

Honk if you're heading OS

Halfway through her university degree in speech pathology, Michelle England

realised she wanted to work in development, and had a sinking feeling that she had chosen the wrong profession. She didn't see how a speech pathologist could contribute their skills in countries such as Bangladesh but a six week visit while at uni led her to the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) Program and a year long assignment in Bangladesh

"I arrived in Dhaka as part of a team of seven AYADs, each of us about to embark on our own journey across Bangladesh. I didn't realise at the time how important our team would become, as in time we became family that helped each of us get through various challenges that come with life in a developing country.

"We took our first CNG rides together (motorised rickshaws) through Dhaka's insane traffic, where the only road rule is honk the horn. Honk to indicate a lane change, honk to go through a red light, honk to hurry the car in front, just honk! We learnt how to eat using our fingers, reminding each other to use the right hand and not the left hand, and we learnt how to fit three people on the back of a rickshaw like the locals.

"I was working as a speech and language therapy teacher, at the Bangladesh Health Professional Institute. It was an incredible experience to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of different training modules for the students. What I found most rewarding was the opportunity to be part of the students' journey as they developed from unsure students to student professionals, competently working with children and adults with a range of different disabilities, such as hearing impairment, intellectual disability, autism and cerebral palsy.

"There were many challenges throughout the year, such as



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finding culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and role models for the students and creating a way for the students to provide speech and language therapy services to a huge population with low literacy levels and high rates of poverty. The intermittent electricity supply and lack of hot water were also regular challenges!

"These difficulties were insignificant when compared to the positive factors, seen everyday in the determination and commitment of the students and the impact my work and theirs was having on the communities around us.

"As I sit here in Australia in my air conditioned office with a constant electricity supply, hot water in the kitchen, and two very neat lanes of traffic passing by quietly outside

the window I feel a very long way from Bangladesh. I look at a photo on my desk of my Bangladeshi students and can't find the words to fully explain the impact that the year working with these incredible students and CRP has had on my life."

The AYAD Program sends 400 young Australians to work in over 20 developing countries across the Asia Pacific region

each year working in a broad range of sectors from education, health, environment, governance, gender, infrastructure and rural development. It is an Australian Government, AusAID initiative. With no cost to participate and the program provides financial and welfare support to participants. 

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