

# ELST Volunteer Reports Summer 2009

In the summer of 2009 Cambridge University English Language Studies for Tibetans organised seventeen volunteer teaching placements for Cambridge University students in South Asia and Mongolia. The project was generously supported by the Cambridge ELST charity and the Cambridge Active Community Grant among others.

The following placements took place between June and September of the year 2009:

*Bylakuppe, South India: 5 Volunteers*  
*Ladakh, India: 3 Volunteers*  
*Kathmandu, Nepal: 4 Volunteers*  
*Zaskar, India: 2 Volunteers*  
*Spiti, India: 1 Volunteer*  
*Darkhan, Mongolia: 1 Volunteer*  
*Ulaanbaator, Mongolia: 1 Volunteer*

The individual reports for these placements form the remainder of this document. We the ELST Volunteers of 2009 would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all who supported us through these extraordinary experiences. We hope you enjoy reading our accounts of the same.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India

**Institution Name:** Tibetan Rights and Freedom Restoration Committee

**Dates of Project:** 26/07/09-29/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 17 Students, 5 hours per day

Bylakuppe is a sizeable settlement for exiled Tibetans in the southern state of Karnataka. The agricultural setting and flat landscape are ideal for visitors, providing a beautiful and cool setting. As tourists require a PAP form to visit the area, few Westerners come here. Thus, though PAP forms were tedious to organise, they have the advantage of creating an untouched area where tourists are welcomed and made to feel part of the community.

Teaching in Bylakuppe was a pleasure. The students were enthusiastic, hardworking and most appreciative of the effort the teachers put in. I taught 4 young girls in the mornings and then went to the monastery in the afternoons to teach a class of 13 monks. The first lesson itself was, unsurprisingly, daunting as it is difficult to gauge the abilities of the students and their understanding due to their shy and polite nature. However, as time went on and they became more comfortable with us, they became more willing to participate vocally in the lessons. It also took a few days for registers to fall into place with students becoming more regular and timings set. The students were especially keen to pick up English pronunciation as they had real difficulty in differentiating between the “v” and “w” sounds. As well as grammar, pronunciation and spelling lessons were widened to suit our students and I conducted many debates with my classes as well as helping them plan out their CVs. The closing ceremony held for us was a touching gesture with all our students present and speeches from various participants. Seeing the relationships we had built and the progress made was most rewarding.

Bylakuppe, as a town, too was wonderful to settle in. The various people we interacted with, from the cafe owners to shopkeepers, were all unbelievably kind. The Tibetans are the most gentle and kind people I have ever met and their stories of struggle and exile were humbling. The 4 monasteries in the area were also beautiful to visit and we were generously offered tours and talks at Sera, where we taught.

I greatly enjoyed my trip to Bylakuppe and this has to be attributed to the people we encountered. The hardworking students, the gentle townspeople and the inspiring monks all made this an amazing experience I would recommend to anyone who has the chance to visit. I truly hope our students gained even a fraction of what I gained from this experience.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Bylakuppe, Karnataka, South India

**Institution Name:** ELST English Workshop 2009

**Dates of Project:** 25/07/09-27/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 12 Students, 4-5 hours per day

The land in which Bylakuppe is situated was gifted to the Tibetans by the Indian government in the 1960s. Originally jungle, Bylakuppe has now been cleared for farmland, and is the largest Tibetan settlement outside Tibet. Bylakuppe comprises a number of different camps, the largest of which is First Camp where we were based during our stay. Our workshop was primarily organized by Tsewang, a local businessman, or “jack of all trades” as his niece once described him in a homework assignment!

In the mornings we taught a group of adults of mixed abilities and ages for two and a half to three hours. There were ten regular students who formed the core of this workshop, with others joining later or coming when they could. Our lessons began in the community hall which had very few facilities – not even chairs or tables – so after about ten days we relocated to the hall in the Cooperative Society Guesthouse, where we were staying. Whilst the Cooperative Society hall was by far the better location, the confusion about changing locations meant that a couple of my lessons were held, at my pupils’ insistence, in their own homes. Over the course of the workshop I had four pupils who spoke a little English, one of whom, Sangay, was learning from scratch. Sangay attended every lesson, wrote copious amounts of homework, and made enormous progress. From my point of view, as a beginner who is now confident with basic English conversation, she was the workshop’s greatest, or most gratifying, success story.

In the afternoons I taught a group of sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students, who wrote and understood English very well, but who lacked confidence when speaking. We did a lot of work on speaking and pronunciation, even reading some Shakespearean speeches and the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (of which they are avid fans) in English! Again, I had a core group of about seven students who made fantastic progress. In addition to these lessons, Tsewang also organized a special lunchtime lesson for me, teaching a friend of his, a celebrated Tibetan journalist who knows little English. These lessons were hugely enjoyable for me as I’m very interested in writing, though they were cut short when my pupil went to visit a newly arrived Tibetan friend in Delhi.

Living and working in Bylakuppe was the most fantastic experience. Everyone we met was overwhelmingly kind, generous and eager to make us feel at home. It was a huge privilege to be able to actively participate in this community, and one which was hugely rewarding for me and (I hope) my students. Thank you so much for enabling it to happen.



Our morning class



Bylakuppe main street (monks & flags!)



ELST volunteers with Tsewang

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Bylakuppe, Karnataka State, India

**Institution Name:**

**Dates of Project:** 24/07/09-26/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 19 Students, 4-6 hours per day

The Tibetan Settlement of Bylakuppe is set in the lush greenery of Karnataka State and close to the vibrant city of Mysore. The settlement is one of the largest – if not the largest- Tibetan exile settlement in South India. It is divided into camps which are small residential areas of varying sizes. Some of the camps are also home to fantastically beautiful Buddhist Monasteries, including the Sera and Namdroling Monasteries.

Our teaching in Bylakuppe was not restricted to one particular organisation, but coordinated by one of the local Tibetans called Tsewang. He arranged for us to teach lay students from a number of the local camps, as well as Monks from the Sera Monastery. Tsewang was extremely kind in advertising the teaching to the Community in Bylakuppe and arranging venues for our lessons to take place. For those of us teaching lay students, lessons took place in a large hall in our guest house and at the nearby Community Hall. The volunteers teaching large groups of monks taught at the Sera Monastery itself. I also taught one individual lesson with a monk from Sera in Tsewang's office.

The lessons were arranged so that we taught groups of different ages and varying levels of English. Due to the varying levels of ability, our targets for the students over the period of teaching were different according to the group. In the morning I taught young adults (around 20 years old) who had left school with good English, but who were looking to improve their grammar and practice applying English to useful situations, such as writing CVs and formal letters. We practiced English reading, writing and conversation. I think that the most successful aspect of our lessons was probably the improvement in their speaking and pronunciation. I also hope the work we did on grammar was useful, although it was very difficult to teach as the pupils seemed to have picked up certain bad habits (often relating to word order) that were now difficult to correct. For this reason I think the students found the writing more difficult, but I was pleased with the progress that was made and took particular satisfaction in being able to help them in writing letters with appropriate tone and formality.

At lunchtimes I taught a monk from the Sera Monastery who is one of the key figures in the 'Tibetan Freedom and Rights Restoration Committee'. He was extremely eager to pick up some of the basics of English while we were in Bylakuppe with the hope that he could continue learning once we left. His main motivation behind this was to be able to communicate the issue of the crisis in Tibet to a much, much wider audience and so support the Committee in its drive to raise awareness of the Tibetan issue.

In the afternoons I taught a class of 10-11 year old children alongside another volunteer. The children had a good level of English that they had learnt at school, although we soon found that their grammar was substantially worse than their vocabulary. This is what we then focused the lessons on, although I would have to admit that we often struggled to stop the children being excitable so that we could get through what we had planned for the lesson!

The experience I had in Bylakuppe is incomparable to anything I have ever done in my life. I met some of the most fascinating, kind, selfless and modest people I have ever known. We were truly welcomed into the settlement – both by the lay Tibetans and the Buddhist Monks. I very much hope that we have been of help to

the community through our English teaching. I would be delighted to think that we have given something back to the Tibetans since I have taken so much away from the whole experience. Thank you very much for making this trip possible.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India

**Dates of Project:** 27/07/09-28/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 15 Students, 4-6 hours per day

Bylakuppe is located 85km west of Mysore and is one of the largest Tibetan settlements in India, home to around 15,000 people. Of this around 10,000 are monks and the rest of the population are the 'lay community' which comprises people of all ages. The settlement is split into around 17 'camps' (which contain schools, shops, houses, etc.) and there are 4 main monasteries.

We were a group of 5 ELST volunteers and between us we taught schoolchildren, young adults (aged 20-25) and adults from the lay community, as well as some monks from the Sera Jey monastery. We taught English primarily as this was most valuable to them, but also some CV and associated skills where necessary. Personally, I taught around 5 to 7 students aged 20-25 from the lay community in my morning lessons (including Miss Tibet for one week only!), and then about the same number of monks in my afternoon lessons at the Sera Jey monastery.

We all made strong bonds with our students and enjoyed teaching them and exchanging stories about our lives, despite it often being quite saddening to hear stories of the Tibetan plight. Personally, the experience of teaching English to Buddhist monks within the monasteries was particularly memorable, and being able to spend time talking to the monks was incomparable.

The settlement was truly an amazing place to spend 6 weeks; it was very peaceful compared to the surrounding Indian towns and the inhabitants were incredibly hospitable. Bylakuppe has a very strong sense of community and makes for an extremely rewarding experience. For example, we made friends with the owners of a local cafe who cooked very nice vegetarian Indian food just for us every day (as aside from this Tibetan food can be slightly monotonous!). Moreover, our host and his family, made our stay very comfortable and really engaged with us, inviting us to their house for tea and conversation frequently.

I thoroughly enjoyed my 6 weeks in Bylakuppe, which is a unique haven in South India. The Tibetan community is remarkably hospitable and welcoming, and teaching English was a very rewarding experience. I thank ELST for giving me this opportunity.



## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India

**Institution Name:** Tibetan Rights and Freedom Restoration Committee

**Dates of Project:** 15/07/09-28/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 15 students, 4.5 hours per day

Granted to Tibetan refugees by the Indian government in the 1950s, Bylakuppe has grown into a thriving, steadfastly Tibetan community amid surrounding Indian communities. The Cooperative Society Guesthouse where we stayed lies only a mile from the archway which separates Bylakuppe from the rest of India. Yet we were entirely immersed in Tibetan culture.

All of my students, both children and adults, taught me an incredible amount about Tibet. In turn, I spent my time in Bylakuppe focusing on improving their spoken English, holding a morning class of three or four adults, an afternoon class of ten eleven year olds and lastly a shorter class for a boy from the SOS Children's Village. Although I did teach grammar, vocabulary and writing, the majority of my lessons focussed on communication, such as conversations, role-plays and debates. I found that the children had difficulty expressing themselves in English, whilst their vocabulary and spelling were very good. So I planned interactive lessons; encouraging the children to practise conversations in groups and playing games, which they loved! Most rewarding was seeing the children gradually become more confident in expressing themselves in complete sentences. The best lessons I had with the adults were those in which we conducted debates; I learnt about their point of view, and they practised English speaking skills.

To get to Bylakuppe, I travelled from hectic Delhi through the ruined temple city of Hampi and the culture-rich city of Mysore. But what most affected me was the incredible cohesion of the Tibetan community and the strength of feeling they have about their homeland. Despite travelling thousands of hard miles from Tibet, they went on to turn a jungle into a flourishing settlement with an extremely generous and kind community. My best experiences were the most simple: talking and getting to know shopkeepers and restaurant staff, making momos with Tsewang's family and watching our students perform dances at school. I am very grateful to ELST for giving me the opportunity to be part of that community for a short time and enabling me to do what I could to help teach its members English.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, India

**Institution Name:** Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh

**Dates of Project:** 03/08/2009-17/09/2009

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 4 to 6 hours per day

For six weeks during the summer vacation, I served as a volunteer in a school called SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh), along with two companions from Cambridge. First of all, a word about the purpose of the school. Founded in 1988 in response to the poor state of Ladakh's secondary education, SECMOL admits students who have finished school *without* reasonable qualifications, and aims to prepare them successfully to re-sit their examinations after the following year.

The campus is located in Phey, 18 km short of Ladakh's capital city, Leh. It has the sense of being a kind of haven, located as it is in the midst of sprawling, mountainous desert. On a typical day, the students rise with the sun, and run a formidable assault course of exercise, meditation, assembly talk, and reading, all before breakfast. Following this are English classes, led alternately by the school's two regular teachers. Whereas, during the morning lessons, our role was rather ancillary, the afternoon gave us a fuller lease of responsibility to plan our own lessons and to devise our own worksheets. The classes are interspersed throughout the day by tea breaks, meals, 'duties', and periods of free time.

There were always, on average, 8 or 9 resident volunteers at any time, and so, unfortunately, our work was sometimes spread thinly. (As a result, my two colleagues were exported to a nearby government school.) However, I surpassed the minimum expectation by giving one-to-one tutorials in English to the advanced students. These were perhaps the most rewarding sessions for me, since the students' progress was so evident. As well as occasionally stepping in as 'supply teacher', I additionally taught lessons of beginners' piano and elementary music theory. Among the notable school trips were apricot-picking, attending a speech given by H. H. Dalai Lama, and lending a hand with the harvest at some students' houses. All in all, my experience at SECMOL was an enjoyable and fascinating one, and I am grateful for the support from ELST and various bursaries to carry it out.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, India

**Institution Name:** SECMOL (Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh)

**Dates of Project:** 03/08/09-21/09/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 40 Students, ~4 hours per day plus further helping out e.g. cooking.

The mountainous region of Ladakh (sometimes called 'Little Tibet' due to the Tibetan cultural influences) is one of the most sparsely populated regions in the Northern state of Jammu & Kashmir, being home to around 270,000 people over an area of 87,000km<sup>2</sup>. It lies between the two ranges of the Great Himalayas and the Kunlun Mountains and contains part of the Indus River which marks the fault line from the collision of India with the rest of Asia. Its population is largely Buddhist and Ladakh boasts many ancient and physically impressive monasteries as well as numerous Chortens, Mani walls and other religious devotions. Many Ladakhi people still survive from small scale agriculture (barley and wheat being the main staples) but there is a growing number who make their living from tourism, the region being home to some of the most spectacular trekking routes in the world.

The education system in Ladakh leaves around three quarters of students unable to progress to higher education after failing their exams at age 16 (tenth class). The system does not allow student to retake tenth class but does allow them to retake their tenth class exams which they must pass all of to achieve an overall 'pass'. SECMOL offers an opportunity for around 40 students to have an intensive year of study and to then retake their exams, giving them a second chance. It is a great place for the students to come and experience an education system which is different, and far more thorough and rounded, than the government schools that they have come from. The government schools encourage learning by heart and do little to aid an understanding, and therefore a real appreciation, of a subject whilst SECMOL aims for the students to really get to grips with their studies as well as gaining useful skills such as learning to manage a small shop or milking a cow (just two of the many responsibilities the students take part in).

I mainly helped with the English conversation classes at SECMOL as, during the volunteer abundant summer, they like to make the most of the chance to have native speakers for the students to have contact with. The classes consisted of small groups of students with one volunteer per group who would guide the conversation about particular topics. It was always very thought provoking hearing the cultural differences when discussing such topics as village life or schooling. Alongside the conversation classes I also helped out with: the English movie classes where we would work through a film over a week or so, learning new phrases and vocabulary; the English grammar classes; afternoon activities, which varied from playing games on the playing field to practicing multiplication with the flash cards we made during our time at SECMOL and cooking in the kitchen, typically spending 2-4 hours each day helping to cater for the 40 students, the volunteers and staff. During my time at SECMOL I also helped to make twenty sets of fraction pie pieces, which would be used to help the students visualise fractions more readily, and gave individual Chemistry tuition to a student who had approaching exams.

As there was a large number of volunteers at SECMOL, myself and one other volunteer spent one week at a government high school where we put together a week of Science, English, Maths and Computing lessons for students ranging from age ten to sixteen. We also spent time making flashcards for the students to use, teaching one of the teachers English and probability and encouraging use of the library.

My time in Ladakh was thought provoking and it was refreshing to see such a willingness to learn and take part. I felt that the students were really benefiting from their time at SECMOL and it was encouraging that they could escape school beatings and exam failure by being part of the SECMOL community. Thank you for all the support and for making the placement possible.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, India

**Institution Name:** Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL)

**Dates of Project:** 03/08/09-20/09/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 35 Students, 4-6 hours per day

Ladakh, the most northerly state in India, is a breathtakingly beautiful part of the world. A land of snowy peaks and mountain rivers, this Buddhist kingdom, often called 'Little Tibet', attracts visitors from all over the world despite its remoteness and harshness. Major changes have taken place since Ladakh was opened up to tourists in 1974, with the traditional farming-based ways of life replaced by more modern values. However the education system is still extremely archaic: poorly-written textbooks, sub-standard learning materials, inadequate teaching and outdated attitudes all mean that only a small proportion of students succeed in their Xth class exams. The majority who fail (72% in 2008) are unable to carry on to higher education. The Students' Educational and cultural movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) aims to address this through campaigning for educational reform, publishing new educational materials and through its campus programmes. These include a summer school and the 'foundation year', based at the Phey campus, 18km from Leh. As boarders here, children have access to a well-stocked library, computer facilities and tuition from foreign volunteers. For students who fail their exams, this is a chance to learn in an encouraging environment; many who attend pass second time round and continue to higher education and further success.

It was quite an experience joining in with such a multicultural group of volunteers: our group of three Cambridge students worked with young people from Canada, the USA, Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Denmark, the UK and Singapore. Over the 6 weeks I was at SECMOL we helped with English conversation and movie classes, educational afternoon activities and took English lessons. Additionally, I ran a singing workshop which was greatly enjoyed by the students. As well as this, we felt it important to leave a lasting impact and so spent time creating resources for teaching English and Maths. Volunteers make themselves very much part of the community at SECMOL by helping out round the campus, for instance in the kitchen; we enjoyed getting to know the students better whilst doing our bit to keep things in order.

Towards the end of our time in India we also had the chance to teach for a week in a government school. This was very different from the work we'd done before, and involved long days, sometimes not returning to home to our host family until 7pm! It was difficult to get stuck in when staying such a short time, but we ran an enjoyable science programme for Xth class with experiments and hands-on activities. We also ran extra conversation classes before school and IT classes afterwards.

Life in Ladakh is often difficult, yet the people there are some of the most genuinely happy and fulfilled I've ever met, with warm smiles and a real sense of community. It was very rewarding to work with such enthusiastic students and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity. Many thanks for your part in making that possible.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Boudhanath, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Institution Name:** Manasarovar Academy

**Dates of Project:** 10/07/09-14/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 30 Students, 4-6 hours per day, five days per week

The Tibetan suburb of Boudhanath is located just 11km away from the centre of Kathmandu and is a UNESCO world heritage site due to it being home to Nepal's largest stupa. Manasarovar Academy was established ten years ago by three women. They began with just eight students, but due to demand they have since expanded and now have 200 students. They decided to start the school in order to provide a higher standard of education than was being received in government schools. The students are mainly of Tibetan origin; however, those from Nepal also attend. The majority of the students at the school are only able to attend because they have been sponsored by someone from abroad. The school also has approximately 30 boarders who live there full time.

This summer, two of us volunteered at Manasarovar Academy with us teaching together. We taught classes 3, 4 and 5, with their ages ranging from 8 to 13. The children were all fluent in English, thus enabling us to cover a wide range of topics with them. The school gave us complete freedom over what we taught. We covered poetry, history and geography. As a geographer myself, I was particularly proud of them when they all produced some wonderful geography projects. At the start of our geography lessons, they had very little knowledge of different countries and their locations. By the end, they could label the key aspects of a world map, knew many geographical facts and were able to produce a project on a specific country. In addition to teaching full classes, we also tutored a thirteen year old boy who was really struggling and was thus in a class of five year olds. Although progress was slow, the exams that they took once we had left showed a dramatic improvement in his English which I am very proud of. In addition to this we taught them sport two mornings a week before school. Normally they would not have been able to do sport as there was no one to teach it. During the evenings we taught them drama, with them impressively learning songs, dance routines and their dialogue in less than two weeks. They then performed their play to the rest of the students and some of their parents. This was a great achievement and clearly demonstrated the dedicated and enthusiastic nature of the children. We also took the children to the local reading room which they thoroughly enjoyed. This helped to improve their ability to read English, as well as teaching them how to research a topic. By the time our teaching reached a conclusion, the children had all improved in all aspects of English.

The hard work and devotion of both the students and the teachers was really inspiring. I had a truly amazing time teaching in Nepal and I was extremely sad to leave such wonderful people. The project was extremely rewarding and I can't imagine a better way to spend the summer. I will forever be extremely grateful to ELST for enabling me to have this opportunity.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Boudhanath, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Institution Name:** Manasarovar Academy

**Dates of Project:** 09/07/09-16/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 16-35 Students, 4-6 hours per day

Boudha is a suburb of Kathmandu situated to the North-East of the city centre. Its massive *stupa* is one of the holiest sites for Buddhists in Nepal, and is one of the largest stupas in the world. Many Tibetan refugees have settled here, and there are around 50 *gompa* (monasteries).

Manasarovar Academy was set up in 1999 to educate children whose parents are unable to pay fees. A few local Nepali children attend the school, but most students are Tibetan refugees. The school started with just 8 children, but now there are around 300 ranging in age from 3 to 12, with a few older children who began their schooling later.

Together with another ELST volunteer, I taught at the school five days per week. Our main job was to teach English to classes III, IV and V, and we did this through classes in English Literature, Geography and History. Over the course of the lessons, the children worked on projects, and to enable them to do research for these projects, we took them to the Reading Room which was set up by Joanna El Nemr.

On two mornings a week we would arrive early for breakfast before teaching sport, and after school each day we had drama rehearsals for our rendition of High School Musical, performed by Classes IV and V. We also tutored a child named Yeshi who had spent 7 years at his previous school yet upon arrival at Manasarovar Academy had to be put into the Kindergarten class as he had learned so little. Teaching him was a challenge but we were rewarded at the end as in the school exams which occurred at the end of our placement, he attained his best ever marks!

In the evenings, I also gave English lessons to some monks whom we met near the beginning of our placement, and in return they taught me some Tibetan. Seeing the results of the work I put into planning the classes both for the monks and for the children was extremely rewarding and it was so inspiring to see the determination of the students to succeed despite their circumstances. I am very grateful to ELST for enabling this project to happen.



Morning Sports

High School Musical!

Kindergarten kids

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Boudhanath, Nepal

**Institution Name:** Manjughoksha Academy, Manasarover Academy, Himalayan Society for Youth and Women Empowerment

**Dates of Project:** 13/7/2009-21/8/2009

The Manjughoksha Academy was established in 1995 to serve Tibetans and others who have a close cultural and religious link with the Tibetans, and is run by a husband and wife team. The majority of the students, now numbered at over 300, are Tibetan refugees together with Mustang, Gurung and Tamang children etc., and the classes serve classes from nursery, which is ages 3-4, to Class 10, who are 16 years old, though ages vary due to students starting schools at different times. The school aims to impart a modern education with emphasis on the all round development of the children, as well as safeguarding the Tibetan language, culture and traditions through daily studies, recitations of Buddhist texts and on hand practice.

I covered Class 3s English lessons while the Principal and his wife were absent, preparing them with revision classes for upcoming exams. I also covered private study lessons, as well as occasional Computer lessons for the younger students, and in the last few days, as the exams began, I became an invigilator, going on to mark the English exams for classes 3, 9 and 10.

Manasarover Academy was founded in 1999 by three women who had dreamt since childhood of opening a school, recognising the need in particular for education for Tibetan children. From originating with a handful of students in one classroom, the school now serves 283 students in a huge building. On Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday mornings I taught sports lessons with three other volunteers. We usually structured the lessons around one sport, beginning with a warm-up exercise or game, then moving on to skills exercises which were organised in groups with the children doing each for 10-15 minutes, before ending in a game of the sport. In the evenings, we taught Drama to Classes IV-V- another volunteer and I wrote a condensed script of *High School Musical*, and together we taught the students the songs, choreographed the dances, and worked on their acting, which culminated in a tremendous performance to their parents, and then to the other students.

The Himalayan Society for Youth and Woman Empowerment (HSWYE) is a relatively new establishment, only opening a couple of years ago. The CEO, Doma Lama, a member of the Tibetan Government in Exile and an incredibly inspiring woman, opened the institution because of her belief in the need to educate Tibetans as the only option in their struggle with the Chinese government – the Tibetan community needs educated representatives to engage in talks with the Chinese. HSWYE provides free lessons in English and Buddhist scriptures five days a week, catering to all abilities and all ages – children, monks, nuns, those that have retired, parents and grandparents are all eager and committed to their studies. On Saturdays, various Buddhists, educated to a high level and usually holding a PhD in their religion, hold talks on the Buddhist scriptures. Workshops on personal hygiene, sexual health, personal development and careers are also held, and talks on the Buddhist scriptures explained in Nepalese are a regular occurrence. Myself and another volunteer taught the Basic One class in the mornings, covering the very basics of the English language. During the rest of the day we worked on developing a coursebook for the different English classes, that would lead on one to another, and could lead to the students eventually taking the JetSet exams in English. The coursebooks had individual lesson plans for future teachers and volunteers to work from, as Doma Lama felt that the constant change of teacher, as well as teaching style, was disruptive to the students learning.

In the evenings I also taught some monks from the local monastery, especially in the last week. This was a funny and rewarding experience, and, as with the students at Manasarover and HSWYE I was stunned by how eager, hardworking and dedicated they were. I interviewed the headteacher at Manasarover, Doma Lama from HSWYE, the monks

and a gentleman who at 74 could remember a time before the Chinese had entered Tibet. All told me incredibly inspirational stories of leaving Tibet and their struggle since, and I was moved by their endeavours to improve their community's situation, as well as their positive attitude and constant laughter in the face of such adversity. My experience in Nepal was humbling and unforgettable, and I can only thank ELST for this lifechanging experience.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Boudhanath, Nepal

**Institution Name:** Manjughoksha Academy, Manasarover Academy, Himalayan Society for Youth and Women Empowerment

**Dates of Project:** 13/7/2009-21/8/2009

The Manjughoksha Academy was established in 1995 to serve Tibetans and others who have a close cultural and religious link with the Tibetans, and is run by a husband and wife team. The majority of the students, now numbered at over 300, are Tibetan refugees together with Mustang, Gurung and Tamang children etc., and the classes serve classes from nursery, which is ages 3-4, to Class 10, who are 16 years old, though ages vary due to students starting schools at different times. The school aims to impart a modern education with emphasis on the all round development of the children, as well as safeguarding the Tibetan language, culture and traditions through daily studies, recitations of Buddhist texts and on hand practice.

I covered class 9 and 10 English lessons while the Principal and his wife were absent, preparing them with revision classes for upcoming exams. I also covered private study lessons, as well as occasional Computer lessons for the younger students, and in the last few days, as the exams began, I became an invigilator, going on to mark the English exams for classes 9 and 10. Due to miscommunication and misunderstanding with the school, we organised a new placement and left the school after three weeks.

Manasarover Academy was founded in 1999 by three women who had dreamt since childhood of opening a school, recognising the need in particular for education for Tibetan children. From originating with a handful of students in one classroom, the school now serves 283 students in a huge building. On Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday mornings I taught sports lessons with three other volunteers. We usually structured the lessons around one sport, beginning with a warm-up exercise or game, then moving on to skills exercises which were organised in groups with the children doing each for 10-15 minutes, before ending in a game of the sport. In the evenings, we taught Drama to Classes IV-V- we taught the students the songs, choreographed the dances, and worked on their acting, which culminated in a tremendous performance to their parents, and then to the other students.

The Himalayan Society for Youth and Woman Empowerment (HSWYE) is a relatively new establishment, only opening a couple of years ago. The CEO, Doma Lama, a member of the Tibetan Government in Exile and an incredibly inspiring woman, opened the institution because of her belief in the need to educate Tibetans as the only option in their struggle with the Chinese government – the Tibetan community needs educated representatives to engage in talks with the Chinese. HSWYE provides free lessons in English and Buddhist scriptures five days a week, catering to all abilities and all ages – children, monks, nuns, those that have retired, parents and grandparents are all eager and committed to their studies. On Saturdays, various Buddhists, educated to a high level and usually holding a PhD in their religion, hold talks on the Buddhist scriptures. Workshops on personal hygiene, sexual health, personal development and careers are also held, and talks on the Buddhist scriptures explained in Nepalese are a regular occurrence. Myself and another volunteer taught the Basic One class in the mornings, covering the very basics of the English language. During the rest of the day we worked on developing a coursebook for the different English classes, that would lead on one to another, and could lead to the students eventually taking the JetSet exams in English. The coursebooks had individual lesson plans for future teachers and volunteers to work from, as Doma Lama felt that the constant change of teacher, as well as teaching style, was disruptive to the students learning.

In the evenings I also taught some monks from the local monastery, especially in the last week. This was a funny and rewarding experience, and, as with the students at Manasarover and HSWYE I was stunned by how eager, hardworking and dedicated they were.

I love volunteering, as it is a way to develop a genuine, reciprocal bond with the local people of a country you are visiting. The highlight of the trip would be meeting a local lama, a Rinpoche of the monastery where I taught the monks. He was just a little boy, and like Mr. Bean, but was also able to discuss compassion, and forgiveness and the foundations of one of the World's great religions with great wisdom. This only came about because of my relationship with the monks, which again had developed due to the amount of time that I was able to stay in one area and the understanding of local customs and cultures I had gained through my work. I loved recognising my students in the street, children from the school and their mothers from the NGO. The most rewarding moment was watching the children perform the musical we had written and rehearsed so hard for, in front of their parents. Within the NGO, everyday the work was hard and frustrating as the adults we taught constantly forgot their new vocabulary. However, on the occasion when one of them surprised you and said something perfectly, or spelt it perfectly, it was always moving.

I underwent some personal difficulties towards the end of my volunteer session due to my health, and had to return to England to get treatment. I have learnt the hard way about our human vulnerability and how harsh the developing world can be. My health problems were a reminder of the misery of poverty and the reality of life for many in third world countries, where thousands of people die everyday from preventable diseases and lack of access to decent medical care. I was able to visit doctors in Nepal without considering cost, and within the UK was given excellent care by our National Health Service. I feel so fortunate that I have mostly recovered and will be able to return and finish my journey one day. The lasting damage to my vision is not the souvenir I would have chosen, but has made an indelible impression on me and has inspired me to continue to travel the developing world in a bid to understand it so I can spend my future creating sustainable solutions and a better world.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Karsha, Zanskar, Jammu & Kashmir, India

**Institution Name:** Jamyang Foundation

**Dates of Project:** 21/07/09-19/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 10-15 Students, 3-4 hours per day

Zanskar is a subdistrict of the Kargil district, which lies in the eastern half of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The administrative centre is Padum. Zanskar, together with the neighbouring region of Ladakh, was briefly a part of the kingdom of Guge in Western Tibet. Jamyang Foundation is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization founded to promote education among women, especially women in the Indian Himalayan border region. Jamyang Foundation began in Dharamsala in 1987 as a literacy program for eight nuns who had recently walked out of Tibet.

Since then, this educational initiative has grown into a network of full-time teacher training programs for women over a vast range of the Indian Himalayas, a variety of outreach programs in the Himalayas.

It takes about 3 hours of walk from Karsha to Padum, which is the regional capital. There are several restaurants and internet cafes in the town. A bus goes from Karsha to Padum once a day, and hitchhiking is definitely something one gets used to. The scenery is mesmerizing and the people are incredibly open and welcoming.

Unfortunately, when we arrived at the Karsha nunnery, we found out that the nuns didn't have time to learn English. During the summer they have to work for their families at the fields in order to store food for the winter, which is very long and cold in Zanskar.

Luckily, we found a school in the village, where there were some very enthusiastic kids, who came to our lessons. Although they had holidays, they visited our classes and showed interest in English language and general geographical and cultural knowledge.

Although the children had to help their families a lot, by finding time to come and learn English they showed how important it was for them. It was really rewarding to work with these kids. Very shy in the beginning, after some time they became more open and enthusiastic. We learned a lot from them, for they loved telling us about their country. Both teachers and students would really appreciate if more volunteers came and stayed at the school (which we weren't able to do because we arranged to stay at the nunnery). I enjoyed staying in Zanskar very much. The only thing I regret is that the initial placement didn't work out and we couldn't teach as much as we wanted. However, there are quite a few schools and NGO's working in Zanskar, so it should be possible to find different placements where help is needed and appreciated.



## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Zanskar, Jammu & Kashmir, India

**Institution Name:** Jamyang Foudation

**Dates of Project:** 19/07/09-21/09/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 10-20 Students, approx 2 hours per day

Zanskar is one of the most isolated regions on earth; situated in the Himalayan region of North India (west of Ladakh), it is cut off from the rest of the world from the end of May until September, due to snow. Consequently, the few months of summer are dedicated to working in the fields and building up supplies of food, clothes and cow dung (for heat) for the next winter. The society is almost entirely rural, and the level of education is extremely low, if not inexistant – apart from monks, the richest and most powerful strata of this society. The nuns are particularly poor due to their low position in the social hierarchy. The Jamyang Foundation was set up to counter this phenomenon by helping Zanskari nunneries financially, to make sure that their basic needs were covered, but also by sending volunteer teachers there as often as possible.

The problem is that, as the region is completely isolated eight months of the year, Zanskari students forget everything that volunteers have taught them over the summer; the only volunteers who have been able to make a true difference are those who have stayed there continuously for at least a year. This is also due to the fact that education is not considered to be very important in this society – at least so long as there are basic needs such as food, water and shelter to be met – and that the teaching methods are so different. Zanskari schools still use the English teaching model of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which consists of repeating and learning by heart, rather than the modern approach of understanding and analysing.

Nonetheless, despite the hardships of living in this region, the nuns carry out every task with a smile and laughter. They were extremely welcoming and attentive to our needs. Therefore, although the facilities were extremely basic, it did not seem so much so at the time, as the nuns put a lot of efforts into making us comfortable. The nunnery is a strong community of independant, hard-working women, and although it is a shame that they were not willing to improve their education, living with them for a few weeks was a wonderful human experience. Finally, I can only hope that the classes we gave in the nunnery school will give this new generation a better incentive to learn.



Anna and I with some of the nuns and of our students.

## **CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009**

**Project Location:** Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India

**Institution Name:** Dechen Choling Institute

**Dates of Project:** 20/07/09-29/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 12 students, 1-2 hours per day

The Spiti Valley is in the far north of India, in the region of Himachal Pradesh, high in the Himalayas. It is a strange combination of desert and mountain, a combination which gives it its unique lunar appearance – barren mountains, huge rocky cliffs and dramatic snow-capped peaks. Dechen Choling monastery is home to a small order of nuns, and lies just outside the village of Kungri, on top of a small hill reached by a steep path. The nuns who live here are terribly welcoming and kind to outsiders, and immediately made me feel relaxed and strangely at home, even given how extraordinarily alien the area was to me. They were friendly, considerate and funny, and I enjoyed spending time walking, sitting and doing chores with them. They were also very enthusiastic about English, and seemed to really enjoy the lessons we had. The six weeks I spent in Spiti were very happy. As the nuns only had time for 1-2 hours of English class a day, I spent a lot of time walking, reading, writing, and spending time with the nuns. I also spent quite a lot of time at Kungri, the neighbouring men's monastery, where I often drank tea with the monks, or watched them doing endless hours of puja. My experience in Spiti was fascinating and exciting, and I am very grateful to ELST for facilitating it. I hope I was able to be of some use to the nuns, and I am also grateful to them for the wonderful experience I had in their home.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Darkhan, Darkhan-Uul, Mongolia

**Institution Name:** Don Bosco Education Centre

**Dates of Project:** 30/06/2009-07/08/2009

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** 40 Students, 4-8 hours per day

Darkhan is the third largest city in Mongolia. Mongolia is the highest in elevation and least densely populated country in the world. The intense summer lasts only three months, and the rest of the year sees the country steeped in a deep freeze. The Don Bosco Education Centre is a school run by the Salesian organization. During the school year, the centre is geared toward enabling students to catch up to their peers. If a student does not enter school in first grade in Mongolia, she cannot enter later unless she is at the level of her age group. During the summer, the centre offers free English lessons and a safe place to play. The children and teens that come to the centre have access to the support of the community, academic resources, and language and financial assistance from foreign volunteers and donors.

I was the only volunteer in the Darkhan centre last summer. I taught three English classes at various levels. The early morning class consisted mostly of women in their 20s who were proficient in English and wanted to improve. Many of them were teachers or worked in the tourism industry. The late morning class was mostly teenagers, but the youngest was about twelve. They were at an early intermediate level. The afternoon class had students from eight to forty years of age. This class was the largest of the three. I often had people who had not registered try to sneak into the class! All three classes made steady progress. By the end of the summer, each student completed a final project. The advanced class students gave reports about English and American authors. The other two classes made posters and spoke about their future dreams. On a practical level, the students made a marked improvement in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Some of them spoke about how they were inspired to continue studying English—and become English teachers! It was humbling to learn about their dreams and to watch the fruit of all their efforts at the end of the summer.

Observing such hope and resilience in the face of such a harsh environment, challenging circumstances and poor infrastructure was inspiring and humbling. While I know that I taught my students, I learned so much more from them. Thank you for enabling this to happen.

## CU-ELST Project Report – Summer 2009

**Project Location:** Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

**Institution Name:** Asral NGO

**Dates of Project:** 05/07/09-14/08/09

**Approx Amount of Teaching:** ~25 students, 4 hours per day

The development process of Mongolia has always been a sail against the winds, what with its landlocked geographical position, drastic climate conditions and lack of arable land, not to mention the constant struggle throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century against foreign invaders. In many ways, Mongolia has the trappings of a country that may trip over by its economic growth -- with the apparent betterment of lives in the cities, nomadic herdsman sell their livestock and migrate into cities only to find high unemployment rates supported by a weak social system, whilst adding on to congestion in urban centres. Under such harsh conditions, Asral NGO was set up in 2001 by the Ven. Panchen Otrul Rinpoche to guard against the disintegration of families, as the country struggles to climb the economic ladder.

The main projects of Asral NGO aim at enabling Mongolians to benefit sustainably from the country's growth and seeking a balance in the urban-rural gap. The summer English classes play an integral role by keeping students in the centre during the day, thus preventing them from taking to the streets. As one of the three English teachers at the centre, I was responsible for the elementary and intermediate classes – the former for kids aged 6-9 while the latter 10 and above, though this is not rigid. Class sizes vary depending on attendance (unfortunately, as these classes are free, students do not always attend every lesson) but are in the range from 6 to 15. I benefitted greatly from the resources at the centre as every major EFL textbooks at any level (Cutting Edge, Headway) is available, allowing me to customise my classes accordingly. I developed an overall framework with goals for each lesson, and sought resources to fulfil those goals. To make classes interesting, I supported each class with a theme. I have also made use of significant audio-visual material found on the web that at times were much better than me in grabbing the students' attention. As the English teacher, I also couldn't help but assume the responsibility of editing the promotional leaflets printed by the centre.

Other projects run by Asral include a vegetable growing project in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar and a felt-making social enterprise (MIM). Endorsed by the Dalai Lama, Asral is very well run and one gets a feel that one is part of something that is transformative in the social development of Ulaanbaatar.

Overall, I am amazed by the tenacity of the Mongolians and sense that the 'Genghis Khan-spirit' (determination to succeed) is still very much alive. Placement aside, I had the opportunity to visit the pristine countryside and ended my trip with a 30-hour journey on the Trans-Mongolian. What more can I ask?