

Name: Megan Bennett Moir

11 months volunteering for the Senahasa Trust in Sri Lanka, on behalf of Project Trust.

On the 13th of September last year I waved my family good bye at the airport feeling both excitement and trepidation for what I expected to be the most challenging 11 months of my life so far. The 11 months flew by and although they were in some respects indeed challenging they were also the best 11 months of my life so far!



For the last year I have been volunteering in and around Unawatuna, a small village on the south west coast of Sri Lanka. I was placed through Project Trust, who paired me with the wonderful Sri Lankan charity, The Senahasa Trust. Senahasa was a charity set up after the Tsunami in 2004 which killed over 30,000 people in the Southern province of Sri Lanka. Senahasa run a variety of projects in this area of Sri Lanka, amongst which

is offering an English programme.

My role was to teach spoken English with the students of 3 different government schools in this area. I worked 5 days a week, had 20 different classes ranging from grade 1-5 (ages 5-11) so in that week I would teach over 500 students (making learning names an enormous challenge!).

I came to Sri Lanka with the naive assumption that all children in developing countries would be thirsty for education and therefore have exemplary behaviour. One of my first lessons was to realise that children are children wherever they are and schooling is not universally enjoyed by all equally. In every class there were always a few who did not like to follow the lesson plans and who challenged us to think on our feet. However, over time I came to love the individuality of many of the more challenging kids and realise how much they taught me and added fun to our days!



Getting to know the children, their families and all the other people we met over the course of the 11 months was probably the biggest thing I have taken away. Some students would arrive at school each morning with slick coconut oiled hair, crisp white shirts and lunch boxes stuffed with delicious rice and curry (not curry and rice – it is the Sri Lankan way!) which would be heated and served from the school kitchen

where all the staff were parents of students. In stark contrast some of my students had nothing. When I say nothing I don't mean they were poor but that they literally had no home and nothing to call their own. Many of my students lived with grandparents and relatives because their mums and dads went abroad to work and more often than not never returned. The experience of these children stood in stark contrast with much of Sri Lanka where parents were completely infatuated with their children.

The last 11 months have been a whirl wind. I have been shocked, amazed, entertained, fed (a lot) and humbled by living as part of a community where people have very little but are so generous, and where it's okay to be ecstatic about something as simple and small as a sticker! My most powerful lesson from this year is to believe and trust in people more. I think, along with many others in our society, believing and trusting people is something we often lose sight of, caught up in our crazy lives. Living in Sri Lanka has shown me that as long as you treat others with kindness, wherever you are in the world, you will always find help and happiness from others. That is something I hope I shall live by for the rest of my life.



I am very grateful to have had the opportunity of the past 11 months and to all the individuals and bodies who made this possible through supporting my funding. This includes my local Church (Augustine United Church, Edinburgh) the URC National Synod of Scotland and the URC Children & Youth Work Committee, to whom I offer my grateful thanks.

