



The Friends of Uppingham GAP Awards
2020 Reports

Zara Tweed (J 14) Chitwan Medical College, Bharatpur, Nepal
Grace Gregory (Fd 14) Crosslinks Charity in The Gambia, West Africa
Kitty Scott Barber (NH 14) & Lily Spurrier (Sa 14) Gairatpur Bass Panchayat School, India



Zara Tweed

Chitwan Medical College - Bharatpur, Nepal

Working in a large hospital, Zara had a particularly challenging experience observing patients, learning about the private health care system in Nepal, as well as how the social and economic situations of patients impact their health.

“So far I have seen four natural births in the maternity ward. Two of these were straight forward, however the other two were more complicated. I found it a remarkable experience to watch, it shows how resilient new-borns are. I also met women being admitted having had a miscarriage, it’s very sad seeing women who desperately want a child but have lost it.”



Zara reported that one of the most fascinating, yet difficult wards to be in was the psychiatric ward. At times she found it very upsetting talking to the patients, she told us:

“Mental health in Nepal is a massive taboo and carries a strong stigma. Especially in the lower socioeconomic class and castes of the community who have very strict cultural rules. It is also difficult for this group to afford the 1,000 rupees bed charge per day (£6.70) so they leave as soon as they can, rather than waiting to ensure they are on their way to getting better. A common issue doctors are forced to deal with is cases of young girls poisoning themselves after conflicts in the family home. I met girls as young as 11 to 13 who had ended up in PICU (Paediatric Intensive Care Unit).”



“There are no words to describe how shocked I was hearing of such cases”

During her volunteering, Zara was also given the opportunity to observe operations, including gallbladder removals which are performed by doing a laparoscopy, or keyhole surgery and caesarean sections. She found the precision of the operations fascinating to watch but difficult.

“I have never described myself as a squeamish person, having done practicals at school with no issue, a couple of hours of watching gallbladder removals and c-sections can be too much! Something sweet and caffeinated tends to make me feel better afterwards!”

Zara gained hands on experience in the on-site-laboratory and was amazed by how fast test results were generated, often within a couple of hours. She was tasked with a role in the microbiology lab where she made slides up with the samples on them ready for inspection under a microscope.

“I enjoyed helping in the lab because was directly helping patients get their results – essential to see their diagnosis or, hopefully, get the all clear.”



After five weeks in the emotionally demanding hospital environment, Zara moved on to a conservation project in the ACAP region (Annapurna Conservation Area Project), staying Ghandruk located in a protected area around Annapurna. The village is located at nearly 2,100 meters above sea level and a 4-hour jeep ride from Pokhara, one of the major Nepalese cities.

Surrounded by mountains and natural jungles, there are no vehicles, lots of mules, hundreds and thousands of steps and the Gurung people. Life is very traditional here and the culture has survived due to the location.

Whilst on location, Zara was tasked with collecting data to see how local wildlife, including bats, butterflies, birds and mammals are being affected by climate change.

“We carried out bird surveys most regularly as there is an abundance of different species in the area. I have seen close to 50 different species of bird including the Himalayan Vulture! They circle around the mountains whilst looking for anything dead to eat. One of the rarer sightings we were lucky enough to see is the scarlet finch. In the last 3 years there have only been 5 sightings!”

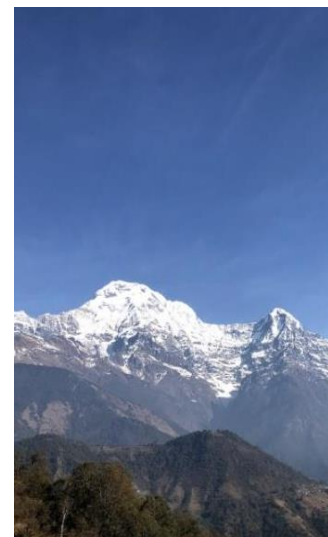


Scarlet Finch

We also undertook water surveys, measuring pollution in the streams and rivers in the surrounding areas. We took temperature and pH measurements and collected sediment, sorting it to find any macro invertebrates – a good indication of the pollution levels because different species can withstand a different level of pollution.”

“After two months in Nepal I have fallen in love with the country! The medical project was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed learning a lot, even if I am not going to go directly into that field. The contrast in the medical systems of Nepal and England were not as obvious as I thought they would be. The hospital's hygiene was not up to the same standards but the care provided was amazing to witness.

My highlight is definitely the conservation project. The views that I woke up to every morning were the most stunning ever, I never got used to it! The work we were doing really helps contribute to the upkeep of the area. I'm passionate about the environment so it's been amazing to know that I have helped. I really feel that I have given something back to the country which is why I ultimately wanted to volunteer.



Grace Gregory

Crosslinks charity in The Gambia, West Africa

Grace volunteered to work in The Gambia for a Christian charity called Crosslinks, teaching in some of the local schools and churches. Located on the North-Western coast of Africa, she stayed with seven other gap year students in a compound on the suburbs of Serrekunda, about a 20-minute walk from the coast.



"I'm teaching English, Maths, RS and taking extra reading sessions and recorder lessons at Agape Primary School. So far it has been less terrifying than I expected and the children are very excited to see me every day and seem to find our 'winging it' teaching style interesting!"

On the weekends we've spent a lot of time chatting to people on the streets, everyone is so friendly. We also attend Omega Church on Sundays where the Gospel singing is absolutely incredible. We've also taken part in leading some of the youth groups and Sunday school classes. At our church I've been helping out in the youth group of teenagers aged 13 to 20. We organised a Mission Week with them a couple of weeks ago at the University of The Gambia where we spoke to lots of Muslims about their beliefs and what they thought about Christianity.

I've had the opportunity to visit a crocodile pool, a traditional Gambian wedding – with African food, dancing, drumming and singing. I've also helped to build a Bible College for Gambian students wanting to follow a Christian faith rather than the usual Muslim ministry here.



We had brilliant fun celebrating Commonwealth Day at the school. It was a huge event and all the children came in wearing their traditional tribal outfits and most importantly for them, there were no lessons! We began the day in true Gambian style doing a march, with flags of West African members of the Commonwealth around the local area. It was a very exciting day for all involved and once we arrived back at school we ate lunch and had a tribal dance off with each tribe performing their own traditional song and dance. Some of my pupils asked what the UK's traditional dance was and I attempted to teach them some Scottish reeling which they found hilarious!

Sadly, due to corona virus, the schools here had to close. We didn't get to say goodbye to the children properly, and my time in The Gambia concluded with getting stuck into activities that didn't involve banned gatherings such as church and mission work. My team were able to help with some plastering and painting jobs. We also looked after some of the doctors' children at the local hospital as some of them plan for the almost inevitable mass outbreak in The Gambia.

My time has been full of exciting experiences, due to the virus I had to cut my trip short by a month, I was sorry to leave a month early, although very thankful that I've managed to have as much time out here as I could. I made some really good friends and it was amazing to feel so accepted into this great country!"

Kitty Scott Barber & Lily Spurrier

Gairatpur Bass Panchayat School, India

Kitty and Lily arrived at Tikli Bottom to a warm welcome from the many children at the school and especially those that live at the farm where they stayed throughout their volunteering experience.

Lily wrote "The children are full of energy, cricket crazed and have an incredible love for dance. The school that we are helping at is trying to create opportunity's for those who would have no hope for a better future without it. As we were driven through the gates on our first day at the school, we saw the yellow, pink and blue buildings ahead. The children have been so intrigued by us. Every chance they got they would want to shake our hands and learn our names and make sure we know theirs.



The children have 7 lessons a day with their school day finishing at 3 o'clock. They gather for assembly at 9 o'clock where they all sing songs and learn two new words a day, and ending the assembly with the national anthem.

Each grade have their own classrooms which are packed with desks and benches to fit all the children in. They have Maths, SST, Science, Hindi, Art, Computer, Sport and of course English lessons. All of these subjects they are taught in English and the pupils are only allowed to speak English when at school.

Most of the day Kitty and I float around the classroom offering extra help to the pupils and especially those that are struggling, this offers an insight into their learning processes and also allows us to get to know more students throughout the school. We also take groups of two or three out of class to practice reading or to help them understand the past tense more.

The most memorable evening for me so far was when we walked three children called Yogesh, Yogita and Archie back to their home. Where the children made up a table and chairs for us with snacks, Chai and chapattis, all delicious. And of course, the entertainment they offered put smiles on our faces with them setting up a speaker and lights to accompany their dancing. Archie is the youngest and loves any excuse to dance. Yogita is the same plus lots of drama, she would be great in Bollywood."

Kitty reported "On our weekends we like to explore, getting an auto (motorised rickshaw) to Badshahpur which is the nearest big town with a supermarket. Here we had our first real glimpse of India; stray dogs, rubbish everywhere, cows wandering the streets and hectic roads.

One of the many memorable occasions during our trip was the 'Republic Day' celebrations. The school prepared a spectacular presentation. Each class had been practicing dance routines since we arrived and it was lovely to see them come together. On Republic Day, they celebrate the creation of the Constitution. They are proud of their freedom which makes it a powerful day but also highlights how far India has to go to achieve the sense of freedom for all.



View from the auto in Badshahpur



Whilst in India, we were also lucky enough to spend a weekend in Delhi. We visited Lodi Gardens, which is a large garden area in New Delhi a short auto ride from Bengali Market where we had lunch. We walked around the paths which connect the different Temple structures around the park.



Lili walking towards one of the buildings in Lodi Gardens.

“We also visited Khan market which is a very popular high-end shopping area with lots of restaurants many of which are westernised. We walked around Palika Bazaar which is situated in the middle of Connaught Place. It is an underground flea market where many people come in from villages to sell the clothes and shoes that they have made. There were a lot of bargains to be found here!

We also enjoyed walking around the old colonial architecture that makes up Connaught Place. This part of Delhi is very reminiscent of pre-Independence India because of the Colonial architecture which was built by the British. There are identical buildings which house shops, there are large white pillars and high arched walkways around the entrance to all of the shops, which reminded me of many of the Roman and Greek buildings that I studied in History of Art.

We would definitely recommend travelling or volunteering in India to anyone who is planning a gap year, it’s so cheap to live and everyone is so friendly!”

