

Experiences: Supportive

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Martin Weber from Austria, spent 2 months at Supportive from Feb - March, 2010. He writes of his time at the project below:

Supportive Self Sustaining Orphan Home is a small home for underprivileged children, located just 7km north of Kathmandu in the hillside village Phutung. Surrounded by fields, chicken farms and forests, the setting is very authentic and represents the natural Nepali way of living. With limited exposure to foreigners, some villagers, above all kids, look at you with inquisitive eyes and cheeky smiles, if you are walking through the village.

After arriving in Kathmandu, I stayed in the city for a few days to relax from my journey and to familiarise myself with the new culture. There, I met the volunteer coordinator Dipendra, who is a very nice guy. He provided me with a detailed orientation about the orphanage. Besides this, he organized my pick up from the hotel to the childrens home.

On the next day, the couple Ramesh and Sarala, who are running the home, picked me up and brought me directly to their lovely place. To escape the chaos of the busy transport hub, we jumped in a taxi and it took us about 30 minutes and a 2 minute walk to arrive at the orphanage.

At first Sarala showed me everything and while we drank a welcome-tea, I waited expectantly until the kids came home from school. Right now there are 20 children (15 boys and 5 girls), from the age of 1 up to 14 years. All of them, except the youngest ones, are speaking English very well.

The childrens home itself is a pretty and warm place, surrounded by a beautiful vegetable garden and enough space for playing outside. Everything is concentrated on the essentials of living, what many people in the West have now forgotten. Two years ago they moved their home to a bigger building next to the old one, which had only two rooms. Now there are 7 rooms, 4 in the ground floor and 3 upstairs.

During the time I spent at the orphanage, one big project was to move the kitchen from upstairs to the former chicken room in front of the house. In the past the kitchen was next to the boys room and there was a lot of smoke inside because of the open fire place for cooking. So the kitchen-resettlement was very necessary for the health of everyone.

The orphan home is a self sustaining home, which is very different to most of the orphanages in Nepal. The idea of self sustaining also means that they are getting no support from the government but the positive thing about it is, that they can act in a more independent way. So they are growing their own vegetables, selling their own eggs and chickens, getting their milk from their own buffalo etc.

As a guest, I had my own room, which I really enjoyed, because sometimes it was retreat from the chaos, where I could take time out for relaxing and reflecting. They provided me breakfast, lunch, an afternoon snack and dinner. Most of the time we ate "Dal Bhat", the traditional Nepali food, which consists of rice, lentils and vegetable curry. The food was always delicious, but try not to expect too much variety.

Your duties while you are there are whatever you feel comfortable with. Because you are a volunteer nobody will say to you: do this or that! It is a relaxed set up with limited structure, so you are best just to blend in to the orphanage life and search out for the fields in which your help and support may be useful. Everything depends on your individual skills, your motivation and courage to try out something. Give as much love as possible and take care of all the kids!

Normally I started the day at 7am and the first thing was to take a look after the kids. Then I had breakfast and helped some of them with their homework and with preparing for school. At 9am I brought them to school, which was a 20 minute walk away from the orphan home. If you like, you can also help out there by teaching English, Maths or some other subjects. While the children were in the school, I cleaned all the eggs and prepared them for selling, helped in the garden, played with the youngest ones, or went to town with Ramesh for buying or organising something. At 4pm, I walked to the school again to pick up the children and from then on they had a couple of hours to play before I assisted them with their homework until dinner-time. After dinner i talked with Ramesh and Sarala or went to my room...



It is not all fun and games. From time to time your comfort zones and boundaries will be pushed and your patience tested. Sometimes it was really challenging to take care of 20 kids. But all in all it was an amazing time and a very good decision to choose this wonderful place.

The time i spent at Supportive Self-Sustaining Orphan Home was one of the most memorable experiences in my life. Seeing the way those people live compared to me, changed my view on life. The beauty of the children left an impression that will last forever. Lovely thanks and respect to Ramesh and Sarala. I will never forget all of you!!!

