

ProjectsAbroad



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Lithuanian Acupuncturist Treats Stroke Patients in Nepal By Giedre Babrauskiene

The first few days in Kathmandu passed very quickly: hotel, introduction to Nepali customs and culture, transfer to my host family and here I am, at the Sahara rehabilitation hospital! I'm ready to work as the practitioner of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture and Tui Na massage.

Patients who are being treated at the hospital are mainly recovering from strokes with unilateral paralysis (hemiplegia), numbness and slurred speech, MS and spinal injuries. The patients with muscular-skeletal and neurological disorders come to the hospital to receive physiotherapy treatments on a daily basis.

During the first few weeks working here I learnt that Chinese medicine is not a conventional treatment in Nepal. Even physiotherapists don't refer patients to acupuncturists despite the fact that studies have shown that Chinese medicine and acupuncture benefits these kinds of patients.

I became quite close to some of the patients I treated. These are their stories:

Kamala – a very sweet lady with right side hemiplegia after a stroke. After the last treatment she said she will miss the acupuncture and massage mornings.



Amber had facial spasms on the right side which disappeared after 10 treatments. He was always a little anxious about the needles, so sometimes I had to calm him down by needling the Yintang point

Bikas was the only patient who came to hospital for treatments 3 times a week for the whole 9 weeks. He has ankylosing spondylitis and lumbar disc prolapse. Chinese medicine cannot cure these problems, but it can significantly reduce the pain and prolong the progress of the disease. After every acupuncture and massage treatment he said he felt significantly less pain in his back and legs.

One of my favourite patients, Shiva, had left side hemiplegia after a stroke. He lost his wife six months ago, and his bereavement eventually transformed into depression. He started to

drink heavily until he suffered a stroke. After two acupuncture treatments he didn't show any response, so I decided to try scalp acupuncture on him. This is a therapeutic method which works by needling specific areas that correspond to the cerebro-cortical distribution functions of the scalp. I had never done scalp acupuncture before, so it was a challenge.

During the stimulation of the needles on a second treatment Shiva started to move his thumb and index finger, and after five treatments he could raise his leg up to 45 degrees! After ten treatments he began to walk with the help of his granddaughter. When I saw this patient for the first time, I saw sadness and hopelessness in his eyes. When he started to recover he gradually became a different person: a cheerful and talkative old man with shining eyes and a big smile. His granddaughter said that after each acupuncture session he was more and more motivated to stand up.

After ten weeks working in Sahara rehabilitation hospital I am really happy that I came. I've gained confidence in both a professional and personal sense. I've made new friends; I've fallen in love with Nepal, its food and customs. And finally and most importantly, I was able to help patients with their health problems by treating them with acupuncture and Tui Na massage. There can be no better feeling than this!



Teaching Nepalese School Children Reignites Spark in Education by Alex Court

When Niklas Walendy decided to do a volunteer teaching placement in Nepal with Projects Abroad he never thought he'd perform in a concert. But when the principal of Tri RatnaSchool asked him if he would sing for the students, he gladly accepted. A big crowd of children turned out to hear his rendition of the Bill Withers classic "Aint no Sunshine" and when he finished the crowd clapped and roared for an encore – "Having never sung at a concert before I was a little nervous at first, but I was so happy to see the smiles on the faces of the crowd" he says modestly.

The twenty-three year old German university student explains it was unexpected experiences like these that have made his time in Nepal so special: "The students are so eager to learn, and it's incredible how with so little we can do so much."

Niklas has been teaching four to five English classes a day at the Tri RatnaSchool in Bugamati, just outside of Kathmandu. Despite airline baggage restrictions he made sure his



guitar got on board and he has been integrating music into his lessons: "Some classes really are so happy to sing, and some even clap along to the beat! Class 6 – eleven to twelve year olds – probably enjoys it the most."

As well as using music, Niklas has found other creative ways to inspire the students to learn English. One time he asked students to act out words like 'squint' and 'grumble' and their reactions, whilst accurate, were surprisingly creative.

Bachelor's degree in Education at Freie Universität Berlin. His time in Nepal counts as credits towards his degree, which also includes English and Spanish components, but he says he's learnt a great many life lessons too: "This experience in Nepal has really proven to me that I want to be a teacher. The enthusiasm you can inspire in children is incredible! I'm interested in social work but also music and photography, and teaching will allow me to pursue all these avenues."

At home in Germany Niklas is studying towards a



Niklas has been staying with five other volunteers in a host family near the school. The mountain views on a clear day are majestic and Niklas says he's been absolutely fine adapting to Nepalese life. With electricity rationing in Kathmandu, houses in his area get 3-4 hours of power a day, and the local diet consists mainly of vegetables and rice.

His enthusiasm about Nepal is impossible to ignore "I love this country. I see it being a place I return to for sure."

LIFE AS A VOLUNTEER AT A CHILDREN'S HIV CENTRE BY DANIELLE BIRKLAND

I volunteered at the MSPN centre for children with HIV AIDS for 6 weeks. During my time I found the children lively and keen to learn (most of the time). I learnt a lot whilst there, but I've tried to think about the three essential pieces of advice I'd give to a volunteer just starting at the centre.



Firstly be proactive. It's important that volunteers get to know the staff and take advantage of all of the knowledge they have to share. While the staff do speak some English, this can still be challenging as it's not their mother tongue and of course they speak to one another and the children in Nepali. The children know more English than they let on, and are very bright and energetic. They will try and get away with whatever they can, as children do, so make sure you are clear with the boundaries.

Secondly, explore Nepal. There is so much cultural diversity in this small country and a great many festivals. Understanding the culture will help you better support the children and understand a bit about why things are the way they are. It's not necessarily the case that Nepal is a conservative country. You may well find Nepali people to be more subdued than people in your home country, and there are reasons for that. Exploring the culture of Nepal is a worthwhile task and great fun – particularly the festivals!

In the afternoons, when my work at MSPN was finished, I had the opportunity to work at the children's hostel "J&K house". There are two homes – one for boys and another for girls, and they sleep in dormitory style accommodation. They stay in these homes because either their parents are no longer alive or their parents can't care for them. It is a very different atmosphere to MSPN and the girls are keen to engage. You'll spend your time helping them with their homework, reading and playing some games. The girls are more interested in volunteers, but the boys also enjoy the attention. It is definitely worth going to volunteer there as you really feel in the interactions with the kids that you are making a difference. It also helps that the staff, like most people in Nepal, are so welcoming.



Overall, my experience in Nepal was enriching. I learnt a lot about the HIV AIDS situation in Nepal and compiled a study for the centre on HIV prevalence. I hope future volunteers can use that information to better help the children who truly do need as much care and love as you can give.

A Gap Year Experience of a Lifetime By Daniel Mann

Hello everyone,

My name is Daniel, I am 20 years old and from Germany. I finished school last year and then embarked on a gap year before starting university. I decided to spend two months volunteering in Nepal because I wanted to visit a country in the developing world, and to get an impression of a completely new culture.

I had heard about Nepal's natural beauty and the friendly mentality of the people and I am not disappointed! Since the second week it feels like I have a second home here with new friends, nice countryside and a very friendly host family.

There are lots of volunteers from all over Europe and even from America staying in the same host family as me. I really like this because we've got lots of intercultural contact. My host family is very open-minded and I've already had a number of interesting experiences with them. Perhaps the most special was celebrating the second birthday of my host father's son – a very important milestone in Nepal – with lots of traditional food.

My host family's house and the hospital I'm working at are both in Banepa, a small town about one hour away from Kathmandu in a bus. While there are many restaurants, shops and buildings surrounding the main street of the town, there are also some rural areas to visit and some beautiful views of the Himalayan Mountains.



I am working at the Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre for Disabled Children (HRDC), an orthopaedic hospital for children. The hospital is located on a small hill, and every morning I stroll for about 20 minutes in the early morning

sunshine on a small path next to rural cottages, cows, goats and fields of mustard seeds. Simply beautiful!

I spent the first few days in the hospital observing and learning from the doctors, and I got to see a number of interesting cases I've never heard of before. Since then I have had a number of different options for work during my time in the hospital. I can observe the doctors working with the patients and they are willing to answer my questions. I've learnt how they analyse x-ray pictures, how they diagnose the orthopaedic diseases of small patients and seen how they discuss difficult cases.

I can also choose to learn from the physiotherapists. They are willing to show me how to treat patients with club foot – a genetic defect that causes a congenital deformity of your foot (also called Congenital Talipes Equinovarus or CTEV). Here they use a “silk cast” – a special kind of plaster cast, to get the foot back into the right position. The hospital specializes in this deformity, so people come from all over Nepal to be treated at HRDC.

I can also spend time with the children in the soft room or at their bed and try to teach them English. This is greatly appreciated because some of them are in the hospital for more than six months! During the operation days on Tuesday and Wednesday there might not be much work to do with the medical staff, but then you can spend your time with the children and I've already seen progress on this front. After some basic reading exercises I saw a patient learning to improve his pronunciation for himself, and then when he read the text to me again, his English was more fluent and his pronunciation much better than day the before.

In general it is important to take the first steps yourself – going out to the patients, asking the doctors questions about the different cases and asking the physiotherapist whether you can help them.

I also worked with some other volunteers to bring children's books to the patients who cannot leave their bed after an operation. In general, you should be happy with the small successes you have here, even if it is just a smile from a patient who's in a lot of pain. The small pieces of happiness you get back from the



children are my strongest motivation during the daily work here. Every smile from a child reminds me that my work is something good.

The hospital's vision is to give every child good medical treatment, regardless of their social background, age, caste or religion, and I am proud, thankful and happy to be an active part of this vision for two months. I have really enjoyed the friendly atmosphere here in the hospital, and how even the patients call you brother or sister.

Your time here in Nepal will give you a new point of view of many parts of your life. The impressions you get here and the good friends you make will stay for the rest of your life.

Holi Festival – A Chaos of Colour by Alex Court

The end of March saw Nepal celebrate the riotous festival called Holi. The day of colour marks the beginning of spring where the countryside comes alive with colour. While trees and fields mostly go green in this season, people go all kinds of colours on this day.

I had been warned that this day is a messy one, so the day before I searched the shops for the cheapest and ugliest clothes available. I found, to my delight, a t-shirt that was so full of colour and ridiculous patterns that I would never normally wear it. At 300rs (US\$3.50) it was a steal, so I grabbed it.

The next day wearing this horrendous attire I stepped out my front door, walked four or five meters and was covered in red, blue and green powder! I had never met the guys who showered me with the colourful sand and water, but as I was outside on that day they had every right! They smiled as they approached, shouted 'HAPPY HOLI!!' and threw powder at me. Quite different from the normal head-nod and whispered 'namaste' I normally get walking in my neighbourhood.

I had arranged to meet a group of volunteers and we went altogether to J-House – a home for young boys who either don't have parents or their parents can't take care of them. Down the road from J House is K House which is the same concept for girls. We were a group of fifteen who turned up at the gates of this home. And we had come for a fight – a water fight.



We first met all the children in the main room and some had come from the girls' house. Their welcoming smiles made us all feel right at home and as the 'uncle' of the

house (who is more like a boarding school master) prepared the ammunition we played simple games with the kids.

When everything was ready we stashed our cameras safely inside and let the games begin. Outside on the grass it was every man, boy and girl for themselves. No teams, no strategy and no safe zones. In other words, total chaos. Just as you thought you were safe from the clouds of purple, green, red and black powder a handful got rubbed in your hair or on your back. Just as your clothes started to dry out in the hot midday sun, SPLASH, a water bomb exploded on you thrown from a secret assassin, or SPLOSH, a bucket of water was poured over your head.

The uncle cleverly positioned himself on the second floor of the house and would occasionally open a window and supply us with more powder. All in all we were having the time of our lives for a couple of hours. Tired and wet and out of powder we sat on the grass and ate a delicious spicy lunch that the 'didis' or aunties had prepared.

Despite showering numerous times afterwards, and rubbing my skin with soap, the remnants of this colourful day stayed with me for about a week. I'd be sitting in a taxi getting cross with the traffic, or becoming irate that someone was late for a meeting and then look down and see my red-stained finger nails and smile, remembering this fantastic day of fun.

