

## Benita Sabharwal



Before Raleigh, I had just finished my psychology degree at the University of Reading and I was unemployed, searching for jobs and getting nowhere. Not even recruitment/temp agencies would take me on because I had no experience. I applied to the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award because I have always wanted to volunteer abroad where I could make a difference on a first hand basis and now I had a lot of time to do it. Previously I could not afford to volunteer abroad, but with the bursary, I could.

I wanted to get some sort of experience or skills from it that can help me in the future with employment. I also wanted to do something I enjoyed and was passionate about.

One of my projects was building a gravity feed water system in a village called Al Cacao in Nicaragua. I got to stay with an adopted family. They were so nice and it was great to learn about their culture. The entire community worked along side us to complete the project so you really got to know everyone and they also threw us parties, with piñatas and lots of dancing! I did not really know any Spanish when I first arrived and was really worried how I would communicate with the locals. However it was not as hard as I first thought. I just used gestures and signs to help them understand and ended up learning a lot of Spanish in the community. I taught English to my adopted brother and sister and they taught me Spanish and I also had the opportunity to teach English in the local school which was a great experience! The work was really rewarding, involved a lot of digging and a lot of laughs with the community. They were really friendly and welcoming and I will never forget my families face when the water first got turned on and how much difference we made to everyone in the village.

I have learnt a lot about myself on Raleigh. I realise I am a lot stronger mentally and physically than I once thought, I can do a lot more than I give myself credit for and I have a lot more confidence now in what I do. Furthermore, seeing people who have next to nothing and living in basic conditions made me appreciate what I have more and made me realise a lot of material possessions are completely unnecessary.

Raleigh has reaffirmed what I want to do. I was slightly unsure as to whether I want to do a Masters at university or try for a graduate job. From helping people on my phases and in my groups I realise I do want to carry this on in my job. Therefore I am definitely going to do a Masters in Forensic Psychology where I can make a difference everyday.

I think Raleigh has really improved my employability skills. During each phase you are continuously with a team of people working towards a common goal. I have learnt how to work well with others, helping and supporting each other when we needed it. From this I improved my skills in teamwork. I also got the chance to be a leader for a day which I got feedback on. This really helped me to see what the group liked about my leadership style and what I could work on in the future. Now I am more confident in the decisions I make. Other skills Raleigh helped with was my communication (I got used to voicing my opinion more within a group setting) organisational and planning (my fundraising events required a lot of organising and planning within a short timescale) and being able to work with a variety of people from different backgrounds and cultures. Furthermore I come across more positive on application forms because now I actually believe I have the skills they are looking for and I have more unique things to say rather than talking about skills from waitressing which a lot of other people have.

My Raleigh experience was amazing and means so much to me. It has helped me in so many ways which I didn't expect it to and is one of the best experiences of my life. I will never forget it.



To read how Benita raised the funds to join her Raleigh expedition take a look at our Fundraising Blog here <http://raleighfundraising.blogspot.com/>