

ProjectsAbroad™

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Cover Photo by Claudia Leugh

Alistair Rooms from Nottingham, England, gains worthwhile experience at Human Rights and Teaching project.

Nineteen-year-old Alistair Rooms from Nottingham, England, has always desired to work in Human Rights. In order to experience what it is like to work in the Human Rights profession at an early age, Alistair wanted to work somewhere in Asia that is completely different from his home. He therefore decided that as part of his gap year, he would travel to Mongolia where he would take part in a Human Rights project.

Eager to fulfill his plan, Alistair signed up with Projects Abroad and was placed for one month at the center for human rights and development in Mongolia. His duties consisted of assisting lawyers with e-mailing, writing reports and applying for fundraising from different organizations. "I am so grateful that I got to do so much that I never expected I would. I had many opportunities to participate in different meetings and conferences such as the training of the new legislation which was passed by Mongolia, the international treaty that Mongolia agreed upon and was organized by the UN and the meeting about the UN development goals which included alleviating poverty and decreasing corruption" said Alistair.



Alistair had the chance to attend the Community of Democracy Conference, a three day event which was organized at the Government house and hosted by the President of Mongolia, the Prime Minister and the Burmese democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi who had been in home arrest for 20 years. "I never would have envisioned myself participating in such a big event like this and I am so lucky to have heard those speeches about how to increase democracy in developing countries like Mongolia and to experience something new" Alistair explained.

Aside from a Human Rights project, Alistair chose to do teaching project during the following month. He taught beginner English to children of ages seven to fourteen at the Buddhist Meditation Center: "I wanted to help out a little bit rather than come only for myself. I gained a lot as a person and experienced a huge amount in terms of what people are like in this culture now, how it works, how to work with children best and how to get the best out of them".

He continued: "The most rewarding things for me were seeing my students get better in their skills and hearing that the cases we were working on had won or had gotten good results. I loved both of my projects. It was very rewarding working with children because a small step in the right direction felt like a big victory. Also, I am so grateful for the experience that I gained from my Law & Human Rights project and I know it will be very helpful in my future career".

"I learned a lot during my stay here. I would advise future volunteers to be friendly and open. Say 'Hello' and 'Yes' because, I said 'Yes' and then ended up somewhere I never thought I would be like in the committee of democracy conference. A woman asked me to help with the speech, and three days later I was in a room with Aung San Suu Kyi" Alistair said.

We hope great stories like this inspire others to help Projects Abroad continue to make a difference and by doing so, enable them to learn something about themselves along the way.

"Let's Explore Mongolian Culture" event



On the 23rd of May, the "Let's Explore Mongolian Culture" event was organized by Projects Abroad Mongolia which included young adults with cerebral palsy, Mongolian and Projects Abroad volunteers. The goal of the event was to encourage the young adults with cerebral palsy and give them the opportunity to socialize and build strong friendships with foreign and Mongolian volunteers through the organized activities. Also, it was an opportunity for the disabled young people to demonstrate their talents to their parents, friends and general public through the outreach program. Five teams were formed. Each team consisted of two disabled young adults, two Mongolian volunteers and two Projects Abroad volunteers. The main activity of the day's event was to exhibit the evolution of Mongolian Culture and Ritual and to present them in an interesting way. Every team worked hard for the duration of two weeks and every person was diligent in their preparations.



The most emotional parts of the event were the performances by the disabled young people who each have some form of paralysis. One girl played the piano using only her chin, one boy typed in English despite being a quadriplegic and another boy made a PowerPoint presentation and incredibly managed to change from slide to slide using his toes.

It was a very special day and everyone was particularly joyful. Two different news stations were present who interviewed some of the disabled young adults as well as Projects Abroad volunteers. We all hope that this event shows that young adults who have cerebral palsy, have the ability to learn what it is they choose and deserve to have many more opportunities than they are currently given. Projects Abroad appreciates the invaluable time and effort of all the volunteers who made priceless contributions in order to make this event possible. <3



Alte Kantonsschule Aarau graduate spends 3 months volunteering with nomads in Mongolia

20-year-old Claudia Leuch, from Brugg in Switzerland, wanted to do something different and unique over her gap year. “After searching online I found Projects Abroad; I looked through the website and stumbled upon the Nomad Project in Mongolia and was really fascinated by it.” Claudia signed up for a 3 month volunteer adventure at the Nomad Project, one of which she spent learning Mongolian in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

Claudia stayed with a nomad family for two months near the village of Altanbulag in the Tuv Province, which is located 200km away from Ulaanbaatar city. She found that her time in the countryside with the nomad family was one-of-a-kind: “The nomadic lifestyle is something you don’t have in Europe, and it attracted me a lot. It is a really quiet life. You don’t have to be bothered by anything that is happening in the world and will be able to feel at peace. You are just in your own world and surrounded by great nature and landscape.”



She really enjoyed being involved in the daily routines of the nomads such as milking cows, riding horses, and herding goats and sheep. She also helped her host mother to collect cow dung, which is used for making fire. “I was able to participate in many different activities that interested me during the time I was in the countryside. For instance, we earmarked all the small animals and also cut the male horse’s hair to sell, and lastly, castrated the male animals. All those things were very interesting, and I really enjoyed my time here.”

“The Mongolian Traditional Dwelling, an event that took place when we needed to move our huts (Ger) to greener pastures, made me see and learn on how to assemble the Ger and how to take it down. The whole procedure to assemble and disassemble was so unique. You can assemble it in a very short time by using a minimal amount of material, and it is also stable against wind. It perfectly fits the climate whether it is hot or cold. It is also easy to carry and available in many different sizes as needed. If I was able to, I would buy a Ger by myself and visit here every summer to spend one or two months in the countryside” Claudia explained.

Claudia also got a chance to see a horse race event between two to four year old horses in the village of Altanbulag. “There were many differences between Mongolian and Western countries’ horse races. For instance, there is no special horse track, and they just race in an open steppe. In addition, the distance is a lot longer than the Western horse tracks, about 10-15km, and children from five to twelve years old are chosen as jockeys.”

She also had the opportunity to learn about the lifestyle and was immersed with the culture of the Nomads. Claudia mentioned, “They did not have a lot of varieties in their food, but it was amazing to see how many different kinds of meals they could prepare with only a few ingredients.” She continued: “It’s incredible how happy these people are, even without the extra necessities such as technology or brand named products.” She also tried her best to learn the language of Mongolia because she thought it was an important part of the whole experience.



At the end of her project, Claudia said that she had found the little things the most memorable, like the time she spent in nature being surrounded by very nice people. She added, "Maybe our way of life is too far away from what it should be. I am grateful for this opportunity to experience the basic way of life in the land of blue sky."

After being in Mongolia for three months, Claudia says, "Nomadic life is not as difficult as it seems to be. There are many advantages and wonderful sides of being at the Nomad Project. It was a really unique experience for me and personally, I learned a lot more about myself and the life that I live."

My experience with Projects Abroad by Hilde Kuipers

Hey! My name is Hilde Kuipers and I'm 23 years old, I come from The Netherlands, Budel. The reason I came to Mongolia was to get more working experience as a social worker. I already graduated and wanted to do something different. In most of the countries which offer voluntary work, the work was not what I was looking for, but Mongolia did. And when I look back it was the best choice I could make; to come to Mongolia!

I have two different voluntary jobs here: One at "Onol Arga" NGO, a social workers' NGO in which I wrote papers about drug abuse and everything that connected to this subject. I used these papers to give lessons in the university. One of these papers is already translated to be used for a book about drug abuse and how to work with this specific group of the society. Another paper I wrote was about the differences between Mongolia and The Netherlands based on social work. For this paper I visited different social work places all over Ulaanbaatar to ensure that my vision was correct.

My second job is working in a shelter house for woman and children who have been abused. This center is a part of the National Center against Violence and also located in Ulaanbaatar. I worked as a social worker with the woman and children, tried to give the children a little bit of English lesson and leached the woman how to cook. I also did some drawing with the children and wrote small papers about parenting, house rules, a safety plan and what abuse is.

These experiences were really rewarding for me, because in the Netherlands I would never get the opportunity to do these kinds of things. It widened my horizon and I am sure I will take many of these memories home.

Besides all my work I am living in a host family, I have to say I'm really happy with this family. They are so nice for me! I have my own room, they make breakfast for me every morning. The host sister likes to do creative things, so we made many cool things together. The parents talk a little bit English but my host sister speaks it really good, so I can make myself understandable. If I say I go out for dinner it's always good and if not they cook me a nice dinner.



The culture is a little bit different, but you'll get used to it. Like eating warm 2 times a day, sometimes even 3 times in which mostly every meal contains meat. Many people still live in their ger's and the land has still a big amount of nomadic people. The city is pretty crowded, there are street dogs and the traffic is pretty dangerous. I am glad that I had the opportunity to see some bits of the country side like the Gobi desert where we did some camel riding and the Hovsgol Lake where we met Reindeer-people. I have also been to the old capital Khakhorin without a tour guide, because there is a bus going there, so we could go by ourselves! That was also a really nice experience. I really like the country side, the landscape is incredible and there is no pollution, many times there is also not a paved road, but that is not a problem! So if you have the chance to go see a bit of the country side, do it!

My overall experience is real good, done so many new things, seen so many things of another culture by living in it, so many opportunities! It has been a great trip, hope see ya soon again Mongolia!



Alte Kantonsschule Aarau graduate spends part of her gap year volunteering in Mongolia



Seraina Petersen, a 20-year-old student from Aargau in Switzerland, was eager to go abroad in her gap year. Gearing up to begin her studies in International Relations in the fall, she embarked on a 2-month long journey: volunteering with the Human Rights Project in Mongolia.

"I read about the Human Rights Project, which is a project that interested me the most from the very beginning, because I want to study International Relations and I want to work for an NGO or for the UN later."

Seraina worked at the Mongolian Red Cross Society, in the HIV/AIDS Prevention Programme. Some of her work included research into the approaches of other countries towards the epidemic, writing English content for a website (giving information about HIV/AIDS), helping others with the English language, and running a workshop that provided an introduction to human rights. It was in this workshop that one very memorable moment in her stay took place: sharing a Mongolian version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with her workmates; "I have to say that was one of the nicest experiences because it showed that it was really the first time they ever read that declaration, even though it's so important. And they discovered how many articles there are. And there's even an article protecting your free time and your right to relaxation, and they were really happy about that article. So that was really heart-warming to see them read that."

Seraina's contributions at the Red Cross Society and in Mongolia certainly did not go unnoticed. In fact, she even wrote an article about HIV/AIDS in Mongolia that was published in the UB Post, the first independent English newspaper in the country. On a more personal note, she learned about the processes of a non-governmental organization, working with other people, and being more proactive. "It's certainly made me more independent and more decisive because sometimes you just have to lead the charge, so to speak, not wait for your surroundings to take care of it."

