

MY THREE WEEKS TRAINING AT MENCAFEP - Alice Humphreys (student) – London UK.

I spent a total of 3 weeks at MENCAFEP during the month of June. When I first arrived I was immediately struck by the closeness of everyone. It was like walking in to one big family. Everyone cared so much for each other; teachers and pupils got on and interacted as if they were friends. I come from a school in England where teachers can't wait to get away from their pupils, and there's no interaction or love between them. So I felt really touched when I saw how much the staff cared for their children and also how the children cared for the staff.

I spent my first week with the pre-school children. I loved the fact that one of MENCAFEP's main philosophies is that they believe in integrating 'normal' children with disabled children so they grow up together and learn how to interact with each other. One of the things I found hard with the pre-school was not being able to communicate in words with the children.

However, although at the start this frustrated me, I am glad because it taught me to use body language and facial expressions and that you don't need language to be able to connect with people. All the children seem to be very close with each other. Once a younger member of the pre-school fell over and all the children were very concerned and checked to see if she was alright.

My second week I spent with the profoundly disabled children. I found my first day quite tough; I wasn't sure what I could do to make these children happier or teach them as I am a sports mad person and love playing sport and running with the children, but as the week progressed I got to know them and what they responded and reacted to and, in taking the sport away, I got to know a different side to myself. I realised that these children might not be able to respond in a way that I recognised or could relate to but they were still incredibly bright and very creative.

My third week I spent going between the educational unit, the pre-school and the profoundly disabled children. I really enjoyed spending some time with the educational unit who made me feel very welcome. I loved playing 'Carem' with them and listening to them practising their English.

The vocational unit make wonderful things; however, I am useless at crafts and made a big mess. I really admire them working hard and making their own living.

I was honoured to be working around such amazing staff at MENCAFEP. Everyone is so dedicated and have such passion and love for their job. They are the most selfless people I have ever met and I have learnt a lot from them.

What people need to know is that MENCAFEP has helped me so much; being in an environment with such loving people gave me more confidence in myself and showed me that there are bigger things out there than myself and I am so grateful for my short but meaningful experience with them