

By Edith Farago, Romania – March Team 2009, at the moment working in the Academy for Working Children, Jaipur, Malviya Nagar

My dear team, dear all!

When I arrived I got to know what it means: culture shock. The feeling is amazing. It is like finding suddenly yourself in a bad and old movie and you cannot make yourself feel you are really taking part of it. It takes time until you can realize that it is true.



It is one thing to see it on some pictures or to hear about, and another to see with your own eyes. My first impressions were that all it looks like after a war, full of damaged buildings (ruins), a lot of garbage, poverty, homeless people on the streets around a fire with some animals like cows, some very skinny and dirty dogs, pigs and so on. Everything full of smog, extremely crazy traffic, always pushing their horn, everything very loud, around 3-5 vehicles beside each other on the same road, with many and very big contrasts between wealth and poverty and on the top you can never hide or to be alone - most of the time because you are always on their

focus because you're white. You cannot cross the street "invisible". It is impossible. Do not even dream about it. Some of them just stop front of you in 2 meter distance and just look at you and check you with big smile or making some different faces. They want to know about you, they try to get in touch with you in many different ways and if you are going to some tourist places or city centre they just want to cheat you because (my feeling was) they see you like a bag full with money. I felt myself like in the cartoons when the wolf can see in the goats or chickens only tasty and fried food (MEAT! MONEY!). Many times these things can be funny but also very annoying and in spite of all these you are so lonely...

On the other side you can find many nice people who are full of energy and spirituality, open to the world and very very curious and full of love of the life. Many times my feeling is that they are happier with their life than we with our "production spirit" concentrating only on the goods and material things. India is so colorful!). They are so thankful even for a smile... :) I am already afraid to leave all of this soon. Soon because the time is slipping away so quickly.

I am working in the AWC (Academy for Working Children), Jaipur, Malviya Nagar. The purpose of this project is to provide free education and contribute to development in slum areas. The children are so lovely and of course naughty as well:)). My main tasks are in the morning time to



visit and teach in the Satellites and after Lunch to produce teaching materials. I like so much the children BUT we have a very big problem, let's say challenge. We do not understand each other. They don't speak English and I don't speak Hindi except for a few words, very basic which is not enough. Most of the time I don't get a translator and they just take me into the class and tell me "Teach!" I do not have to say that after max 10 minutes it is getting chaotic!!! You feel yourself so tired like after a week and I'm speaking about 2-3 hours. I like to be with them and I try to push always teachers to translate for me, but also for them is difficult to be in two spaces in the same time.

I have started to focus on the teachers and I would like to work with parents as well. There are many points in which they need help. I was speaking with them about how we are all examples in front of children and everybody else. With our behavior, habits - with our life we can teach people very much and help developing. I do not think that they have understood. Their English is not as good and many of them do not force themselves to try to speak with me all the time in English.

There are too many problems/challenges where I see it needs to be done something. I tried to start some short meetings with them early in the mornings (who knows me know that this is almost impossible for me, I mean to get up early in the morning) where I could hold some presentations, speaking about the problems in the Satellites, to get them to speak and think about it and that we can follow the new tasks that they are getting from Humana. But even they are always busy they do not get from one step to the next. They are teaching the children even after 2-4 months still the ABC in English and many of them they still do not know it and it is the same with other classes like Hindi, Math and General Knowledge. We tried to find a new system for the homework and correcting it through using two notebooks/class/child that teacher can write into one of the notebooks the homework after classes preparing for the next day and correct it also not including the teaching time to do not waste time (usually it takes about 1-1,5 hours and they have classes from 9 am till 12:30). They should change always those notebooks. Since the idea until just buying the new notebooks it took about 2 weeks and not because of the money. It still needs a few days to distribute them among children and maybe more few days or even a week to get used to that teacher and even children because here everything is going more slowly. This is just an example so you can understand better the situation.



I am very happy even for small successes. For ex. the alimentation is not the best. They are eating very one-sided and of course a lot of chili, chili and chili. Many of the teachers have/had some health problem like weakness, headache or even fever. One of them quite on the beginning was complaining to me many times and I gave him some protein powder with vitamins and minerals. In the evening time he came to me very happily saying that he had not anymore headache. Before he had it for days or maybe for weeks. This I do not know exactly why. But the next day we went together to buy for him as well one of this protein powder and since that he takes it daily.

I mentioned already that here everything is so dirty and also teachers they do not care to throw away rest of food or paper or even just to spit inside in that house where we live. Incredible. Once I got really angry and I tried to explain for 2 of them with a small story why we have to take responsibility for our Earth and that we cannot just throw anything away where we ever just want it. Of course we were discussing little bit but more in a joking way. They were asking me very ironic if I want to change whole India?! I said why not! 2 days later I went to teach English with one of those teachers. First he was telling something in Hindi to the students. I really understand just a few words in Hindi and it helps me many times the body language, I understood what he was talking about. Exactly the same story when we were “discussing” about why we have to keep clean our environment. I have planted the seed in his mind:)))) I am so HAPPY! And I'm going to also help this seed to grow.

I have some plan for how to improve one of our slum schools. There the conditions are really bad and because I have to be very diplomatic and I do not want waste time I'm trying to get permission and support from the right person about who I know is practical man and wants changes soon as possible.

One of the children, a little boy around 4-5 years old from the same Satellite had a very bad open wound on his foot. It got infected. First I met him in the beginning of November. He had the wound already and we gave first aid with the teacher from the Satellite and we hoped that he will come for the Health Checkup Day what we have organized for a few days later. On this program more doctors came to check the children's and people's health of the community and give treatment in case and the school provided the medicines. BUT that boy didn't come. Then it passed more weeks and we didn't see him in the school.



A few days ago he appeared again. It didn't get better the wound of course because nobody treated it and he even doesn't use slipper. Now I didn't repeat the same mistake. I pushed the teacher and we took him to the next hospital. He got tetanus vaccination; some medicines and they disinfected the wound and banded his foot. The parents or one of the members of the family should take him every second day for changing the band. Our point is to check it and in case take him by ourselves to the hospital. I found out that treatment in the government hospitals is free for anyone, they need only a name for the paperwork and the hospital is there in the slum area about 5 to 10 min by walk from the home of the child. I got really angry when I got to know that! Why did his parents or sisters/brothers not take him to the hospital? I didn't meet with the parents, only with the sisters and brothers. The teacher said to me that the parents are always working during the day and they cannot take care of children. They have to survive by themselves. I didn't except this answer because I think it is up to the mentality. But I do not want to judge anyone. Next day that we have taken the little boy to the hospital parents together with the child went to the school to meet with the teacher. I was not there:(. I could not meet them. They were very thankful and happy and they said they will take him next they to the hospital for changing the band.

But putting away all of this for a bit I would like to tell you about a very nice experience: Dipauli/Diwali. It is one of the biggest festivals in India and I could take part in it. He he:) I spent it in a small village here in Rajasthan not far away from Jaipur by a family of one of the teachers from my school. Actually she is my roommate. It was amazing. The festival is about victory of life above death or celebration of the light. It took exactly 3 days and it reminded me of Christmas, New Year and Easter. 3 in 1:))) They were many elements from the way how we celebrate. They celebrated the New Life as well (Christmas) and also on the first night we were going door to door (neighbour to neighbour) and we wished HAPPY DIWALI and at every house we left a candle. I know this is not more a habit with us, but earlier they were usually children who went door to door and performed something about Jesus Christ's birth and they wished Merry Christmas! It was also like New Year because of a lot of crackers. They love them so much. And it was like Easter because of the 3 days and because of the victory of Light above Darkness. For me it is very interesting and really it was amazing. The only BUT was that I didn't understand everything. I had a lot of questions but I could not get answers for those questions. It is quite hard to get to know about things that you are interested in. You have to try and try and try again!

Do not give up!

Cheer up!

Greetings for the new people!

I miss you all so much!

BIG HUGS!

Edith