

LiA Showcase Blog

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Tubairata Village, Fiji

During my time in Tubairata, I was fortunate to experience a number of different aspects



of their culture and traditions. My primary role, as with the other volunteers, was assisting DiabetesFiji and Youth Champs for Mental Health Fiji in educating youth villagers. In doing so, I coordinated with those in charge of the organisations to ensure the villagers got the most out of the experience. This duty had a number of different

requirements. Firstly, I had to learn the ins and outs of each organisation so that I could properly deliver the important messages we were there to deliver. Secondly, I had to integrate my previous knowledge and teaching experience to curate a session that was memorable and beneficial. I coordinated two sessions, one with each organisation, and received valuable feedback from my fellow volunteers. I also got the opportunity to organise separate workshops from the scheduled sessions to present and discuss important topics with the villagers. I, along with a number of other volunteers, hosted a women empowerment and



animal welfare workshop. I found the volunteers to be engaging with each session, and my passion for the topics aided in a successful delivery. Another aspect of the programme was aiding DiabetesFiji in hosting a Diabetes Clinic. In preparation for this clinic, we spent 2 weeks discussing diabetes with regards to the causes and effects, treatments, and ideal lifestyle with the villagers. We then hosted an open clinic that was available to anyone from Tubairata and the neighbouring village, Tonga. My primary role during the clinic was taking the patient's personal details and weighing and measuring them. As the first volunteer villagers spoke when coming into the clinic, I was mindful to remain calm, positive and encouraging when greeting those both from Tubairata and those who had travelled for the clinic.



Whilst in Tubairata, I was exposed to a culture extremely foreign from anything I had ever experienced, and I was met with both positive and negative experiences. Being in Tubairata exposed me to a completely new way of thinking and new found



appreciation for life itself. From cooking roti, a traditional Fijian dish made with flour and water, with my Laywa (Fijian mother), to waking up early to feed my family's pigs, I got to experience a way of life that was quite simple, yet so fulfilling. Moreover, the genuine love I experienced from

my Fijian family and the other villagers was incredible. They immediately accepted me as a family member and made me feel incredibly welcome. From giving me a Fijian name (Venyana) to giving up their only mattress for my roommate and I to sleep on, the genuine love and affection I felt is unforgettable.

As with any new experience in life in an unfamiliar environment, I was further met with a number of challenges and difficulties, particularly the disparity between men and women in the village. My own mother raised me to be fiercely independent, and has always taught me that anything my brother and male counterparts can achieve, I can achieve too. Yet, in Tubaiarata, the role of women was quite traditional, with women expected to do the washing and cooking whilst the men did the farming. Although this was difficult to adapt to, the

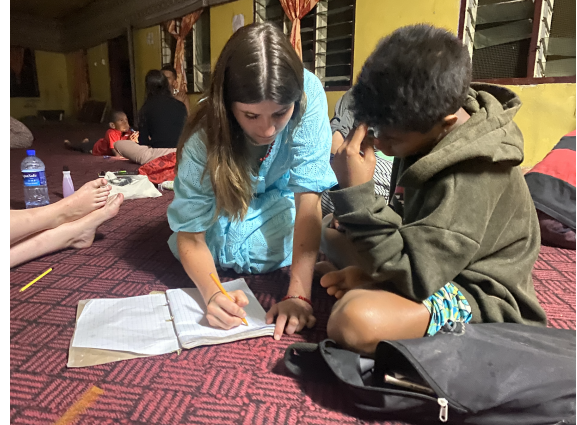


women I met were mostly content with their way of life, and it was not my place to correct age-old traditions. However, I was in a position to empower the women, from daughters to grandmothers, and remind them that they hold as much value in the community as their husband and sons - an experience I will be forever grateful for.

From my experience in Tubairata in Fiji, I hope to continue making an impact through my dissertation research and exhibition. From my experience, I have decided to do my thesis on the impact of attachment for volunteers and the

perceived attachment for recipients. As we were only in Fiji for a 6 week period, and from the emotional and physical impact I feel we had on the villagers and the villagers had on us, I became intrigued by how our arrival and departure from the village

impacted the villagers. From initial research and conversations with psychology professionals, I hope to establish some sort of exit strategy or model depending on the type of volunteering being carried out so as to ensure a safe and mutual learning experience between volunteers and villagers. It is imperative that long and short term volunteer projects like the one I partook in are



responsible in ensuring beneficence and an absence of maleficence for both volunteers and participants. My love of volunteering and cultural engagement coupled with the life changing experiences from Fiji have motivated me to continue working with vulnerable populations both in my community and around the world, and whatever I can do to ensure volunteerism remains beneficial and safe for the recipients and volunteers, I will try my best to achieve.

Venaka (Thank you!)