



REEP

Religions & Environment
Education Projects

Gardening at Le Foyer in Marrakech

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The project brief was to spend a week creating a garden for the girls at Le Foyer de Jeune Filles which is essentially a boarding house for girls age 12 and over who live at the Foyer so that they can attend school and get a good education. Six gardeners including myself were brought together in Marrakech to create the garden and to work with the girls. The team of gardeners and landscape architects came from Spain, Morocco and the UK bringing various experience and knowledge to lead and facilitate the project. The project is a long-term arrangement with REEP to help encourage the girls to regard gardening as a profession with our visit being the first stage in a programme to set up and develop a team of girls that learn to garden at the school and perhaps go on to study horticulture as a profession. In the long term the aim is to create a kitchen garden that can be planted, maintained and used by the girls in their cooking. Another main objective is to get the girls interacting with English speakers to improve their English language skills.

Working on the project with the team was an amazing experience for me. To see the girls working incredibly hard and really listening to what we had to say even if they didn't understand all of it was truly inspiring. The girls got stuck in to every aspect of the work we had planned and we were often left without tools ourselves as we were giving them to the keen apprentices leaving us to offer encouragement and support. The girls desire to learn really brings home how privileged we are in the UK when it comes to education and equal opportunities available to us.

The task itself of making a garden was a combined effort with all six gardeners working together to put a design together that allowed the girls to be involved and help create a space that was inspiring and relaxing. As the area was tiled we decided that painting the tiles would allow the space to come alive and every girl would get to paint a tile. We used colour to bring the garden to life and we used plants to add height for privacy and shade. The idea was to give the girls an outdoor room for play, relaxation

or study. We planted herbs, fruit and flowers. The finished garden was simple but cheerful and I think the girls really liked it.

For me one of the best elements of the week was working alongside 5 people who I had not met until the beginning of the project who all had different backgrounds and brought different knowledge and experience to the group. I have worked with a lot of fellow gardeners but I have not had the privilege to work with a team made up of 3 different nationalities in the same project in another country. It really makes you aware of communication and language. It also allows you to really assess the differences and similarities between cultures, nationalities, religions and climates. In this instance the differences that we were learning and acknowledging everyday were between horticultural design, technique and training in different countries and climates. Each day brought a new challenge, plenty of laughter and we all worked hard to bring the project to life for the girls and for each other.

The week went really quickly but knowing that some of the girls were hugely affected by our presence was very special. Being at Le Foyer was very gratifying because every girl that passed you would say hello and I felt that even the girls who had to attend classes all day and missed our gardening time made every effort to communicate and make us welcome. All the people at Le Foyer were really supportive and accommodating so it was a pleasure working in such an environment and the food was some of the best we ate in Morocco.

I have really learned a lot from my experience working on this project. I feel inspired to work with different people where I can in the future in a professional and personal capacity because it really broadens your views and challenges your perceptions. The project has allowed me to work with people with completely different backgrounds, cultures, languages and religions to me and it has made me learn about myself and others. I feel motivated to look at other opportunities bringing people and horticultural projects together and I hope to be involved in REEP projects in the future because they really do share culture and learning with all involved.

