entertainment news and making contact with Dutch charity organizations to participate in a program about disabled people.

"This experience allowed me to gain more understanding about journalism and how a TV station works in Mongolia. With this project, I could see what TV journalism really means, how it works and if it is the right fit for me." With this experience under her belt, Celine is looking forward to beginning her studies in journalism and believes that the knowledge she has gained in Mongolia will be beneficial in the future.

Celine also had the chance to arrange a small class and teach English at her placement outside of her work tasks. "It was rewarding because I got to know Mongolian people and make more friends at the same time; and I was able to improve my English and practice more."

She continued: "I think traveling as a volunteer has many more benefits than traveling only a tourist. Because you can experience a different culture, a different way of living and many different people firsthand by living with a host family and working as a team member of an organization. When you are traveling you don't get those opportunities as easily or interact with locals that much."

"My most memorable experience was getting to know Mongolian people. Especially, the times when I was socializing with my colleagues, knowing them and having such nice memories of them."

After having spent 2 months in Mongolia, Celine advises future volunteers: "In the beginning most Mongolians are shy. Give them the time to open up and don't hesitate to approach first. If you have problems with something, let Project Aboard know, they are very helpful."

"All in all it was such a great experience. I learned how Mongolian people live and what differences we have but also what we have in common. Most importantly, I achieved my purpose to experience a new challenge and a new profession."

