

# Volunteer Testimonials

My Experience Visiting Amar Seva Sangham (ASSA) ~ Sudharshan Seshadri



In 2018, I traveled to India to volunteer for two weeks, assisting in physiotherapy, teaching English, and helping children with their motor and cognitive skills. This humbling experience at Amar Seva Sangam changed the way I look at the lives of myself and the differently abled.

One of the most profound experiences I had was when I saw a girl with a limp pushing a young boy's wheelchair, using the wheelchair as support. In this simple action, I saw a symbiotic relationship, where both parties benefited from a mutual action. Across the campus, I saw people talking and laughing, having a good time. By removing any stigma, they fostered positivity and hope.

The people I met there were hard to leave behind when I finished my volunteering. The support I received from everyone involved, right from arranging my accommodation to planning everyday activities was commendable. The patients I spoke to were genuinely happy to receive help and were open when talking to me. The kids I taught were all curious and it was a joy to teach and play with them. The time I spent at the organization and the people I met exposed me to different perspectives on life and showed me that these

differently abled people could make the best of their lives with just a little help from others, and each other.

### Our experience with the EI program by visiting Amar Seva Sangham (ASSA) ~ Jun 19-21, 2017

The Early Intervention (EI) program is fabulously managed by ASSA staff and ensuring its availability to more and more deserving children that would benefit by Early Intervention, as we observed during our visit. Our understanding of the EI program is based on our:

- spending time with the leaders located in Amar Seva Sangham,
- visiting a Primary Health Centre where the field staff were interviewing the parents of young children, who go there on their own for the normal care of their children, and assessing the suitability of those children for the EI program for extending to them,
- spending time with the parents and children who were already enrolled in the EI program,
- being silent observers in a meeting of the field staff and the parents who are participating in the EI program,  
and
- interviewing a couple of such parents to assess the effectiveness of the EI program, from their points of view.

The parents of the children who are already in the EI program were delighted by the support they are receiving and the improvement in the condition of their children. The field staff gave us the impression that they are very satisfied how they were trained, and the tools provided to them. We were impressed how the program is run by the ASSA staff, both the leaders and the field staff.

Handi-Care Intl. and ASSA should continue their activities to ensure the funding and support required.

## “Experience at Amar Seva Sangham” ~ 2013 Dr. Srividhya



I observed physiotherapy for the home children, other children from surrounding areas, adults and stroke patients. I was able to see children with physical disabilities which I had only come across in my textbooks and I was also able to see what physiotherapy they had everyday which slowly but surely helped their mobility.

I enjoyed my clinical experience with the doctor at ASSA. I partook in discussions about diagnosis and treatment of patients within Amar Seva Sangam and also from surrounding areas. I was able to attend rounds and see the patients at the Spinal Cord Unit, assist with dressing changes and urinary catheter insertion. I was able to get a feel for how medicine and health care was handled in a village setting. I spent a very short time at the two hospitals nearby, but that was because my stay at Amar Seva Sangam was not long enough. In the future, after completing my residency I intend to come back to Amar Seva Sangam and volunteer with the Health Fair that takes place every year.

I formed many close friendships; with the main administrators, with my roommates who were from Canada, the Home Children and Mothers, the physiotherapists, patients, the Teachers, the wonderful cooks at the Canteen, those at reception, those who worked in the computer room, the security and everybody else at the campus! I really miss everyone a lot. Everyone was so friendly and accommodating. I

believe the sweetest thing I heard from the Home Children was that even though I had only been in ASSA for a few weeks, they felt like they have known me for years! It is very easy to grow attached to the children and everyone there.

I would definitely recommend volunteering at Amar Seva Sangam to others. It's a priceless life-changing experience.

### “Experience at Amar Seva Sangham” ~ 2012 Veena



Volunteering at Amar Seva Sangam has opened my eyes to a different perspective on life and has shown me the hardships faced by many individuals with a physical or mental disability. I had never been exposed to such real debilitating conditions and seeing their smiling faces was really touching and made me feel so much compassion towards them. The children were so content with their way of life, in contrast to the demands of the Westernized society. Throughout the campus, I would see one child helping another child on a wheelchair and it made me realize what a tightknit and caring community they have created for each other. Coming from all walks of life, they are so accepting and loving and showed me what a real society should be like. As well, interacting with the older patients who were suffering with spinal cord injuries gave me exposure to an array of muscular paralysis and I was able to learn many physiotherapy techniques. This gave me

a broader understanding of what it means to live with a disability and I have a lot of respect for those individuals who are managing with only a few working limbs. I was interested by the rehabilitation facilities and played an interactive role at the gym and it was so nice to see them lift weights and dumbbells with determination and optimism towards their road to recovery. All of the patients were so genuine, loving and full of laughter, which is ultimately the best medicine! I grew very fond of many of the children and older patients, and it was heartbreaking to leave the campus. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at Amar Seva Sangam and have taken back a lot of special memories that I will always and forever cherish.

### “Experience at Amar Seva Sangham” ~ 2012 Kamakshi Ganesan



"Amar Seva Sangam is an organization that makes a profound difference in the lives of many differently abled children and youth, and I was fortunate enough to be welcomed so warmly and openly into their lives of determination and enthusiasm.

The children at Amar Seva Sangam are truly the embodiment of courage and optimism. Compared to these children, we live such privileged lives, and yet do not hesitate to grumble about our trivial problems. The children at the Sangam may not have luxuries, but are truly hopeful and positive about their lives. They genuinely believe in themselves; that they can achieve anything they want if they work at it, which is more than I can say for most people I know. This is all thanks to the kind of empowerment that

Amar Seva Sangam fosters, as self-reliance and confidence are built into every activity the children take part in.

My time at the Sangam was spent in many of the various facilities and programs it offers, including the Physiotherapy Centre, the Spinal Cord Injury Centre, the SRBC Special Education school, as well as field visits with the Village Based Rehabilitation program, but the most memorable and enjoyable times were spent playing and interacting with the children of Amar Seva Sangam.

Bonding with these kids is an experience I will never forget, because they taught me what it really means to be brave and overcome real challenges on a daily basis, while still remaining enthusiastic about life. I will never forget the warm welcomes, daily enthusiastic greetings ('Good Morning M'am, have you eaten?' is my favourite), and the many memorable moments I spent with these children. Whether it was teaching them English, or playing chess and carom with the kids (and losing badly every time), or playing my first game of cricket with the older boys, I will always cherish the time I spent at Sangam. They are more than an inspiration; these kids are role models for how we should all live our lives - with confidence and hope. Spending a month with these real-life heroes meant more to me than I can put into words, and I am already looking to plan my next trip back to Amar Seva Sangam."

## “Experience at Amar Seva Sangham” ~ 2012 Robyn Smith Saona



Robyn is a Physiotherapist from Vancouver Canada. She wanted to donate a significant time in India doing voluntary work before getting married in 2011. She found out about HCI and ended up volunteering at Amar Seva Sangam for 4 months in 2010-2011. She had a very meaningful and remarkable experience which has enhanced her work as a therapist, opened up new venues for her professionally, individually and socially. Here is what she says:.

"I cannot express how grateful I am to Handi-Care for connecting me with Sangam. At Sangam, I learned that there are no barriers to developing close and meaningful relationships with others, regardless of culture, context or language. I learned that it is possible for one person or one organization to truly impact the lives of thousands of people. Sangam allowed me to not only utilize my skills as a physiotherapist but to also explore my interest in learning about the administrative side of running a successful NGO. I also enjoyed every minute I had to spend with the children on campus. They were truly an inspiration. Despite the physical challenges many of them face on a daily basis, I never heard a single complaint or saw a single frown, just an endless stream of warm smiles. There is definitely something unique about Sangam, and I feel very blessed to have become a part of the family there. I look forward to remaining closely involved with both Handi-Care and Sangam, and I am excited for my next visit to India!"

Janna MacLachlan , MSc OT, Occupational Therapist, Ottawa, ON, Canada

"In the summer of 2007, I traveled as a volunteer with Handi-Care Intl. to Amar Seva Sangam in India. I saw and learned about more types of disabilities than I would ever see on my occupational therapy placements in Canada. I met people with post-polio syndrome, significantly contracted extremities, stage IV pressure ulcers, club foot and suffering from long-term effects of tuberculosis. I didn't know how much this learning would be helpful to me until I took a position as a Baffin Region Occupational Therapist stationed in Iqaluit, Nunavut where I again saw each of these conditions and situations. Another way this experience provided by Handi-Care Intl. helped me with my work in Nunavut, is learning how different cultures approach disability, and an introduction to what it is like to live with a disability in areas of extreme poverty. Handi-Care Intl. and Amar Seva Sangam provided me with so much more relevant experience that I needed in Nunavut than did the rest of my occupational therapy education, which was executed in an urban Canadian setting."

Student Vol. 2009 – Sindhu Suppiah, Toronto, Canada



"During our time at Sangam, we spent our mornings at the Centre for Special Education, helping the teachers and students with their daily tasks. In the afternoons,



we held an English class for the physically disabled youth who were part of the vocational training programs, and in the evenings we spent time with the children who stay on campus, playing games, and drawing pictures. While this may seem like a one-sided exchange of knowledge, the lessons we learned from them were much more valuable than anything we taught. These children completely redefined the meaning of ability to us. Even though we are fully able and healthy, they saw us as no different. The term 'disabled' seemed like an injustice to these children as they have most definitely learned to be 'differently abled'."

[Elizabeth Seale, Calgary, Canada](#)



They taught English, craft, arts and generally helped out with various rehab programs. Here is what they say:

"I was very impressed with ASSA. Hindu, Muslim and Christian young people all live and study together amicably. People dealing with huge physical difficulties are optimistic, cheerful and helpful to others. Physically disabled young adults help mentally challenged adults and children from the local area. Parents are supported when they indicate they need help with their children in their communities. I was much taken with the great respect everyone shows to one another, regardless of age, education or economic situation. We were welcomed with open hearts at Amar Seva Sangam and we are already talking about whether we could possibly go there again."

## Student Volunteer – 2007, Thurarshen Jeyalingam



Volunteer in Summer of 2007 for 6 weeks. He is currently in medical student at Queen's University, ON, Canada.

## Student Vol.2006- Arti Thiagarajan - Finished Medicine and working in the USA



"The essence of my ASSA trip came from what I learned from the children there. They taught me never to complain about the small things, as there are bigger problems in life. Words like courage and determination outline the basis of what these children believe in and practice every day. I had come to ASSA with no expectations, and returned with memories and experiences I will cherish for years to come. The value of

this trip is priceless; no words can quite explain how much I have learned from these children and how much of what I have learned I use on a daily basis. "

Student Vol.2006- Bimal Lakhani- Currently a specialist in Physio Rehab



"Family is the ideal that makes life worth living and at Amar Seva Sangam, there is no shortage of family. The entire campus acts as one family. Children call each other brother and sister, refer to housemothers simply as "mom" and show equal affection towards everybody. Family holds this place together, as it should in any home, and it makes these children strong and ready to face the battles that lie ahead of them. Those kids taught me more than they will ever know. I am forever in their debt for that. Here's a glimpse of the ideas that were introduced to me during my brief time there: motivate, inspire, change, act, live, love, cherish, teach, learn, accept, speak out, smile, trust, question, honour, educate, explore, help, initiate, defend, investigate, laugh, respect, imagine, dream, create, support, write, enjoy, listen, feel, appreciate, give, play, construct, experience, and remember. I will always remember. "

Student Vol. 2005- Nishita Parekh - Currently doing Medicine



"I felt that the entire experience at Amar Seva Sangam was beneficial to me both academically and personally. The proposal writing was the part that was most beneficial academically. As a life experience, it was just amazing to see how Sangam is a world of its own within the world we know. It was great to see that kids with physical disabilities were integrated with local village children in school. The acceptance level for people with differences is far greater amongst the school children than anything I have seen/experienced in North America. People there are always smiling regardless of their disabilities."

Student Vol. 2005- Sapna Sharma- Currently doing Medicine



"This summer was one of the greatest experiences of my life because of the time I spent with the children at ASSA. Although the language barrier was an issue, I found that we were able to relate on many other levels, and that really touched and impacted me. It has really put things in perspective for me, and made me realize that there is so much we have to be grateful for, and how easy it is to take for granted what we have so readily available to us. As a student beginning my first year of medical school, it also had an additional impact on me as it made me realize that international medicine is something I hope to pursue in the future. I had a wonderful experience and hope to return soon."