

## DAMASCUS STUDENT HELPS THOSE IN NEED

Since the tender age of 11, Damascus College Ballarat Year 10 student Leah Young always knew she would volunteer overseas in a developing country. For her 16th birthday Leah chose her destination to visit and to her the choice was obvious – India. Leah’s mum, Melissa Young, had always encouraged her to open her mind to new possibilities, to become more independent and to help those that have less than us. “We did some research and selected i-Spiice (Integrated Social Programs in Indian Child Education) as they provide housing, food and place volunteers in schools to teach English to the Indian children,” she said.



Leah’s mum and dad, Melissa and David Young, both work in education in primary schools, so their family has built a real appreciation and love for education and the need for offering education for everyone. Leah and her dad spent the September school holidays in India together. “I really didn’t understand the difference between India and Australia until I actually arrived in India. The moment I stepped off the plane, the smell and the heat was overwhelming. The buildings were dilapidated and the poverty was striking.”

Leah found it difficult to comprehend that the population of Australia would fit in the city of Delhi which has 26 million people. “My first reaction, was - oh my god! It was not what I expected and the photos I had researched didn’t describe the place adequately at all.”



After a few days in Delhi, Leah and her dad travelled to an Indian village, Dharamsala, for two weeks to teach English at the local community school. “This school was based out of a local ladies home located on a hill, which was a long tin shed with three beds. At 4pm each day, children walked to her home that she opened up each afternoon for volunteers to teach the students until 6pm.”

During the two week period, they taught so many beautiful local children and Leah developed a special relationship with a quiet 10 year old boy, who couldn’t speak English at all, so it was difficult for them to communicate. Luckily Leah knew a bit of Hindi which helped the cause. “I had the idea to use my mobile phone, pointing to emojis to communicate to the children. It worked well and the children responded really well to lots of sensory learning, so we made play dough, and the children would draw to aide in conversation. Every day we

did something different, we taught numbers, days, times, conversation starters, school subjects.”

Leah fell in love with many of the children, they were adorable, and would mimic everything she said. She was amazed that these children had to walk three hours each way to school, and no-one was forcing them to attend, they chose to attend. “It was so different to Australia - these children loved attending school even though they had so little resources. In Australia children don’t want to go to school, but yet the schools have an abundance of resources in comparison. I loved the experience. It was very surreal and confronting to see such poverty, where so many people sleep on the streets. Such a different way of life.”

“It was wonderful to travel to a new country with a purpose and have a role to play and to feel so useful. I am very grateful for my life in Australia now. I see school as more of a privilege, and try to take it less for granted. The visit has turned everything around for me, and I look at things differently now.”

Upon returning to Australia, Leah and her family are sourcing school supplies to donate to Dharamsala, to help the region further educate the local children. “I hope to volunteer again and visit different countries and I am now saving for my next trip and maybe after secondary school I could visit Africa. In the future when I travel I want to do it with a purpose and make a difference. This is much better than just going on a holiday to relax. Helping others and learning other cultures is important and can change your life forever.”

*Sarah Boswell - Leader of School Development*