

Samantha Sattler, '18
Kathmandu, Nepal



In the summer of 2017, I volunteered in Kathmandu, spending half of my time at Shree Shitala Secondary School in Balaju Height and half my time at Kopila Children's Home in Taukhel. The experience shaped my character and concerns, and I know I will hold onto these values as I enter the medical field.



Photo 1. Shree Shitala Secondary School, with four of our students out front.

Every day at Shree Shitala began with students gathering in the courtyard seen behind the gate to sing the national anthem of Nepal followed by another country song. This was my favorite part of the day—hearing the children’s voices sing these beautiful tunes so proudly started my day off with a moving reminder of where I was and what I had set out to do. After many days of listening in awe, I too learned both songs and would join them in voice, honored to be a part of their lives and their home.



Photo 2. Students of the third grade class to whom we taught English.

Irene and Alexa, the two other Siena students I went to Nepal with, and I each taught about five classes a day, rotating between grades and teaching various subjects, but mainly English. We were thrown into the classroom with a textbook as our only lesson plan, but found ways to break the language barrier and best communicate our lessons to these young students. We noticed a huge disparity in the learning level of the girls versus the boys, so we tried to engage the girl students more while we were there, and warned the teachers of this observation too in hopes that they continued to encourage the girls more.



Photo 3. Nursery student saying bye to us through the window.

In between classes or during the students' lunch break, we would go down to the nursery class and play with the children there. None of them knew what tickling was, but I gladly passed on the universal game and soon couldn't stop nursery kids from coming up to me, wiggling their fingers and saying "ickle ickle."



Photo 4. My last picture of the school, taken on my last day working there after all the children had gone home.



Photo 5. View from the roof of Kopila Children's Home from our first day there.

I learned more from the children at Shree Shitala than I ever hoped to teach them. Language really isn't the only form of communication, love and imagination are enough. After saying bye at the school, we moved on to work and live at Kopila Children's Home. Pictured above is the area surrounding the home, as viewed from the roof of the home. The roof was a major site of interaction in the home—after doing homework, we would all gather on the roof to play games, particularly Karen board, until night fall. Many dinners, laughs, cries, dances, and memories were shared on this one roof.



Photos 6-8. Life in the children's home.

There were no days off in the children's home because weekends were actually the more important days for us to be there since the children were home all day. During the week they would go to school, and we would help around the house or take breaks. Once they got home, we did homework with them and helped them study for exams. Downtime was spent playing games and sharing stories. We sometimes helped make dinner and were always sure to eat as one big family.



Photo 9. See you soon, not goodbye.

Saying goodbye to these children was one of the hardest moments. We spent our last afternoon all dancing on the rooftop together but eventually had to pack up and leave. After hugging all the girls in the orphanage goodbye, we were upset to see that the boys had their backs turned to us, looking out over the balcony, uninterested in our departure. We went over to them to say bye only to see that each and every boy had his back turned not to prove his disregard, but to hide his tears. Witnessing such feeling in such innocent children—who live in a small house, on an unnamed street, in an obscure little town that we happened to find out of *anywhere* in this great, big world—was so powerful. I had hoped to feel personal connections to those I served, but I never imagined a bond that rare, yet that strong.

**I could not be more thankful for my Summer of Service, the experience of a lifetime.
“Dhanyabaad” forever, Nepal.**