

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Morocco



WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 1 Volunteer story
- 2 Volunteers in action

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AMESIP CARE and SPORTS CENTER

Lydia Thurlow from UK

I've simply had the best 2 months in Morocco. My whole experience was just utterly overwhelming. The colours, the spices, the music, the astonishing levels of hospitality and generosity, the frighteningly high levels of sugar in the mint tea, the weddings that end when the street lights are going off, the stifling 4 seat taxis that cram in 6, the little street children who kiss you after every class, who have odd socks and don't know when their birthday is, the pink sunsets; it was everything I imagined and so much more.

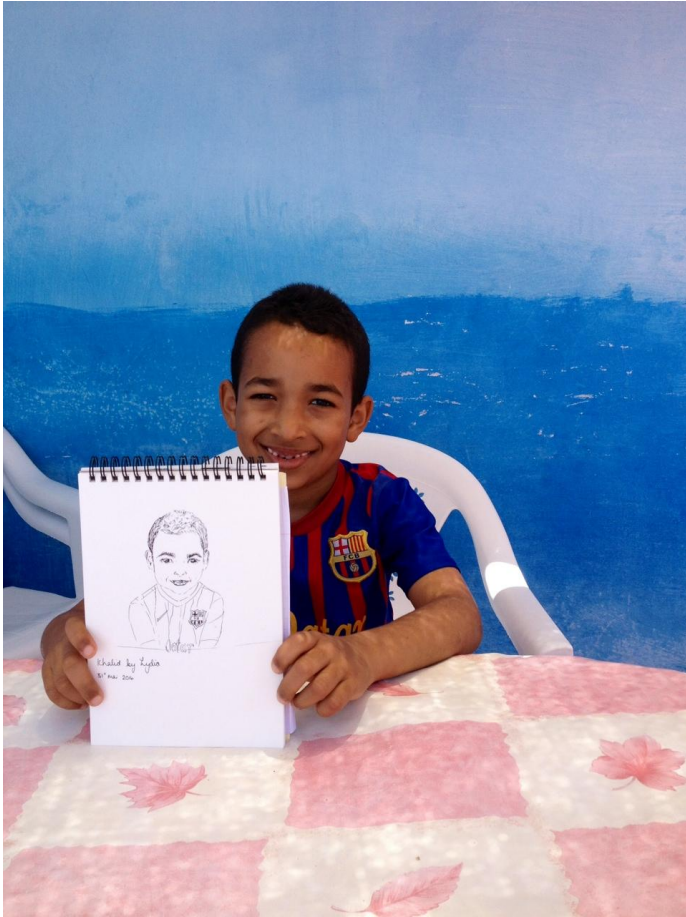
I was really lucky to be staying with such a wonderful host family who made me feel at home immediately. They were always hugely generous and fun and taught me so much more than I would have discovered through being a tourist. Perhaps the only thing which took a while to adjust to was the very different eating styles as well as meal times. On my first weekend I was taken to a *Lafakek* to celebrate the birth of my host mother's 3 day-old niece; where an entourage of colourful ladies flocked around crying and laughing, throwing the tiny baby around like a doll. Afterwards a roast chicken arrived on the table but I was surprised that there were no plates or cutlery and then it dawned on me we were expected to eat with our hands; something that felt very bizarre to start with but comes completely naturally now. Generally everyone returns home for lunch and mint tea while *harsha's* and *rifa's* are served in the early evening, and eventually dinner around 11pm after a *paseo* where everyone hits the *souks* - elderly grandpas arm in arm with their sons, wolf whistling guys on the prowl and little children cartwheeling and riding around on roller skates. British mothers would be horrified to see how late bedtime is here!

I spent one roasting weekend playing football with my host brother Khalid on the roof terrace.



During half time I drew this sketch of him in his Barcelona t-shirt. He was so pleased with it and he sat admiring it all through lunch and got into trouble for not eating anything!

On another weekend when my host sister needed a revision break, she took me to the beautiful Kasbah where a lady inked henna art on my hand and we sat watching the fishermen and ate little almond filled pastries called *cab gazelle* (gazelle's hooves). I wanted to pick up some Arabic during my stay so I had a few weeks of lessons which I absolutely loved. It was such a great challenge to learn something so utterly different. I had a brilliant teacher called



Yasmin who would say things like “Brav” and “Merv” when I got words right and we'd sit in her cool sky-high turquoise and purple sitting room and drink strawberry juice at break time. It was tiring learning a new language with all the new sounds and backwards reading but naturally being surrounded by so much Arabic was brilliant and I quickly began to recognise words. I was so happy when I was able to read "share with a friend" on a coca cola advert!

One evening I was very lucky to be invited to a Moroccan wedding which was like nothing I've ever seen or heard before! I was prepared for all the belly dancing but I didn't expect so much warrior chanting and costume changes! It was a full 13 hours from 6 pm (I literally almost died of hunger because dinner wasn't served until 2 am and I was to so far beyond hungry by then I could barely eat!) to 7am where we emerged exhausted into the street as the sun was rising and the street lights were going off and all 30 of us clambered into a truck in our elaborate kaftans; takchitas and heels as we made our way home.

Another totally Moroccan experience was when my host mother took my roommate Sara and I (who she

referred to as her babies!) to the *hammam* where a vicious fight broke out when we sat on a patch of tile that had already been taken. We were stripped bare and scrubbed raw with pumous stone and smothered in henna until we were released into the sauna room with skin like silk.

We really had the best of both worlds with work, which kept us busy during the week, and then free weekends to take mini holidays. One weekend we went on a road trip from Meknes through Volubilis to Fes. One of my favourite nights was when we sat on the roof top of our Riad with some sushi and beers listening to the call to prayer and an instrument that sounded like bagpipes. The next morning we were taken around fez medina by a wonderful Berber tour guide called Hassan who would say "you're welcome please" at any opportunity. We saw the mosques and the theological schools and the tanneries where I

bartered for a slate grey suede jacket and bought it for half the price.

Another weekend we visited Tangiers and managed to get hopelessly lost in a labyrinth of a Medina, and were rescued by two sweet little Moroccan boys who acted as our tour guides, personal shoppers, bag carriers and road crossers (which is an art here!). We took them back to our hotel and bought them a pineapple juice in a very sophisticated candlelit lounge with live Spanish music. They were thrilled but had to get back for supper otherwise their mother's would be worried!

One of my new favourite places in the world is Dhow, a restaurant on a ship decorated with Moroccan antique furniture and charming waiters, who let me try the freshly baked biscuits shaped like spoons for one of the desserts. There's always jazz playing in the background and you lie back on little sofa lounges and watch the sail boats go past. I suppose it's like being on a cruise but without the sea-sickness.

I volunteered at an association called AMESIP in Salé, a charming little school with a basketball court; little tents to work outside and a lorry that had been converted into a library with little benches and a chalk board where I taught.



The schoolchildren were the most adorable children I've ever met. We all had a lot of fun and they got so much out of the classes. I think it was really refreshing for them to learn through activities rather than sitting up straight and rote learning as they have for French Arabic and Islam studies.

After the first day they asked me if I could stay forever and one girl is planning to have two daughters so she can call them Cecilia and Lydia!

Stickers were a huge success! I produced them thinking they'd be too babyish or girly, but it was the boys who came to my desk at the end of the lesson asking for another sticker. I asked them to tell me what colours they were wearing in French and they'd skip off really chuffed with themselves, wearing their little stickers like badges of honour! It was so lovely to get to know them over the two months, some were really bashful at first and had no confidence in their French and it made me so happy to see them coming out of their shells; shouting and laughing. Others are thrilled to have a teacher with

blue eyes and would do anything to catch my attention and win my approval!

One day we produced a pair of kites, which they absolutely loved and kept them occupied all

afternoon. They also had a lot of fun drawing mazes and desert island obstacle courses with chalks in the playground.

One of our challenges was a little boy who was half deaf and was naturally pretty angry and volatile, who didn't want to join in with anything and couldn't really follow even if he tried to. I decided to teach them the hokey kokey (which didn't require much language) and he was captivated and wanted to beat everyone else at it!

Another afternoon a group of teenagers from a school as part of Karacena came dressed as clowns



and taught the children magic tricks and songs which they absolutely loved. It was really sweet how happy the head teacher was to see his students so thrilled!

I don't think I've ever fallen in love with a country so much before. I'm very sad to leave but I know I have a home here and I'll be looking for an excuse to come back.

To all the brilliant people at the Projects Abroad office and all the wonderful Moroccans I met here; I really can't thank you enough for introducing me to your beautiful country and its fascinating culture. This was an enriching and beautiful experience which will stay with me forever.

AMSD: Teaching placement

Margherita from Italy teaching English

