



# ProjectsAbroad

أهلا وسهلا بكم في المغرب  
Bienvenue Au Maroc

## Content

- Volunteer Story : Helen Coward  
– Speech Therapy
- The Nomad Project



## Volunteer Story: Helen Coward – Speech Therapy



Speech therapy student, Helen Coward (47), from Essex, England, spent 2 months volunteering with Projects Abroad in Rabat, allowing her to gain more hands-on experience in speech therapy, as well as have more confidence as a newly-qualified speech and language therapist. She found out about Projects Abroad 3 years ago at one of our open days held in London, and was impressed by the organisation.

Morocco was no alien to Helen. "I noticed that some medical placements were offered in Morocco and decided to write to Projects Abroad to see if a speech therapy placement would be possible there. Morocco is one of my great passions in life as I have spent 3 years teaching English there in the past and absolutely loved the country! I also knew there would be a need for speech therapy support in Morocco and believed doing voluntary work would be so worthwhile. After some emails and sending in my CV in French, I got the go ahead from the Projects Abroad team. I was truly over the moon! "

Helen's project took place in an association inside a primary school in Rabat. "I was working with a special needs class of children with a variety of disabilities;

including autistic spectrum disorders, learning disability and cerebral palsy. The class is supported by the 'Association Regionale de l'Integration Scolaire et de l'Education Specialisée des Enfants en Situation d'Handicap, an association which supports the inclusive education of children with disabilities and of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds"

Helen believes that volunteers can make a big difference by joining a speech therapy placement in Morocco to share their knowledge, ideas and experiences to support the communication of individual children and also to support their access to the school curriculum. "I found that the amount of actual speech and language therapy support is extremely limited in the school and being able to work there full time for 2 months can be really valuable to get to understand the needs of these children, as well as work closely with their teacher and families to give them the help which they may not otherwise receive with no extra outside assistance."

She was given the freedom to structure her days as she saw most useful for the children. Her daily tasks included working with individual children to support their language and communication in class activities, leading group activities – especially those which developed the children's vocabulary linked to classroom topics and those which supported their social communication in small groups, liaising with the class teacher and teaching assistant to give informal training in how to do specific speech and language therapy activities, discussing the needs of the children with the class teacher, and creating visual material to support the children's understanding and participation in everyday classroom activities.

"As time went on and I built up a good working rapport with the class teacher, I found that I was given increasingly more responsibility. I really appreciated this as it helped me gain the valuable experience I needed, doing hands-on speech and

language therapy activities with the children, even though language was a challenge. I found myself working mainly in French interspersed with words and phrases I picked up in Arabic to communicate with the children, but I guess being a speech therapist and knowing how to use all means to communicate, including the use of gesture and drawings, really helped!"

When she first started the project, Helen found that a number of the children were lacking in motivation to communicate socially, so one of the things she thought would be good was to practise the habit of greeting each child as they came into the classroom each day, just by going round and saying hello and asking how they were. "This sometimes was met with a positive response from the children and I sometimes received no response, but was something I continued to do each day regardless.

7 weeks into my project I was standing in the classroom one afternoon, looking around and thinking of how best to put the children into groups for an activity when a little boy, with complex needs, who had never spoke out in class before looked

straight at me, grinned and called out "Lebess?" (How are you? /You okay?). His mother, who happened to be present at the time, beamed in surprise beside him and I was overjoyed. That one word was worth a million and has definitely made my year!"



## The Nomad Project



The nomad area is located 640 km south of Rabat, and one and a half hours away from the city of Guelmim; the latter being known to be the gate to the Sahara desert. Our nomad co-ordinator lives in Guelmim and is originally from a village called Fask (on the midway between Guelmim and the nomad area)

The Nomad volunteers live with nomad/semi-nomad families whose life is based on finding food and water for their animals. So, there's a small chance to experience the moving with their host family, otherwise they have to understand that they are in a convenient area, and might remain there for months.

Nomad's way of life has barely changed over the period of hundreds of years. The volunteers will be able to observe and see how the family lives, and learn about their culture, food, dressing habits, and how they look after their animals. They wake up early in the morning (around 6 am) and go to bed early at night (around 9 pm)

The nomad families are relatively more conservative than Moroccan families in the cities, but they are very nice, welcoming and very modest; they always put up a tent especially for their guests/volunteers. Their lightning system is usually based on a small gas cylinder.



The main meals of the family are based on meat they get from their livestock. They slaughter goats from time to time, and as they do not have a fridge, they dry the meat under the sun. The family has to go to the weekly market in Fask to buy anything they might need.

The mobile network works in some areas, so the volunteers may need to walk to a certain place (that the family would know of) to make a phone call.

There are obviously no proper shower-rooms or toilets, so volunteers can go behind the bushes for their toilets, and can arrange with the hosts on how to shower (using a bucket).

On weekends, volunteers usually go to Fask and Guelmime with our co-ordinator, where you can attend a few festivals about the local culture. There's also the coastal city of Sidi Ifni where you can enjoy the beach and surfing if you can surf.

The nomad project is the best way to have some time off from your computer, Internet, TV and smart phone.

