

My Incredible APNA Experience

My name is Aadarsh Ramakrishnan and I am a sophomore in High School. As an ambassador for NSF, I had a strong desire to give back to the community where I hailed from and decided to give up part of my summer vacation to teaching sixth grade students from an underprivileged school in India.

India's population is rising at a rapid pace and knowledge on eating habits has not kept up. A balanced diet is critical for a child's wellbeing. With the advent of stress in these modern times, I felt that giving them tools to manage their stress would also be beneficial. As English is not their native language, the kids needed help with English. With these in mind, I selected the following topics.

1. Nutrition
2. Mindfulness/Meditation.
3. Spoken English

I taught at a government school in Virugambakkam, Chennai which was a middle school serving underprivileged children from the nearby areas where the native language is Tamil. All the sixth-grade students did not have chairs or tables, so they would learn by sitting cross legged on the floor and write on a notebook placed on their laps.



For the first few days, I taught students the basics of English grammar, including nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs. By the end of the session, I was pleased to see the kids speak few sentences in English. Each of them told me their name, favorite actor, favorite food and what

they want to be when they grow up in English. They could also greet in English with a “How are you?” and reply “I am fine”.



Next, I taught them nutrition concepts - how to classify foods into carbohydrates, proteins, starch, fiber, fats etc. and how to evaluate the quality of foods. I drew their attention to the drawbacks of eating processed food which was growing popular in India. I told them the importance of vitamins and minerals since they are critical for overall health. I prepared colorful charts and pictures on the local foods. This helped retain their attention and encouraged them to participate.



For the remainder of my time, I taught about mindfulness, yoga, and meditation. Most of the kids came from poor families. School was a respite for them from their daily struggles. I did not want their stresses seep into the classroom, hence I taught them some mindfulness techniques to increase their confidence, focus, awareness and understanding of one’s feelings and emotions.

To drive my point, I created many fun games and activities on these topics. Games and activities are very important because it fortifies concept and keeps the students engaged.

The students treated me with the utmost respect and referred to me as “Teacher”, which touched me. The school lacked a good audio system for performing arts, and other items like dictionaries and notebooks. With the money I earned by working part time in the US, I bought each student a dictionary and a goodie bag filled with candies, pencils, pens, and a notebook. I also gifted the school an audio system the students could use for plays and assemblies. I felt incredible about using my money for a greater good, as the English to Tamil dictionaries would be useful till their twelfth grade for their board exams. On my last day, the kids all embraced me and called me ‘Anna’ which means older brother in Tamil. This almost brought tears to my eyes.

My greatest memory was asking these students what they wanted to be when they grow up. All of them had big ambitions and the striking part was they wanted to get into professions where they could help others. I told the students to work hard and never back down from their goals. I could not have asked for a better experience as a North South Ambassador and felt very happy that I made a small difference in some deserving students’ lives.