

When my parents told me that we were going to India this summer, I expected to go through the same routine that we always go through. Travel to a few temples, visit my extended family, try and remember who everyone was and how exactly we were related, try to speak a few words of heavily accented Telugu, do some shopping, and then fly back home. After my parents told me, I wasn't exactly thrilled at the prospect of repeating this process yet again. However, a couple months before we left, I found out about two incredible organizations, namely the NSF APNA program and the Sri Sarada Nikethan School for Underprivileged Youth, and I knew that this year was going to be different. I have been participating in North South Foundation competitions ever since I was in second grade, and when I found out about this opportunity to give back, I was immediately interested. The Sri Sarada Nikethan School for Underprivileged Youth was started by a hand surgeon that lives here in St. Louis, Dr. Subbarao Polineni, and its goal is to give a better life to underprivileged youth in India through education. Without this school, many of these poor children--orphans, missing one parent, or having parents that are unable to work-- would never be able to discover their inner potential. Having heard about both organizations, my parents made the arrangements for me to go to the school and conduct the workshop there. I arrived on Sunday night, and I received a quick introduction to the school and how everything worked there. The next day, I started to teach. I taught four classes per day, two essay writing and public speaking workshops and two biology classes. I taught one class of 9th and 10th graders, and one class of 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. When I walked into a classroom for my very first class, I was surprised at how different it was from the United States. All of the kids were sitting on the ground, and there wasn't a fan or air conditioning. Since tuition was completely free at the school, money was always a little bit tight, and while most of the kids had uniforms, some didn't. When I walked into the classroom, all of the students stood up and said, "Good morning, Madam." It took me a minute to realize that they were waiting for me to tell them to sit back down. While I had initially wanted to follow the APNA curriculum to a tee, I realized that these kids were at very different levels in terms of their

English skills, so I decided to switch tactics. Every day, I would split the class into two parts: writing and speaking. I would have the students form groups and write a story, and then read that story out loud. After every sentence, I asked them to write that sentence on the chalkboard. I would correct any grammatical mistakes, and then have them keep going. This helped them learn how to speak proper English, and it also helped them learn to be more confident when speaking in front of the whole class. It was difficult at first, because the students were shy and they had a bit of trouble understanding my American English. I had to slow down my speech and repeat my sentences several times, but it eventually got easier to communicate with everyone. After my classes were over, I went to the student's study hour and answered any questions that they had on the topics that I presented. As the week went on, I was happy to see that all of the students were making progress. I was also very impressed with how creative the students were with their stories. In the United States, high schoolers are often less than excited about school, but at the school in India, every single student was always paying attention to what I was saying, and they were truly eager to learn. On the last day, I prepared a test for everyone, and we had an awards ceremony. We handed out chocolates to all of the kids, and we presented the winners with games, books, and compass boxes. I also donated some of my old Indian clothes to the younger girls. All in all, I would definitely recommend the NSF APNA program to any NSF alumni. It was amazing to see the way the students' eyes would light up when they finally understood a concept, or how they eventually started calling me "Akka," or "elder sister," which made me feel like I was a part of their family. The way it felt to know that I was making a difference in the lives of these children was truly indescribable, and I learned more from them than I ever thought I would. I hope to continue volunteering with NSF, and that my lessons will help the students I taught eventually win NSF scholarship opportunities. In the end, it was truly a touching experience, and I know it is one that I will never forget.





